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INTRODUCTION

The present volume contains a collection of papers that analyse intercultural, cognitive or social aspects of communication. They were presented at the 2nd Symposium on Intercultural, Cognitive and Social Pragmatics –EPICS II, the Spanish acronym for “Encuentros de Pragmática Intercultural, Cognitiva y Social”– which was held at the University of Seville in May 2004.

EPICS was created in 2002 and has become an important activity of the Research Group “Intercultural Studies (English-Spanish): Pragmatic and Discourse Aspects” (PAI HUM 640). Following the guidelines established for EPICS I, the organising committee envisioned the second edition of EPICS II as a stimulating and enriching forum of debate and exchange of ideas on current research on pragmatics. The response to EPICS II was very enthusiastic and more than 30 scholars from all over the world attended the three day symposium.

EPICS II was also honoured by its plenary speakers: Professor Istvan Kecskes (State University of New York at Albany), who lectured on bilingual pragmatics, and Professor Peter Grundy (English Language Centre, Northumbria University), who gave two presentations, one on English as a lingua franca pragmatics and another that focused on writing across cultures from a Neo-Gricean perspective.

Since EPICS II was dedicated to the introduction of a new journal –the Journal of Intercultural Pragmatics (Mouton de Gruyter)– it dealt mainly with issues of intercultural pragmatics. As indicated above, Professor Istvan Kecskes, editor in chief of the journal, was one of the symposium’s plenary speakers. The main theme of the symposium is reflected in the selection of papers contained in this issue.

Following the structure of Current Trends in Intercultural, Cognitive and Social Pragmatics (Garcés Conejos, Gómez Morón, Fernández Amaya and Padilla Cruz 2004), this volume is also divided into three thematic sections. Nonetheless, some of the papers could have been ascribed to more than one section due to their multidisciplinary approach.

The first section contains five papers that focus on intercultural pragmatics. Cheng and Grundy’s “Thinking for Writing” draws on Slobin’s (1996) to explore whether a writer has specific affordances at his/her disposal that constrain not so much what the writer may think, but what thoughts s/he may express in the written code. Cheng and Grundy, extending Slobin’s analysis,
argue that those affordances may be pragmatic, rather than syntactic, and also explore the extent to which they are the products of cultural organization. In order to test their hypothesis, they contrast a parallel text where the writer sets out to convey the same meaning to two different linguistic populations (Chinese and English in Hong Kong). They list seven predictions for the thinking for speaking preferences, which are based on extensive socio-psychological literature on Chinese and Anglo-Saxon cultures, and set out to analyze which of those predictions are confirmed by their data. Cheng and Grundy’s groundbreaking approach identifies some emergent patterns and draws attention to the need for more extensive work on the subject.

In “On the Impoliteness of some Politeness Strategies: a Study and Comparison of the Use of some Pragmatic Markers of Impoliteness in British English and American English, Peninsular Spanish and Argentine Spanish”, Laura Alba questions the validity of one of Brown and Levinson’s (1978, 1987) tenets: namely, that indirectness is the most efficient strategy to avoid face threats. In some exchanges, Alba argues, both English and Spanish speakers prefer to be direct and go on record as these strategies are felt to involve a lesser face threat than indirectness. Besides, indirectness can be used to convey impoliteness. Alba also illustrates cross-cultural differences motivated by divergent notions of face.

With “Politeness in Turkish: a Cross-Cultural Comparison”, author Leyla Marti analyses the politeness value assigned to request strategies in Turkish in order to test the relationship between indirectness and politeness in this language. Marti also compares her results with those obtained by Blum-Kulka (1987) for Hebrew and English. One of her most revealing conclusions is that there is no straight linear link between politeness and indirectness as direct strategies can be assessed as being very polite.

Hortènsia Curell and Maria Sabaté examine the apologies performed by proficient Catalan learners of English in “The Production of apologies by Proficient Catalan Learners of English: Sociopragmatic Failure and Cultural Interference. The authors set out to study the learners’ apology behaviour in Catalan and then move on to analyse the learners’ realisations of apologies in English. Curell and Sabaté’s goal is to contrast L2 learners’ behaviour with that of native speakers’ and to explain the reasons behind socio-pragmatic failure, which they relate to cultural transfer. The paper also provides an additional empirically based description of the performance of apologies by proficient L2 learners. Curell and Sabaté’s contrastive study is rather innovative due to the scarcity of works addressing speech act behaviour by speakers of Catalan, one of the co-official languages of Spain.

The paper by Inmaculada Fortanet, Juan Carlos Palmer and Miguel F. Ruiz concludes the section on intercultural pragmatics. The authors compare the
features of university lectures delivered to students of Business Administration in Spain, the United States and the United Kingdom. In “Interaction through Shared Knowledge in American, British and Spanish Business Lectures”, Fortanet, Palmer and Ruiz follow a recent trend of research within English for Academic Purposes (see Young 1994, Thompson 1994, Swales and Malczewski 2001) and analyse the linguistic and pragmatic features connected with presupposed background knowledge. Their aim is to elucidate what kind of background knowledge is used by the audience in their interpretation of the lecture. Exchange programs, such as ERASMUS and SOCRATES, have contributed to make situations like the ones analysed in this paper—lectures addressed to a multicultural audience—a very common occurrence.

The second section of this volume includes two papers on cognitive pragmatics. Both papers take on a Relevance theoretic perspective (Sperber and Wilson 1986, 1995). The first being Manuel Padilla’s contribution who describes how interlocutors use phatic utterances so as to transmit information about the politeness systems (Scollon and Scollon 1983, 1995) within which they are interacting. Hence, in “Phatic Utterances and the Communication of Social Information: a Relevance-Theoretic Approach”, the author argues that speakers communicate weak or strong assumptions that the hearers recover and use as strong or weak implicatures in the inferential processes intervening in utterance interpretation. The expectations of relevance raised by a phatic utterance prompt hearers to combine those assumptions with other contextual assumptions in order to obtain contextual effects that render such utterances optimally relevant. Finally, Padilla’s paper suggests some directions for research in intercultural pragmatics.

The second paper is “A Framework for Reading: Relevance Theory” by Clarice Lamb. The author discusses the implications that Relevance Theory has for the teaching of reading in a foreign language. Since reading in an L2 is a complex activity that involves many cognitive strategies, Lamb argues that correct comprehension requires the selection of a context that provides the best background for interpretation. Therefore, after analysing the roles of reader and teacher in the classroom, Lamb develops an experimental approach to the teaching of reading and concludes by discussing some implications for pedagogical materials.

The last section of this volume deals with socio-pragmatic issues and includes two papers. The first is “Sociocultural Variation and Indirectness in Responses to Threats”. The authors Holger Limberg and Ronald Geluykens classify different responses to threats uttered by native speakers of English in order to assess the sociopragmatic factors influencing their choices. The authors argue that gender and social power lead interlocutors to prefer indirectness as a face saving strategy, both in the main response act and its supportive moves.
Regarding gender, they found that women display a greater tendency towards compliance than men. Concerning social power, equals show the highest tendency towards compliance. The authors conclude by discussing some possible impacts of their research on cross-cultural pragmatics and indicate the need for further empirical research.

In “Book Advertisement as a Genre: the Case of Blurbs” Maria Luisa Gea Valor analyses how these short descriptions of a book’s contents perform both an informative function and persuasive function by selecting very specific linguistic strategies. Gea Valor argues that, in order to fulfil these functions, the creators of blurbs have to resort to different linguistic and discourse conventions to capture the interest of potential readers in a particular book. Gea-Valor also compares the linguistic strategies used in traditional blurbs, i.e. those found on book covers, with blurbs displayed on publishers’ websites.

Thus the contents of this volume, synthesised above, offer an illustration of the many theoretical perspectives and research approaches to pragmatics. These will no doubt be useful to researchers and scholars in the field since they provide novel insights into existing approaches, new empirical evidence on phenomena already analysed as well as suggestions for further research.

Both the organisation and celebration of an international symposium, such as EPICS II, and the compilation and edition of the present volume are time-consuming activities that require the cooperation of different individuals and institutions. The editors would like to thank the Faculty of Philology and the Vicerrectorado de Relaciones Institucionales, Relaciones Internacionales y Extensión Cultural of the University of Seville for their funding and support. Also, our most sincere gratitude to the conference participants and to the contributors to this volume for their cooperation, patience, and -above all- for their enthusiasm.

The Editors

References


Part I:
Intercultural Pragmatics
Abstract

This paper explores the extent to which the relationship between the availability of language specific affordances and the conceptualization of different characteristics of events which Slobin (1996) demonstrates at the level of syntax also exists at the level of pragmatics. In order to address the issue of obtaining pragmatically comparable cross-linguistic data, we restrict our investigation to a parallel text which simultaneously represents the same context in Chinese and English. As written language has the collateral advantage of being a public representation of agreed ways of expressing meanings across many users, parallel texts therefore constitute representative as well as cross-linguistically comparable data. Based on the considerable literature which explores Chinese culture from the perspective of social psychology, we make seven predictions in the areas of person deixis, social deixis, presupposition and implicature about hypothesized differences between the readily available pragmatic affordances of Chinese and English. Whilst not all these predictions are supported, our results show that predictions based on the dimensions of power/distance and individualism/collectivism are reflected in a range of deictic and politeness phenomena. Of particular promise for future studies of inference is the finding that, when invoking a common context, Chinese texts tend to be more explicit and English texts to rely more on implicature.

1. Introduction

Readers familiar with Slobin’s (1996) paper will recognize the echo of “Thinking for Speaking” in the title of this paper. According to Slobin’s account of the semanticization of thought
the expression of experience in linguistic terms constitutes thinking for speaking - a special form of thought that is mobilized for communication [...] “Thinking for speaking” involves picking those characteristics of objects and events that (a) fit some conceptualization of the event, and (b) are readily encodable in the language. (1996: 76)

Whilst all human beings witness the same events, when we speak about them we refer only to those characteristics of the event that are readily encodable within the affordances of our particular language. Although Slobin concludes that human languages are subjective orientations to the world of experience which affect the ways in which we think while we are speaking (1996: 91), he distances himself from the strong position of linguistic relativity, observing that

Distinctions of aspect, definiteness, voice, and the like, are par excellence distinctions that can only be learned through language, and have no other use except to be expressed in language. They are not categories of thought in general, but categories of thinking for speaking. (1996: 91)

This more modest view of the relationship of language and thought is echoed by Levinson, who argues that

A language without a conditional construction does not imply that its speakers cannot have thoughts of the kind ‘if p, q’; but they cannot exactly express just such a thought in the semantic representations available to them. (Levinson 1997: 17)

2. Thinking for speaking, thinking for writing and pragmatic inference

Following in Slobin’s footsteps, we speculate as to whether a writer too has available particular affordances which constrain not so much what that writer may think, but rather, what thoughts that writer may express in the written code. We also explore a dimension not addressed by Slobin, the extent to which those affordances are pragmatic rather than syntactic in nature and the extent to which they are the products of cultural organization. This is a challenging task for several reasons: first of all, pragmatic meaning is more usually addressed in the spoken code – as far as the written code is concerned, pragmatic considerations rarely progress beyond studies in contrastive rhetoric, which address pragmatics in a much more general way than would be usual in studies of the spoken code; secondly, whilst it is relatively easy to contrast the available affordances in the syntax of a particular language, as Slobin demonstrates in his consideration of path and manner constructions, it is much more difficult first to understand cultural organization and then to relate prevalent organizational structures to pragmatic effects; in addition,
comparing favoured ways of expressing meanings across languages is infinitely more complex that identifying a path or manner structure; and finally, whilst a consideration of syntactic affordances requires only a limited number of occurrences to determine whether a user favours one construction or another, any micro-level study of pragmatic meaning inevitably has to take into account a much wider variety of linguistic forms as well as the influence of a potentially infinite context and the user’s judgement about what Sperber and Wilson (1995: 218) call “[…] the hearer’s cognitive abilities and contextual resources”. For these reasons, our conclusions will necessarily be tentative, and whilst we will claim that “thinking for writing” is indeed as much a reality as “thinking for speaking”, our data will show the difficulty of determining precisely and in every case just how “thinking” constrains writing.

One of the most obvious ways of getting a purchase on thinking for writing is to contrast parallel texts produced in a context where the writer sets out to convey the same meaning to two different linguistic populations. The advantage of working with parallel texts is that they constitute a minimal pair and thus enable us to control what would otherwise be a chaotic data set where strict comparability would be impossible to achieve. Grundy (1998) analyzes two parallel text letters, one sent by a Hong Kong bank to Chinese and English speaking customers and one sent by the President of a Hong Kong university to Chinese and English speaking staff, and shows that such texts are “in principle capable of revealing prototypical pragmatic modulation for every cultural group” (168). One obvious weakness of Grundy’s analysis is that he compares the original English texts with free translations into English of the original Chinese texts, so that although some pragmatic features are revealed, the necessary micro-level of analysis not achieved. In order to progress further, in this paper, we make use of item-by-item English glosses of the Chinese original. Whilst it might be objected that item-by-item Chinese glosses of the English original are also required, since only a Chinese-English bilingual would be able to follow the consequent analysis, for this practical reason we contend ourselves with what we believe to be a good second best.

We take as our starting point the notion that “utterance interpretation is radically underspecified by linguistic meaning” (Horn 1989: 433), and that linguistic forms, including individual lexical items, invite stereotypical interpretations. We will illustrate our pragmatic take on “thinking for writing” with reference to these institutionalized stereotypical interpretations and in particular by considering how they may differ between one group of users and another. As far as the pragmatics are concerned, stereotypical interpretations have been the focus of work in the neo-Gricean tradition, and especially in Levinson’s theory of utterance-type-meaning (1995, 2000) and more recent work on optimality theory and lexical pragmatics (e.g., Blutner & Zeevat 2004).

Levinson reworks Grice’s two Quantity maxims and the Manner maxim so that,
rather than being precepts for a speaker to follow, they are reformulated as heuristics which a hearer can apply in attempting to assign an optimal meaning to a form. Thus the first Quantity maxim (Make your contribution as informative as is required) is reformulated as The Q heuristic: “What isn’t said, isn’t”. As in Grice, a hearer will take a speaker who says some to imply not all. The second Quantity maxim (Do not make your contribution more informative than is required) is reformulated as the I heuristic: “What is expressed simply is stereotypically exemplified”, so that minimal specifications get maximally informative or stereotypical interpretations. Again, as in Grice, a hearer will take a speaker who says Sperber and Wilson wrote about relevance to imply that they wrote about relevance together. Finally, the Manner maxim (Be perspicuous: avoid obscurity of expression; avoid ambiguity; be brief; be orderly) is reformulated as the M heuristic: “What’s said in an abnormal way isn’t normal”. Thus, a hearer will take a speaker who says Sperber and Wilson both wrote about relevance to imply that they did not write about relevance together.

It can readily be seen that these heuristics are subject to cross-cultural variation and interpretation. For example, in a presentation at the Sociolinguistics Symposium in Newcastle in 2004, Jan Svennevig illustrated the patronizing, although well-meant, nature of reformulation of client talk by professional carers with the following example:

(1) Original Norwegian utterance: (0) nei så _ det kan du greie "sjøl
Written gloss: (0) no so _ that you can manage "yourself
Impromptu spoken gloss: so you can do that for yourself

The question that arises is whether Norwegian greie is an implicative verb like English manage or whether, like English do, greie does not convey the implication that the task is difficult. With the Q heuristic in mind, we might ask just what is and what is not conveyed by the original Norwegian utterance, and, therefore, what speech act or illocutionary force accompanies the utterance. This determination will have implications for the central thesis of Svennevig’s argument that carers frequently patronize clients.

In the case of the I heuristic, cross-cultural variation is illustrated by an utterance such as

(2) I don’t drink

which for us implies that the speaker does not drink alcohol. By way of contrast, for us the optimal meaning of

(2’) I don’t drink alcohol
is that the speaker thinks highly of themselves in this regard. Thinking cross-culturally, clearly these linguistic forms do not always have such stereotypical associations. Thus one speaker may apply the M heuristic and another the I heuristic to the same utterance, regarding I don’t drink alcohol as either an abnormal or a stereotypical expression, depending on the degree of explicitness expected in a culture when discussing this topic.

For Levinson, utterance-type-meaning “is a level of systematic pragmatic inference based on general expectations about how language is normally used … [which] give rise to presumptions, default inferences, about both content and force” (2000: 22). But as we have seen, the same form does not always give rise to the same default inferences across cultures.

The same observation applies to the variability of the default inferences associated with lexical items. This is because “The situated meanings of many words and simple phrases are combinations of their lexical meanings proper and some superimposed conversational implicatures” (Blutner 2004: 506). This is readily illustrated by examples such as mind and watch, as in

(3) Mind your step

which serves as a warning of some physical obstacle, and

(4) Watch your step

which serves, at least for the authors of this paper, as a warning that the addressee is overstepping some mark in a metaphorical sense and would be well advised to say no more. However, once again, these “superimposed conversational implicatures” are liable to cross-cultural variation, as the presence of signs reading Watch your step at airports in several countries in south-east Asia demonstrates. For this reason, as Verschueren (2000: 450) points out:

In the realm of social life in general, more or less coherent patterns of meaning which are felt to be so commonsensical that they are no longer questioned, thus feeding into taken-for-granted interpretations of activities and events, are usually called ideologies.

3. Writing as a representation

Before considering how ideology, or taken-for-granted interpretation, manifests itself in Chinese and English parallel texts in Hong Kong, we need first to consider the nature of writing as a representation. Unlike “languages of thought”, which are
private, spoken and written languages are public representations (Levinson 1997: 23). In literate cultures, writing is an institutionalized form of public representation about the effective doing of which there is broad agreement. The graphemic system is codified and standardized so that the channel of communication rarely affects intelligibility, whether, like English, the written form approximates closely to the phonetic realisation of the spoken form or, like Chinese, the written form contains morphological information that is not apparent in the phonetic realisation of the language. The institutionalized nature of writing is also evidenced by the process of writing itself, which involves recursive drafting as writers attempt to satisfy standard ways of conveying the meanings they have in mind, implicitly presupposing both agreed ways of putting things across a wide community of writers and generalized interpretations in the wider reading community. In addition, the acceptability of the “correction” of apprentice writing when deemed deficient is further evidence of the institutional nature of writing, as is the expectation that expert writers will set out to teach apprentice writers to understand genres, and to recognize the power of the discourse community in determining the acceptability of what is written. Precisely because of its highly institutionalized nature, writing is more easily conceived of as intra-cultural or cross-cultural than as intercultural.

These observations, and particularly the extent to which writing institutionalizes stereotypical interpretations across many cases, makes writing especially important to pragmaticists interested in culture. However, as has been pointed out, reaching generalizations in pragmatics is much more problematic than in syntax, phonology or semantics, precisely because the pragmatics of spoken language is predominantly concerned with particularized, context-sensitive interpretations (utterance-token-meaning in Levinson’s terminology). To the extent that writing is relatively freer of immediate context, pragmatic meaning in writing perhaps comes closer to a steady state than in talk, at least in as far as writing disfavours utterance-token-meaning and favours the more conventionalized utterance-type-meaning. It seems highly probable to us that the sense of “otherness” that grammatically accomplished second language writing often conveys to first language readers is a reflection of a violation of principles of joint reference and common construal at the level of type, where it is not the “lexical meanings proper” that are idiosyncratic but rather the “superimposed conversational implicatures” which reflect the ideology of the writer. Indeed, precisely because utterance-type-meanings are conventionalized and intra-culturally commonsensical, we would expect to find systematic pragmatic variation at this inferential level, especially in writing, where utterance-type-meaning predominates over utterance-token-meaning. Thus Verschueren observes that

much of the meaning negotiation that forms the dynamics of linguistic interaction is a struggle over the communicative status of utterances, involving norms (generally
accepted or hegemonically imposed even if not generally adhered to) against which the ongoing (or past, or future) behaviour can be evaluated

and adds that “this is most clearly the case in institutional settings” (2000: 451), of which one of the most typical is the institution of writing.

4. Pragmatic dimensions of writing

Having got this far, we do not wish it to be thought that utterance-type-meaning is the only way in which characteristic pragmatic thinking for writing preferences emerge. We have spent some while discussing typical inference, more to demonstrate the credibility of utterance-type-meaning as a “thinking for writing” affordance rather than because it is the only such affordance. Indeed, in the analysis which follows, we focus on implicature to only a limited extent, although in the suggestions for future work which follow, we once again consider it.

So we turn now to some of the ways in which it has been claimed that Anglo and Chinese cultures differ, with the intention of identifying a number of pragmatic phenomena that we would expect to reflect these claimed differences. We readily acknowledge the danger of this approach and the likely inadequacy of the representation of culture that we detail below. Despite this reservation, to the extent that the predictions that we make about thinking for writing differences between Chinese and English writers in Hong Kong turn out to be valid, they may perhaps demonstrate the credibility of the cultural constructs on which they are based, although we also need to reiterate our earlier concern about the complexity of pragmatic data when compared to the relative simplicity of the syntactic data considered by Slobin and others.

Our approach at this point once again differs from the approach adopted by Grundy (1998), although we make use of the same sources of information for the construction of Anglo and Chinese cultural typology. Whereas Grundy tended to draw tentative hypotheses from the texts he examined and then investigate the extent to which these hypotheses held good for the texts as a whole, in this paper we make a series of seven predictions and then examine the extent to which the data confirm or disconfirm each of these hypotheses. Despite the manifest difficulties, if we want to understand how the semanticization of thought occurs across a large community of language users of the kind institutionalized in writing, we see little alternative to working with predictions derived from the principled investigation of cultural typology. As stated earlier, we also believe that the item-by-item English gloss of the original Chinese text permits a more appropriate comparison than in the earlier use of a free gloss.

For the sake of economy, we will forgo an extensive discussion of cultural typology since the literature is well known and readily accessible. Instead we list
seven predictions for the thinking for writing preferences of Chinese and English writers which we expect our parallel text data to reveal, and append a short justifying rationale to each:

**Deixis oriented predictions**

Prediction A (Social deixis): *Institutional writing will encode default assumptions about power / distance differentials.* (Specifically, Chinese texts will favour greater encodings of power / distance in same context institutional writing than English texts).

[Rationale: Anglo cultures are small Power / Distance, Chinese cultures are large Power / Distance (Hofstede 1980, 1991, 1997)]

Prediction B (Social deixis): *Cultures will show their orientation to ingroup / outgroup distinctions through direct encoding and in the use of person deixis.* (Specifically, exclusive deictics will be relatively favoured in Chinese texts and inclusive deictics relatively favoured in English texts).

[Rationale: Confucianism provides an elaborate moral code for relationships among known members of *ingroups*, such as family, friends, or colleagues in the workplace; it does not provide any universal rules for others; Chinese culture is *particularistic*, so that the same rule does not apply to everybody, and relationships are differentially graded and regulated (Yum, 1988)]

Prediction C (Politeness phenomena): *More hierarchically ordered societies will favour negative politeness.* (Specifically, negative politeness (and indirect speech acts) will be relatively favoured in Chinese texts and positive politeness (and direct speech acts) will be relatively favoured in English texts).

[Rationale: Chinese cultures exhibit hierarchical organization with society mainly organized in terms of, and social power allocated solely according to, vertical relationships defined with respect to seniority, position, and sex (Yang 1981); in USA relations are symmetrical-obligatory (i.e. as nearly "paid off" as possible at any given moment) or else contractual (where the obligation is to an institution with whom one has established some contractual base), while in Confucian societies, relationships are complementary or asymmetrical, and reciprocally obligatory (Yum 1988); the greater the imposition and the wider the hierarchical power and social distance differentials between speaker/s and addressee/s, the stronger the preference for negative over positive politeness redress formulas (Brown and Levinson 1978, 1987)]

Prediction D (Discourse deixis): *Orderly cultures will favour in-text references to other parts of a text.* (Specifically, discourse deixis will be relatively favoured in
Chinese texts).
[Rationale: the Chinese value *Confucian work dynamism*, on which Hong Kong scores highest and Anglo countries score low, values ordered relationships (The Chinese Culture Connection 1987); Chinese societies exhibit structural tightness, with social roles and relationships highly rigid in their prescriptions and enactment; Chinese societies favour social homogeneity where social norms stress local uniformity rather than diversity (Yang 1981)]

**Presupposition oriented predictions**

Prediction E (Factivity and presupposition): *Orderly and hierarchical cultures will favour presupposition since it reflects the extent to which mutually held beliefs are shared or can be accommodated.* (Specifically, presupposition will be relatively favoured in Chinese texts).
[Rationale: the Chinese value *Confucian Work Dynamism*, on which Hong Kong scores highest and Anglo countries score low, values ordered relationships (The Chinese Culture Connection 1987); Chinese cultures exhibit hierarchical organization with society mainly organized in terms of, and social power allocated solely according to, vertical relationships defined with respect to seniority, position, and sex (Yang 1981)]

Prediction F (Factivity / presupposition): *Orderly cultures will favour nominal style.* (Specifically, nominal style will be relatively favoured in Chinese texts because it tends towards factivity; verbal style will be relatively favoured in English texts, because it is used to assert).
[Rationale: the Chinese value *Confucian Work Dynamism*, on which Hong Kong scores highest and Anglo countries score low, values ordered relationships (The Chinese Culture Connection 1987); Chinese societies exhibit structural tightness, with social roles and relationships highly rigid in their prescriptions and enactment; Chinese societies favour social homogeneity where social norms stress local uniformity rather than diversity (Yang 1981)]

**Implicature oriented prediction**

Prediction G (Implicature): *Individualistic cultures will favour implicature because the hearer is “free” to interpret the form that serves as input.* (Specifically, on the implicature-explicature-propositional meaning continuum, English texts will be positioned nearer the implicature pole and Chinese texts nearer the propositional meaning pole, with Chinese texts favouring relatively more explicit lexicalization and English texts relatively more inference).
[Rationale: Anglo cultures are high Individualism, Chinese cultures are low
Individualism (Hofstede 1980, 1991, 1997); Chinese cultures exhibit collectivistic functioning with the individual required to submit himself to his family, group, or other collectives in social functioning (Yang 1981)

With these predications in mind, we now turn to the analysis of the parallel Chinese:English text which will be used to test our predictions. In selecting a text, we bore the following criteria in mind:

• so as to ensure that predictions based on social structure would be testable, the text should address a social / lifestyle issue of relevance to both the Chinese and English speaking populations of Hong Kong

• in order to eliminate the potentially significant variables of age and social class, the text should address Chinese and English speaking audiences of comparable ages and backgrounds

• on the basis that a writer would take special care to address readership issues in a situation where the audience would have to go to some trouble to identify the text as relevant to themselves or to their needs, the chosen text should be sourced by a well-defined audience. Obviously enough, texts accessible on the internet and / or requested from providers best met this criterion.

After considering several parallel texts, we finally decided to use part of an extensive text available in print form and on the website of a multi-national insurance company with a significant presence in Hong Kong and a large number of clients in both the Chinese and English speaking populations. The extensive text described and promoted several products. The section we chose dealt with the education of children, hence enabling us to identify Chinese and English speaking populations of similar ages and economic status.

The relevant text can be found in the Appendix, where we have provided the Chinese original with item-by-item and free glosses in English and the English original. The data are numbered from 1-22, with each number representing a sentence (S) or a heading (H). Although there is one case where the Chinese text has no English equivalent (S6) and one case where the English text has no Chinese equivalent (S12), essentially they exhibit a close parallelism. The data may also be accessed on the internet at:

In the analysis that follows, the Chinese data are represented by the item-by-item gloss in order to enable a direct comparison with the English original, followed by the free gloss in parenthesis to facilitate understanding. The data to which we wish to draw particular attention are underlined. Rather than work through the seven predictions in the order presented in the previous section (i.e. according to pragmatic category), in this section we work through the predictions according to the extent that they are confirmed, with those that are borne out
discussed first and those that are not borne out discussed later. Again, we hope this will facilitate understanding.

5. Results

We now turn to the predictions and a consideration of the data relevant to each. In each case, we begin by stating the prediction and the specific linguistic reflex we expect, then indicate the extent to which the prediction is borne out and how the data support this conclusion.

Prediction A: Institutional writing will encode default assumptions about power/distance differentials. (Specifically, Chinese texts will favour greater encodings of power/distance in same context institutional writing than English texts).

Results: the two texts encode notably different conceptualizations of the nature of a service encounter, with the Chinese text encoding deference to the powerful reader/customer and the English text encoding the expertise of a writer addressing a reader who is of equal or even lesser status. Whilst service encounters commonly bring together an expert provider and a customer with the power to purchase what is provided, we find it striking that the Chinese text encodes the unequal nature of the encounter and the power of the customer to a much greater degree than the English text, as the following extracts show:

(S5) Chinese: Perhaps you-polite poss. son daughter still young / even you-polite pl. just have small baby (Perhaps your children are still young, or you’ve even just had a baby)

   English: Perhaps your children are still very young or you’ve just had your first baby.

The use of “even” in the Chinese but not the English text enhances the relevance/informativeness of the text proposition (the addressee has just had a baby) in relation to the context proposition that this is not the norm (see Kay 1990 for a full analysis of the function of even), thereby encoding the implicit assumption that the writer views the reader as special, and hence defers to them.

(S10) Chinese: Manulife in Hong Kong operate long / can help you-polite make Comp. smart decision / achieve let child smooth receive higher education poss. wish (Manulife has been operating in Hong Kong for a long time [and] can help you to make smart decisions [and] realise your wish to enable your child to progress smoothly to higher education)
English: Manulife’s long experience and understanding of the Hong Kong market gives us a unique ability to give you sound advice on funding your children’s post-secondary education.

The Chinese text focuses on how the reader can be helped to make smart decisions and is the decision-making agent; the English text focuses on the value of the expertise of the writer to a reader in need of advice in a notably non-deferential way.

(S11)  Chinese: Dur. asp. not yet understand our poss. product and service before / should first weigh education reserves actually need how much (Before getting to know our products and services, you should first assess how much educational funding is actually needed).

   English: But before we get to our products and [the] services we offer, first you need some information about what that education might cost.

The English text is notably less deferential and even colloquial ("get to"). In the Chinese text, the reader is the conceptualized as the agent to a much greater degree than in the English text, which instead focuses on the agency of the writer.

(S12)  English: Now we can discuss how we can help you

   [There is no direct Chinese equivalent of the English text]

The English text again draws attention to the writer’s role as agent in discussing what the reader is supposed to lack, a proposition that the Chinese writer is sufficiently respectful not to communicate.

(S17, S22)  Chinese: Manulife happy-willing for you-polite serve (Manulife will be happy to serve you)

   English: We can help...

Again, the Chinese text is more deferential.

(S19)  Chinese: If you-polite or you-polite poss. spouse encounter have untoward incident / another one person still can alone-strength / for son daughter provide book knowledge Q-part (If you or your spouse were to meet with an untoward incident, would the other person alone be able to provide education for your children?)
English: If something were to happen to you or your spouse, could you still afford to pay for your children’s education?

In the delicate situation in which the death of one of the parents is supposed, the surviving parent is referred to rather than addressed in the Chinese text (“another one person”) whereas in the English text a lazy deictic occurs whose more colloquial reference is uncertain, so that once again the Chinese text encodes a greater degree of power / distance.

Prediction G: Individualistic cultures will favour implicature because the hearer is “free” to interpret the form that serves as input. (Specifically, on the implicature-explicature-propositional meaning continuum, English texts will be positioned nearer the implicature pole and Chinese texts nearer the propositional meaning pole, with Chinese texts favouring relatively more explicit lexicalization and English texts relatively more inference).

Results: This prediction is broadly borne out, with the Chinese text tending to be more explicit and to lexicalize in many places when the equivalent meaning would be recovered as an inference by the English reader. However, there are a number of places where the English text is more explicit than the Chinese text. We list examples of each text type below.

Cases where the Chinese text is more explicit than the English text:

(S4) Chinese: Mm perhaps still say this too early (Mm! Perhaps it is still too early to talk about this)

   English: Well, maybe not quite yet.

   The Chinese text treats time in a more explicit way than the English text, implying that it is a reason for not yet celebrating.

(S6) Chinese: but expect son become dragon / should not yet rain tie [windows and door] (but expecting your son to become a dragon, you should put something aside for a rainy day)

   [There is no direct English equivalent of the Chinese text]

   The Chinese text imagines a future involving a successful male child and the measures one should take to assure it.

(S7) Chinese: of course even more should early prepare manage-finances plan / surely
guarantee they later receive the best poss. education (of course you should also make financial plans early to ensure they will receive the best education in the future)

English: It is never too early to imagine their futures but it can be too late to put a financial plan in place to make that future a reality.

The English text imagines only a “future” becoming a “reality”; the Chinese text mentions “education” specifically and makes the reason for making financial plans more explicit than the English text:

(S8) Chinese: knowledge is give to child the best poss. gift (knowledge is the best gift for a child)

English: There is no greater gift than the gift of knowledge

The recipient of the gift of knowledge is specifically identified in the Chinese text and inferred in the English text.

(S9) Chinese: but household-thing price continuous up-rise / save money for small child provide book teach knowledge / really burden not light (but the cost-of-living is continually rising [and] saving money for the education of your child is certainly not a light burden)

English: But with rising costs, saving for that education can also be one of your greatest responsibilities.

The Chinese text is more explicit about the nature of the rising costs, about saving money and about who will benefit from the education.

(S15) Chinese: you-polite poss. manage-finances plan can surely guarantee Dur. need occasion / have enough poss. money may spend Q-pt. (Can your financial plan guarantee that when the occasion arises there is enough money available for use?)

English: Does your financial plan ensure you’ll have enough money when the time comes?

The Chinese text mentions having money available to spend, a meaning inferred in the English text.

(S17, S22) Chinese: Manulife happy-willing for you-polite serve (Manulife will be happy to serve you)

English: We can help...
The Chinese text is more explicit and the English text indicates the incomplete nature of what help will be provided by means of ellipsis marks.

(S19) Chinese: If you-polite or you-polite poss. spouse encounter have untoward incident / another one person still can alone-strength / for son daughter provide book knowledge Q-part (If you or your spouse were to meet with an untoward incident, would the other person alone be able to provide education for your children?)

English: If something were to happen to you or your spouse, could you still afford to pay for your children’s education?

The euphemism (“if something were to happen”) in the English text is less explicit than the Chinese mention of an “incident”, although this is also a euphemism; there is no English lexical equivalent to the Chinese notion of one person being on their own and the Chinese “another one person” is more specific than the English lazy “you”.

We also note in passing that these two tests are explicit in different ways, with the Chinese text focusing on “provid[ing] education” and the English text on “pay[ing] for” it.

(S20) Chinese: you-polite know choose insurance can help you-polite / attain son daughter poss. education reserves Q-pt. (Do you know choosing insurance can help you to secure funding for your children’s education?)

English: Did you know insurance could be a way to save for your child’s education?

The Chinese text is more explicit about choosing insurance and attaining reserves.

We have already noted one case (S19) where the two texts are explicit in different ways. We list two further instances below:

(H1) Chinese: Son daughter education article (Children’s education article)

English: Going to University

The Chinese text specifies who the education will benefit and the English text specifies the relevant level of education.

(S11) Chinese: Dur. asp. not yet understand our poss. product and service before / should first weigh education reserves actually need how much (Before getting to
know our products and services, you should first assess how much educational funding is actually needed).

English: But before we get to our products and [the] services we offer, first you need some information about what that education might cost.

“[W]e offer” in the English text has no Chinese equivalent but the Chinese text is more explicit about assessing the resources needed.

We also list two cases where the English text is more explicit than the Chinese text:

(S2-S3)  Chinese: wow you-polite poss. son daughter university graduate-perf. / now heading life career poss. bright road / congratulations congratulations (Wow! Your children have graduated from the university, and are now heading down the road to a bright future in life and in their careers. Congratulations! Congratulations!)

English: Congratulations! Your children have all graduated from university and are on their way to successful lives and careers!

In the English text, the performative (“congratulations”) occurs initially so that the speech act is specifically signalled in advance of the proposition whose illocutionary force is therefore made manifest, whereas in the Chinese text a non-lexical vocalization occurs initially and the performative is appended after the proposition, so that its illocutionary force is not manifested in advance.

(S10)  Chinese: Manulife in Hong Kong operate long (Manulife has been operating in Hong Kong for a long time)

English: Manulife’s long experience and understanding of the Hong Kong market

The English text is more explicit than the Chinese text about the relation between Manulife and Hong Kong.

To summarize: Prediction B is well-founded. Although it is possible to find cases where the English text is more explicit than the Chinese text and although both texts have characteristic more and less explicit ways of conceptualizing which probably have more to do with the syntax of the languages than with pragmatic affordance, overall the Chinese text displays a more explicit stance and the English text a more implicit one.

Prediction C: More hierarchically ordered societies will favour negative politeness. (Specifically, negative politeness (and indirect speech acts) will be relatively favoured in Chinese texts and positive politeness (and direct speech acts)
Politeness phenomena are important evidence of the extent to which conceptualization reflects cultural organization with virtually all accounts of such phenomena in the literature making reference to factors that are implicitly social. These include Gu’s (1990) claim that politeness in Chinese is associated with preserving social order and Brown and Levinson’s (1978) cross-cultural study demonstrating the importance of power and distance differentials in determining the extent to which impositions are linguistically redressed. Although there is ample evidence to show that for some groups of users positive politeness is the norm and for other groups of users negative politeness is the norm, it would be unrealistic to expect to find exclusively positive or negative politeness phenomena in a given text. And it is not therefore surprising that both the Chinese and English texts favour positive politeness and negative politeness at particular points, as in the use of the positively polite “Congratulations” in both texts or in the use of negatively polite impersonal structures at the point where the reader is invited to consider what would happen in the event of a tragedy (Chinese: “another one person still can”; English: “If something were to happen to you”).

What is therefore predicted is that the predominant tone of the Chinese text will be negative or less direct, i.e. oriented to the reader’s right not to be imposed on, and the predominant tone of the English text will be positive or more direct, i.e. oriented to the reader’s wish to be well regarded. How then does this prediction fare?

There are indeed a number of places where the English text exhibits positive politeness (and the Chinese text sometimes exhibits negative politeness):

(S12)  English: Now we can discuss how we can help you

[There is no direct Chinese equivalent of the English text]

where the use of “we” and “you” involve both writer and reader in the activity,

(S16,  Chinese: if have doubt-question (If you have any doubts)
S21)  English: Not sure?

where the colloquial English formula contrasts strongly with the Chinese conditional, which gives rise to the negatively polite implicature possible have doubts / possible not have doubts,

(S17,  Chinese: Manulife happy-willing for you-polite serve (Manulife will be happy to serve you)
S22)