

Doctoral Dissertation

**Interactional Explanation:  
A Pragmatic Perspective**

**Puyu Ning**

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**Interactional Explanation:  
A Pragmatic Perspective**

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## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>List of Figures.....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>List of Tables .....</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 The Significance of the Interactional Explanation Research.....	1
1.2 Research Objectives, Working Definition and Research Questions.....	3
1.3 A Note on Terminology .....	5
1.4 The Structure of the Dissertation .....	7
1.5 General Notes on Methodology and Data.....	9
1.5.1 Notes on Methodology.....	9
1.5.2 Notes on the Data.....	9
<b>2. Literature.....</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1 Explanation Study in Philosophy of Science .....	11
2.1.1 The Deductive–Nomological Model (DN Model).....	11
2.1.2 The Statistical Relevance (or SR) Model.....	13
2.1.3 A Unificationist Account of Explanation .....	14
2.1.4 The Pragmatic Aspect of Scientific Explanation .....	15
2.2 Attribution and Ordinary Explanation in Social Psychology .....	17
2.2.1 Explanation and Attribution.....	17
2.2.2 Ordinary Explanation.....	18
2.3 Explanation in Pragmatic Research .....	20
2.3.1 Explanation in Speech Act Realisation.....	20
2.3.2 Overinformativeness and Linguacultural Characteristics.....	22
2.4 <i>Accountability</i> and <i>Account</i> in Sociology .....	23
2.5 Other Theories and Concepts Involved in the Study of Interactional Explanation .....	27
2.5.1 First Order Analysis and Emic Point of View .....	28
2.5.2 Speech Set and Speech Event .....	29

2.5.3 Interactional Ritual and Convention .....	29
<b>3. The Pragmatic Concept of Explanation and the Rationale for the Studies.....</b>	<b>32</b>
3.1 The Pragmatic Concept of Interactional Explanation.....	32
3.2 Rationale for the Following Studies on Interactional Explanation.....	38
<b>4. Linguistic Features of Interactional Explanation .....</b>	<b>41</b>
4.1 The Linguistic Features of <i>Interactional Explanations</i> in the CCPE-M Corpus.....	41
4.1.1 Data Description .....	42
4.1.2 Methodology .....	43
4.1.3 Text Search .....	44
Text search of causal links <i>because</i> and <i>cuz/cos</i> .....	44
Text search of causal links <i>for</i> .....	47
4.1.4 Manual Coding.....	50
Random sample.....	51
Causal connectives <i>because</i> and <i>for</i> in the random sample.....	51
Manual coding .....	52
4.1.5 Summary .....	57
4.2 Linguistic Features of Interactional Explanations in Chinese Data.....	59
4.2.1 Data Description .....	59
4.2.2 Methodology .....	61
4.2.3 Text Search .....	63
Text search of causal link <i>yinwei</i> (because).....	63
Text search of causal link <i>shiweile</i> (is for). .....	69
Text search in an open-source traditional Chinese discourse. ....	71
4.2.4 Manual Coding.....	73
Data of public apologies in Chinese. ....	73
Manual coding .....	73
4.2.5 Summary .....	77
4.3 Linguistic Features of <i>Interactional Explanation</i> .....	78
<b>5. A Study of Interactional Explanation in Speech Acts of Request and Apology .....</b>	<b>79</b>
5.1 Interactional Explanation and the Speech Act of Request.....	79

5.1.1 Methodology and Data Description .....	80
5.1.2 Results and Discussion .....	82
Interactional explanation in academic email requests .....	82
Findings and discussion of the online surveys.....	84
5.1.3 Summary .....	87
5.2 Interactional Explanation and Speech Act of Apology.....	89
5.2.1 Apology and Its Realisation.....	89
Apology: remedial interchange.....	89
Explanation as a realisation strategy of apology.....	90
Factors that affect the use of apology strategies .....	91
5.2.2 Meta-analysis .....	91
5.2.3 A Meta-analysis of Apology Realisation Across Languages .....	93
Research questions.....	93
Data retrieving .....	93
Results.....	94
<i>Meta-statistics</i> .....	94
<i>Meta-regression</i> .....	101
Discussion .....	103
5.2.4. A Meta-analysis of Apology Realisation in Chinese.....	104
Research questions.....	104
Data retrieving .....	105
Results.....	105
<i>Meta-statistics</i> .....	105
<i>Meta-regression</i> .....	110
Discussion .....	114
5.3 Conclusion .....	116
<b>6. Evaluation of Interactional Explanation .....</b>	<b>118</b>
6.1 Introduction.....	118
6.2 Methodology and Data.....	119
6.2.1 Ex post facto Interview .....	120
6.2.2 Interview Participants .....	121
6.2.3 Data Coding .....	122

6.3 Findings .....	122
6.3.1 Consistency of Ritual/Convention in Interaction.....	123
6.3.2 Attribution Types of Interactional Explanations.....	127
6.4 Discussion .....	136
6.5 Conclusion .....	139
<b>7. A Theory of Interactional Explanations .....</b>	<b>140</b>
7.1 Grounded Theory .....	140
7.2 An IE Model of Chinese .....	141
7.3 A Theory of Interactional Explanation .....	146
7.3.1 Essential Attributes of IE and General IE Models.....	147
7.3.2 Interaction Analysis Using the IE Model.....	150
7.3.3 Typology of IE.....	153
Definite IE versus indefinite IE .....	153
<i>Definite IE</i> .....	153
<i>Indefinite IE</i> .....	153
<i>Directly sought IE</i> .....	154
<i>Indirectly sought IE</i> .....	154
Informative IE versus dispositional IE .....	155
<i>Informative IE</i> .....	156
<i>Dispositional IE</i> .....	156
Ritual IE .....	158
7.4 Conclusion .....	159
<b>8. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>161</b>
8.1 Summary of the Study .....	161
8.1.1 Linguistic Features of Interactional Explanation.....	161
8.1.2 Interactional Explanation in Speech Acts.....	162
8.1.3 Factors Influencing the Evaluation of Interactional Explanation .....	164
8.1.4 Modelling Interactional Explanation .....	165
Intercultural IE Model: IE Model of Chinese.....	165
IE Model .....	166



8.2 Future Research .....	167
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>170</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>183</b>
Appendix 1: Survey in Chinese and English translation .....	183
Appendix 2: Survey in German and English translation .....	185
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>187</b>
<b>Absztrakt .....</b>	<b>188</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 2.1	12
Explanation (IE) in the DN model.	
Figure 3.1	37
Interactional explanation (IE), discourse and speech act.	
Figure 4.1	42
The CCPE-M data in JSON format.	
Figure 4.2	62
A snapshot of text search in the MLC corpus.	
Figure 5.1	85
Correlation between interactional explanation and politeness (CN).	
Figure 5.2	85
Correlation between interactional explanation and politeness (GE).	
Figure 5.3	95
Meta statistics: apology strategy shares in English.	
Figure 5.4	96
Meta statistics: apology strategy shares in other languages.	
Figure 5.5	96
Meta statistics: the apology strategies of English and Arabic.	
Figure 5.6	97
Meta statistics: the apology strategies in English (UK & US) and English (Asia & Africa).	
Figure 5.7	98
Meta statistics: the apology strategies on different English proficiency levels.	
Figure 5.8	98
Meta statistics: the apology strategies taken by men and women.	
Figure 5.9	99
A contrastive view between interpersonal apology and meta interpersonal apology.	
Figure 5.10	100
Meta statistics: a contrastive view between public apology and meta public apology.	
Figure 5.11	106
Distribution of the apology strategy statistics (funnel graph)*.	
Figure 5.12	107
Apology strategy shares by different publication languages (Chinese and English).	
Figure 5.13	108

Apology strategy shares in different age groups.	
Figure 5.14	109
Gender difference.	
Figure 5.15	109
Apology strategy shares by different data collection methods.	
Figure 6.1	128
Attribution types of the Hungarian interactional explanations.	
Figure 6.2	128
Evaluation of the Hungarian interactional explanations of different attribution types.	
Figure 6.3	132
Attribution types of the Chinese interactional explanations.	
Figure 6.4	133
The orientation of the Chinese interactional explanations.	
Figure 6.5	138
Influence of interactional ritual and attribution on the evaluation process of interactional explanations.	
Figure 7.1	149
IE Model.	

## List of Tables

Table 2.1	.....	19
Features of research on social explanation in two traditions.		
Table 2.2	.....	27
Linguistic styles of account according to social intimacy (Scott and Lyman, 1968).		
Table 3.1	.....	36
Features of research on explanation.		
Table 4.1	.....	45
The frequency of <i>because</i> in the CCPE-M corpus.		
Table 4.2	.....	46
The frequency of <i>cuz/cos</i> in the CCPE-M corpus.		
Table 4.3	.....	48
The frequency of <i>for</i> in the CCPE-M corpus.		
Table 4.4	.....	51
The frequency of <i>because</i> in the random sample of CCPE-M corpus.		
Table 4.5	.....	51
The frequency of <i>cuz/cos</i> in the random sample of CCPE-M corpus.		
Table 4.6	.....	52
The frequency of <i>for</i> in the random sample of CCPE-M corpus.		
Table 4.7	.....	53
The forms and patterns marking interactional explanations in the random sample.		
Table 4.8	.....	57
The linguistic features of the information appeal in the random sample.		
Table 4.9	.....	61
Chinese corpora list.		
Table 4.10	.....	64
The text search of causal connective <i>yinwei</i> in Chinese corpora.		
Table 4.11	.....	69
The text search of causal connective <i>shiweile</i> in Chinese corpora.		
Table 4.12	.....	72
The ratio of the causal connectives in different Chinese corpora.		
Table 4.13	.....	74
The forms and patterns marking interactional explanations in the apology dataset.		

Table 5.1	82
Interactional explanation and its attribution types in Chinese and German email requests.	
Table 5.2	94
Shares of apology strategies across languages in the meta-analysis.	
Table 5.3	102
Meta-regression of the influence on the apology strategies.	
Table 5.4	107
Apology strategy shares in Chinese.	
Table 5.5	111
Meta-regression of explanation/account in Chinese.	
Table 5.6	113
Meta-regression of explanation/account in English.	
Table 6.1	121
Participants of the ex post facto interview.	
Table 6.2	123
Statistics of the evaluation of interactional evaluation.	
Table 6.3	129
Attribution types of the interactional explanations offered by Hungarians.	
Table 7.1	142
Normative themes invoked by interactional explanation (Chinese perspective).	
Table 8.1	166
Intercultural IE Model of Chinese.	

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this study is to explore the phenomenon of *interactional explanation* from a pragmatic angle. In this dissertation, I conduct multiple studies on the pragmatic phenomenon of *interactional explanation* based on diverse data types. I provide a working definition and discuss the essential characters, functions and typologies of it. Finally, I propose a replicable research model of *interactional explanation*.

Chapter 1 first introduces the significance of my research. Then I provide a working definition of interactional explanation and the research questions. After that, I present information on the terminology and the structure of the thesis. Finally, I introduce the data and methods employed in my research.

### 1.1 The Significance of the Interactional Explanation Research

The question over what statement or account can be considered as a piece of (good) explanation yields much research from various academic disciplines, such as philosophy of science, social psychology, rhetoric and argumentation studies, etc. Interestingly, little attention has, so far, been paid to *interactional explanations* in pragmatics and interaction studies. The reason might lie in the inquisitive nature of human minds. In the process of making sense of ourselves and the world around us, explanation has been endowed as a general and rudimentary mode of learning and experiencing. Thus, in pragmatics and interaction studies, explanatory utterances are taken as postulates for the perception and appreciation of those relevant interactional phenomena. For example, the reason provided by the interactant for the request is categorised as grounder (Edmondson, 1981; Edmondson & House, 1981; House & Kádár, 2021) in the studies on the speech act of request, one supportive move to realise the speech act (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). Nevertheless, many key questions remain unanswered. For example, what could be counted as a (good) grounder for request? What can determine the efficacy of a grounder? Does the use of a grounder correlate with the effectiveness of the speech act of request? Against this background, the present research aspires to fill the gap and investigate this particular pragmatic phenomenon—*interactional explanation*.

To the best of my knowledge, the literature has not yet mentioned any systematic research focusing on the dynamics and capacity of explanatory expressions in interactions.

Interactional explanation is a highly frequent pragmatic phenomenon. I cite the first example from an American sitcom to illustrate the pragmatics of this interactional phenomenon.

#### Example 1.1

Virginia found that her husband, Burt, behaved strangely. She started to worry that he might have started gambling again. In order to find what her husband was hiding from her, she sent her son, Jimmy, to stalk him. It turned out that Burt felt he might be seriously sick. When Jimmy discovered what Burt was hiding, Burt asked Jimmy not to tell Virginia. Example 1.1 is the conversation which took place between Jimmy, Virginia and Sabrina, Jimmy's wife, when he came home. They asked Jimmy what his father had been hiding:

1. Jimmy: ... He's not gambling.
2. Virginia: If he's not gambling, what took you so long?
3. Jimmy: Freak sandstorm, plus a family of ducks crossed the road.
4. Virginia: (to Sabrina only) Either one of those excuses alone would be perfectly good. But together, I smell something fishy.
5. Sabrina: (to Virginia only) Oh yeah. When Jimmy uses a double excuse, it means he's lying about something.

("Raising Hope", 2014, Season 4 Episode15, 00:08'15")

Despite the absurdity in the interactions of the sitcom, the explanatory utterance Jimmy gave in turn three was to fulfil the information-seeking from Virginia in turn two. Jimmy wanted to assist his father in covering-up the secret. His answer about the "Freak sandstorm" and that "a family of ducks crossed the road" were reasons or justifications for him being out long following his father. However, the dialogue between Virginia and Sabrina right after Jimmy's *explanation* shows that this explanatory utterance has communicated more than simple declarative information. In addition to the informative message, both the women recognised the explanatory utterance as "a double excuse." For Virginia, Jimmy's double excuse raised suspicion. For Sabina, Jimmy's double excuse meant that he was lying about something. Jimmy's *interactional explanation* intended to respond to the information appeal in the interaction. This response has been immediately interpreted and evaluated by the other interactants. Thus, Jimmy's explanatory utterance was perceived differently by his mother and his wife to how Jimmy expected. This divergence made the interaction salient to Virginia and Sabrina.

The different interpretations of this piece of *interactional explanation* demonstrate that this piece of declarative utterance communicates more than a simple informative message. Jimmy's explanatory utterance in Example 1.1 thereby illustrates the pragmatics of explanation in interaction.

The present research views such explanation in Example 1.1 as *interactional explanation*. This interactional phenomenon spans across various discourse. It may accompany some speech acts, such as a request or an apology; it can also be independent of established speech acts, like the one in Example 1.1. Example 1.1 also shows the likelihood with which *interactional explanation* may become a cause of suspicion or even irritation. It can even bring a pragmatic failure that results in interaction breakdown. Usually, only when the pragmatic/discursive norms are breached, can the interlocuters realise the existence of certain discursive norms behind the interaction and reflect what the interaction should have been like according to these norms. Therefore, the research of *interactional explanation* is inherently pragmatic.

Given this problem-oriented characteristic, a contrastive emphasis could benefit the research of *interactional explanation* in that cross-cultural and intercultural data may provide more grounds for the discovery of the (breached) pragmatic norms in interactions. A systematic study and better knowledge of *interactional explanation* complement the classical research of speech acts, especially those that involve explanation as one realisation strategy. Combined with the interaction ritual theory, it could shed light on other pragmatics and interaction studies. Finally, a replicable research model is advantageous for a systematic analysis of the pragmatic phenomenon. All in all, the research of this interactive phenomenon will broaden the understanding of the dynamics of human interaction from a new perspective.

## 1.2 Research Objectives, Working Definition and Research Questions

The present research aims to establish *interactional explanation* as a novel perspective to approach and understand the dynamics of interactions. I conceptualise the discursive phenomenon from a pragmatic standpoint and propose a working definition. Finally, I aim to construct a replicable research model of *interactional explanation* in pragmatic and interaction studies.

*Interactional explanation* communicates more than a simple declarative message and is interpreted and evaluated in the real time of the interaction. My working definition of



*interactional explanation* is a response to the perceived information<sup>1</sup> appeal from the interaction.

To understand the pragmatics of *interactional explanation*, it is essential to build a viable research model of this specific discursive phenomenon. Consequently, the overarching research question of the current research project is:

*How can diverse interactional explanations be modelled from a pragmatic standpoint?*

In order to solve this overarching research question and construct a replicable research model, I address the following specific queries (Wen, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010) that are directly related to the essential aspects of *interactional explanation*. Firstly, to determine whether the phenomenon of *interactional explanation* may be located in encounters by linguistic markers, linguistic representation of the phenomenon constitutes a key focus of my current work. Secondly, *interactional explanation* occurs with certain speech acts, in particular, the speech act of request and apology (see more in Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). Earlier speech acts research, however, regards explanatory utterances as one of the realising strategies in such encounters. Whether the effectiveness of these speech acts and the explanation strategy are related, and what contextual factors could influence the use of explanation in the speech acts constitute different research focus. Thirdly, explanation in interactions is pragmatically interpreted and assessed by the interactants. An effective *interactional explanation* could promote a peaceful and delighted interaction, whereas an inadequate one might lead to a pragmatic failure. Consequently, the focus of the last research question is on the factors that affect the efficacy (or inadequacy) of *interactional explanation* in discourse.

In order to answer the queries listed above, I have designed the following three sub-questions in the present research:

- 1) *Do interactional explanations bear any linguistic features and/or patterns?*
- 2) *What is the relationship between interactional explanation and the performance of the speech act of request and apology?*
- 3) *What factors influence the interactants' evaluation of interactional explanations?*

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<sup>1</sup> In the present work, I use *information appeal* as a neutral term in the definition of *interactional explanation*. The word *information* here refers to the message with the potential of being loaded with pragmatic meanings/functions, which is pertinent to the topic of the interaction.

Finally, based on the studies of the three specific research questions listed above, I aim to answer the overarching research question and construct a replicable research model of *interactional explanation*.

### 1.3 A Note on Terminology

I use the term *interactional explanation* in the present study. As has been pointed out at the very beginning of this chapter, *to explain* is regarded as a basic mode of knowing the world, knowing ourselves and others. The term *explanation* can, therefore, encompass the diverse types of messages that may constitute this particular pragmatic behaviour in interaction.

Similarly, *explanation* is a key concept in philosophy of science (e.g., Hempel & Oppenheim, 1948; Achinstein, 1983, etc. See Section 2.1 for further information). Indeed, the research of scientific explanation explores the fundamental validity of the explanation concerning phenomena by investigating the essential quality of accuracy, logic and credibility. In order to mark a contrast in the scientific explanation, Antaki (1988) uses *ordinary explanation* in his social psychology research. However, the *ordinary explanation* does not bring the study of explanation into the dynamics of interaction. Thus, I use *interactional explanation* to indicate that the focal point of the present research is the explanatory utterances taking place (or called for in the case of missing explanation) in interactions. The pragmatics research of the *interactional explanation* is different from the research of *scientific explanation* and *ordinary explanation*.

In order to illustrate these differences, I would like to share the story of Paul Dirac, the Nobel-Prize-winning physicist. The story goes like this:

Moments after Paul Dirac finishes his lecture, the moderator asks if anyone has any questions. Someone in the audience says, “I don’t understand the equation on the top-right-hand corner of the blackboard.” Dirac says nothing. The audience shuffles nervously, but he remains silent, whiling away the time of day, looking unconcerned. The moderator, feeling obliged to break the silence, asks for a reply, whereupon Dirac says, “That was not a question, it was a comment.” (Farmelo, 2009, pp. 161–2)

I find this story illustrates very effectively the differences between explanation studies in philosophy of science, social psychology and pragmatics. First, the scientific explanation

mentioned in the above story refers to the missing one—the explanation asked about “the equation on the top-right-hand corner of the blackboard” (an indirect request from the perspective of the speech act theory). However, as the *scientific explanation* is not given, scientific philosophers are not able to analyse the validity here.

The *interactional explanation* research sees an information appeal from the audience utterance, “I don’t understand the equation on the top-right-hand corner of the blackboard.” At the end of a public lecture, there is a convention of opening up the floor to questions. The audience can pose questions to the lecturer if they have any queries. The audience’s utterance is made with such a presupposition. In the story, Paul Dirac does not take the implicature from the utterance. He does not perceive any information appeal from the interaction. Consequently, there is a missing *scientific explanation* and a missing *interactional explanation*. The two explanations refer to the same piece of informative message expected from Dirac, but they are concepts from two different research perspectives. The scientific explanation has not been given by Dirac, so the research cannot be made. But the pragmatics research features problems. A discursive problem makes the interactional patterns salient. The missing *interactional explanation* results in a pragmatic failure due to the (Dirac’s) disregard for the convention of the public lecture. When Dirac is asked by the moderator to reply to the audience, which is again an explicit information appeal from the interaction, Dirac replies “That was not a question, it was a comment.” Interestingly, this *interactional explanation* does not fulfil the information appeal derived from the “the equation on the top-right-hand corner,” but answers Dirac’s perceived information appeal “why didn’t he reply to the audience?” The point here is that the *interactional explanation* answers the *perceived* information appeal by the interactant. It might or might not fulfil the information appeal from the interaction. Then, either a missing *interactional explanation* or an inappropriate one could result in pragmatic failure and interaction breakdown.

From the perspective of social psychology, the *ordinary explanation* again only analyses the presented explanations. Dirac’s utterance “That was not a question, it was a comment” can be concluded as *claim-backings* according to Antaki and Leudar (1990). Other social psychologists conduct *attribution* studies of the presented explanations (Kelley, 1967; Weiner, 1974). Dirac’s explanation is to attribute the reason of his silence to the audience—the audience’s utterance does not reflect a question calling for an answer. This explanation is of the external and uncontrollable attribution. The point here is that the *ordinary explanation* does not observe the dynamic process of the interactional discourse but concerns the analysis of the inner mental process of the explainer.

More terms related to explanations have been conceptualised by researchers in sociology. Scott and Lyman (1968, pp. 46–7) define self-serving *accounts* as the statements made to explain untoward behaviour and bridge the gap between actions and expectations. They then classify account into *justification* and *excuse* on the basis of the assumption of responsibility. Goffman (1971, p. 203) categorises “accounts” as remedial work, together with apology and request. However, despite the conceptualisation endowed by researchers, “we do not use the terms *justification* and *excuse* as carefully as we might” (Austin, 1957, p. 177), so “there is genuine uncertainty or ambiguity as to what we mean” (Ibid). Goffman (1971, p. 112) also believes that the terms for accounts, explanations, excuses, etc., tend to be used interchangeably in common usage. The meanings of the terms in use might involve multiple conceptualisations in different areas. Be it an *account of justification* or *excuse*, I contend that it may very well be the pragmatic *interactional explanation*, if it answers the information appeal from the interaction and communicates more than a simple declarative message. In addition, there are plenty of no-product explanations (Achinstein 1983: 74), which deserve equal attention as those with “product” do (see more in Chapter 2). The study of *interactional explanations* includes the pragmatics of the missing *interactional explanation*.

Finally, all the italicised words mentioned above are second-order terminologies. The word “explanation” or “to explain” can also be used in daily conversations without any abstract conceptualisation (see “excuse” in turn 5, Example 1.1). Thus, I use “interpretation” or “perception” to refer to the first order conceptualisation in the present study.

In the following sections, I introduce the structure of my dissertation and how the research questions are approached in the different chapters. I also elaborate on the respective data and methodology I adopt.

#### **1.4 The Structure of the Dissertation**

The thesis consists of eight chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction of the research. I present the significance of the research. More importantly, I present the objectives of this research project and the major research questions. I also discuss the terminology in the research and introduce the methodology and data.

Following this introductory chapter, I review the literature of explanation studies from different academic disciplines in Chapter 2. These disciplines involve philosophy of science, social psychology, sociology, and speech acts theory. I establish the academic niche of the

explanation study in pragmatics. I also review the theories that work closely with the concept of *interactional explanation* in the area of convention and interactional ritual.

In Chapter 3, I develop the working definition of *interactional explanation* and present the essential characteristics of the phenomenon with examples. I also explain the rationale of the following three major studies in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 respectively.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 constitute the core tenets of the thesis. These chapters report three major studies I conduct on *interactional explanations* to answer the research questions. As this is a new concept in this area, it is important to describe the linguistic features of this pragmatic phenomenon. Starting with a corpora exploration in English and Chinese, Chapter 4 presents a study of linguistic features of the *interactional explanations* in discourse. Uncovering the linguistic features can help to locate the pragmatic phenomenon in discourse. I work on different corpora and find that *interactional explanations* bear no “hard” linguistic markers. Interactional explanations do not necessarily accompany causal connectives, such as “because” or “so.” The corpus exploration shows that there is no simple direct way to locate *interactional explanations* solely by linguistic markers. However, the interactants usually have an acute perception of information appeals in interactions and tend to recognise the presence of *interactional explanations*. Based on this, I move on to look into this pragmatic phenomenon in the performance of speech acts.

*Interactional explanations* very often accompany some speech acts, among which are the speech acts of request and apology. Chapter 5 includes two sections that focus on the use of *interactional explanation* in the speech act of request and apology respectively. The two studies aim to find the interconnection between explanation and the performance of the two speech acts. I study the anonymised email request in Chinese and German languages and discover that the *interactional explanation* frequently appears in the performance of email requests in both languages. The follow-up online surveys with native speakers of the two languages show that interactants from different linguacultures can employ interactional explanations for different pragmatic purposes. Following the study on request, I make two meta-analyses of apology realisation studies in order to find the correlation between *interactional explanations* and the performance of apology in different linguacultures.

In Chapter 6, I use ex post facto interviews to collect metadiscourse data and study the interactants’ interpretation and evaluation of *interactional explanation*. I analyse the data and discover that both the interactional rituals involved in interactions and the attribution types of *the interactional explanation* can influence the interactants’ evaluation of *interactional*

*explanation*. Based on the findings and the metadiscourse data, I make an attempt to model the pragmatic phenomenon of *interactional explanation* in Chapter 7.

Chapter 8 summarises the major findings of the previous chapters, answers the research questions and discusses the research model of interactional explanations. I also propose the typologies of the *interactional explanation* and the prospects of future research on this pragmatic phenomenon.

## **1.5 General Notes on Methodology and Data**

### ***1.5.1 Notes on Methodology***

To conduct the study and answer the research questions, I use a mixed method approach (House & Kádár, 2021, p. 52) and a variety of data types in the present research. In Chapter 4, I conduct the study based on multiple corpora. Thus, descriptive statistical analysis is the predominant method in this part. In Chapter 5, I use content analysis to analyse the data of anonymised emails and online surveys with judgement tasks to collect the evaluative data of interactional explanations. I also conduct two meta-analyses. In Chapter 6, I mainly use discourse analysis in the study based on the metadiscourse data collected by way of *post facto* interviews (House 2008, 2018; Haugh & Kádár 2017, p. 608). Further information about the research methods are available in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 respectively.

### ***1.5.2 Notes on the Data***

The present research includes various types of data for different research questions (Jucker, 2009; Jucker, Schneider & Bublitz, 2018) covering different aspects of the *interactional explanation*. The datasets involved in the three major studies reported in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are mainly corpora data in different linguacultures, anonymised emails, meta discourse data collected from pragmatic interviews, and judgement task data from online surveys.

There are also many examples cited in the present and later chapters. These examples have been collected by the researcher from her own life experience during the study of this PhD programme. This way of data collection can be regarded as field notes or a dairy method (Schneider, 2018) in pragmatic data collection. Such data is largely used in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics. It fits the present pragmatic study as it collects those everyday pragmatic details that are easy to overlook.

Last but the least, in the present research I have followed the ethical criteria of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Momentum (Lendület) Interactional Research Group. All the data has been ethically stored and all participants have been anonymised.

## 2. Literature

Retrospectively, there has been a body of research dedicated to the topic of explanation from various academic disciplines. In order not to overscale the explanation literature for the present research, I only review the studies in close connection with *interactional explanation* from four major areas, namely philosophy of science, pragmatics, social psychology, and sociology.

The following literature review tries to depict the profile of the explanation study and establish the existing gap of the explanation research in interaction analysis.

### 2.1 Explanation Study in Philosophy of Science

Scientific explanation has long been a focus of philosophical research, and correctness is the principal focus of the explanation studies in the philosophy of science. The philosophers of science who are interested in the logical structure of explanation regard an explanation as the abstract regularities or patterns that could answer a “why” question of a certain event or an occurrence. Research into the scientific explanation is generally assumed to identify the ideal model of explanation which is believed to be substantially consistent in non-scientific ordinary explanations. Thus, the theory of scientific explanation is to serve as the most generally applicable principle. On the other hand, philosophers of science generally accept that a cause is regularly followed by its effects, which is the Humean or regularity theory of causation. Thus, the theory of scientific explanation intends to explore the explanations for repeatable patterns in nature. The “descriptive” type of accounts, for example, the verbal explanation of a particular decision, is not readily accepted in the area of philosophy of science.

#### 2.1.1 *The Deductive–Nomological Model (DN Model)*

Modern development of explanation studies started with the Deductive–Nomological model (DN model). The model has been promoted since the early 1930s but was fully developed in the 1940s by Hempel & Oppenheim (1948). They defined the basic pattern of scientific explanation in the following way:



*We divide an explanation into two major constituents, the explanandum and the explanans. By explanandum, we understand the sentence describing the phenomenon to be explained (not that phenomenon itself); by the explanans, the class of those sentences which are adduced to account for the phenomenon. (Hempel & Oppenheim, 1948, p.136–137)*

This two-constituent-division of scientific explanation has been adopted by the researchers proposing different models as well.

The DN model is by definition deductive and argues that an explanation has to be a sound deductive argument. The conditions of adequacy they proposed are fundamental:

*If a proposed explanation is to be sound, its constituents have to satisfy certain conditions of adequacy, which may be divided into logical and empirical conditions.*

*I. Logical conditions of adequacy.*

*(R1) The explanandum must be a logical consequence of the explanans ...*

*(R2) The explanans must contain general laws, and these must actually be required for the derivation of the explanandum ...*

*(R3) The explanans must have empirical content ...*

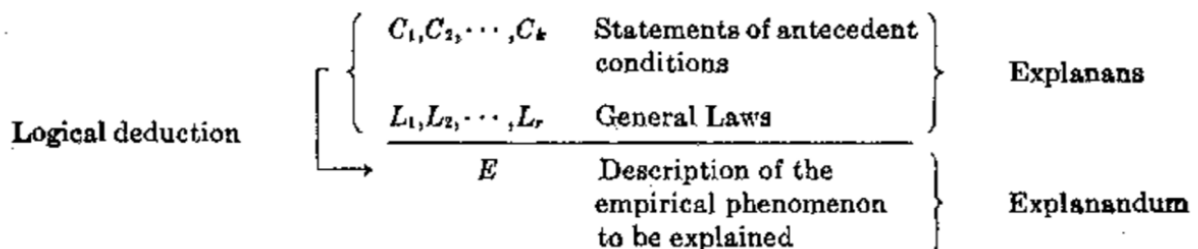
*II. Empirical condition of adequacy.*

*(R4) The sentences constituting the explanans must be true.... (Ibid. p. 137)*

They summarised these characteristics of scientific explanation in the following schema:

**Figure 2.1**

*Explanation (IE) in DN model.*



(ibid, p. 138)

Most debates on the DN model have derived from what could be regarded as the “general law” (R2). The DN model would require perfect generalisation potential to be taken as “law.” This condition, however, could hardly be achieved. Thus, Hempel & Oppenheim (1948) considered the incomplete explanatory arguments as “indicating some positive correlation between the antecedent conditions adduced and the type of phenomenon to be explained” (p. 139). They believed the incomplete explanation could be further investigated and ultimately become the complete explanation. This concept of incomplete explanation is associated with statistical theories. Hempel, Oppenheim and later statistical explanation researchers agreed that the probability assigned to some outcome should be interpreted as explaining that outcome.

### ***2.1.2 The Statistical Relevance (or SR) Model***

Following the statistical theories, Wesley Salmon (1971) proposed a different model of scientific explanation—the statistical relevance (or SR) model. The explanatory relevance lies in the statistical relevance. If the DN model considers an explanation as an argument—a valid argument that certain conclusive statement is drawn from the information according to the (universal) law(s). In contrast, the SR model provides a very different perspective. It concludes that statistical theories assigning probabilities to an outcome should be seen as explaining the outcome. Salmon (1971) argued that “an explanation is a set of probability statements, qualified by certain provisos, plus a statement specifying the compartment to which the explanandum [explanandum] event belongs” (p. 77). The SR model placed the probability in infinite sequences of events, and from this perspective, explanations under the DN model (deducted from the general law) are considered as special cases of statistical explanation.

Salmon defined the SR model as answering a “Why does this  $x$  which is a member of  $A$  have the property  $B$ ?”

*The answer to such a question consists of a partition of the reference class  $A$  into a number of subclasses, all of which are homogeneous with respect to  $B$ , along with the probabilities of  $B$  within each of these subclasses. In addition, we must say which of the members of the partition contains our particular  $x$ .*

(*ibid.*, p. 76)

Salmon believed the SR model could answer all possible questions about explanation, because by such an explanation,

*... we know exactly how to regard any A with respect to the property B. We know which ones to bet on, which to bet against, and at what odds. We know precisely what degree of expectation is rational. We know how to face uncertainty about an A's being a B in the most reasonable, practical, and efficient way. We know every factor that is relevant to an A having property B. We know exactly the weight that should have been attached to the prediction that this A will be a B. We know all of the regularities (universal or statistical) that are relevant to our original question. (ibid., p. 78)*

Another important aspect of the SR model is that it emphasises the relevance instead of high probability. Salmon believed that “an explanation is not an argument that is intended to produce conviction; instead, it is an attempt to assemble the factors that are relevant to the occurrence of an event” (ibid., p. 65). Unlike the pursuit of general law in the DN model, the SR model does not impose a probability requirement for explanation. In this case, a low probability event could also be explained according to the criteria. Interesting questions can be derived by the SR model. For example, the SR model could define a multiple statistical relevance relationship, but the identification of the causal relationship is hardly made by the model. Salmon (1984, 1994) later developed his SR model into a Causal Mechanical (CM) model, in which he placed explanation into a “causal nexus” in terms of a causal process and causal interactions. However, the problem of the identification of an explanatory relevance remains the problem of his newly developed concepts.

### ***2.1.3 A Unificationist Account of Explanation***

Following Hempel’s conceptualisation of explanation as a specification of the genuine relevance relations, Philip Kitcher (1989) developed an unificationist account of explanation. Kitcher presented the criterion of unification based on the following idea. He defined E(K) as a set of derivations that could make the best trade-off between minimising the number of patterns of derivation employed and maximising the number of conclusions generated (p. 432). He also argued that the central problem of explanation is “the question of defining the class of genuine relevance relations that occur in the ideal why-questions of each and every science at each and every time” (Kitcher, 1989, p. 417).

Kitcher's unifactionist approach has tried to solve the problems of the earlier models, but it did not approve the full criteria for the scientific philosophers. For example, in the scientific sense, his approach is fundamentally descriptive rather than causal. However, one important point is, similar to Hempel's approach, Kitcher also stressed a *time-independent* theory of explanation, which should work independently of the branch of science (ibid., p. 417).

#### **2.1.4 The Pragmatic Aspect of Scientific Explanation**

While most works in scientific explanation have centred on the ultimate truth-conditions of (scientific) explanation, Van Fraassen (1980) casted doubts on the objectivity approach towards the exploration of explanation:

*The discussion of explanation went wrong at the very beginning when explanation was conceived of as a relation like description: a relation between a theory and a fact. Really, it is a three-term relation between theory, fact, and context. No wonder that no single relation between theory and fact ever managed to fit more than a few examples! Being an explanation is essentially relative for an explanation is an answer ... it is evaluated vis-à-vis a question, which is a request for information. But exactly ... what is requested differs from context to context. (p. 156)*

Van Fraassen proposed the context-sensitivity of the theory of explanation by claiming that why-questions were context-sensitive (Skow, 2016). The contextual factor(s) proposed here are of an "empirical" nature. The most general criticism towards van Fraassen is the unconstrained relevance relation he placed on the explanation theory.

Following van Fraassen's pragmatic approach to explanation, Achinstein (1983, p. 3) proposed an illocutionary theory of explanation. Grimes (1987, p. 91) also defined a fundamental distinction between an explanation proposition and the giving of an explanation. These views conform to the speech act theory (see more in the works of the language philosophers; Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Searle (1969, p. 29) argued that the pure expression of a proposition does not explicate a speech act. The reason lies in that a proposition, an explanation *per se*, is not an illocutionary act. However, when this piece of explanation is expressed in interaction, the giving of an explanation carries a certain illocutionary force. Further speech act studies literature is reviewed in the following section.

Achinstein regarded an explanation as the product of the explaining act, by which he differentiates the act and the ‘product’ of explaining. Another important difference he made is the correct explanation and good explanation (Achinstein, 2020, p. xi). The correct explanation might or might not be the good one, which depends on the appropriateness it holds towards the audience.

The argument of Achinstein was a pragmatic approach to the theory of explanation, but his goal remained nevertheless a cross-disciplinary concept of explanation. Most scientific philosophers have explored the theory of (scientific) explanation as a pursuit of a universal objectivity, a logic truth or the condition of the relative truth. Researchers contended that such a logic truth should be shared across disciplines. For example, Hempel & Oppenheim (1948, p. 142–143) held some widely accepted (mis)opinions about the differences between scientific explanation (in physics and chemistry) and those in psychology, economics and other social sciences. They argued that there should be no substantial difference between the logical structure of scientific explanation and ordinary explanations.

There have been some attempts made to associate the study of the sciences of nature with the study of man. In the philosophy of action, von Wright (1971) proposed an Intentionalist model to understand human action. He suggested that human action could not be explained causally by scientific or natural laws but had to be understood in a social and cultural context (p. 111). Gee (1999, p. 46) argued that the lifeworld discourse was not trying to be “correct” in the same sense as the scientific discourse. Indeed, in scientific discourse, an explanation is a piece of truth-driven statement of fact or illustration of a certain phenomenon. In lifeworld discourse, an *interactional explanation* is a relationship-driven, co-constructed linguistic behaviour by the interlocutors with its meaning mediated within the interaction.

However, among the immense literature of scientific explanation, very few works are on the application of the explanation theory. As the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy states:

*what is accepted as an explanation, how explanatory goals interact with others, what sort of explanatory information is thought to be achievable, discoverable, testable etc.—varies in significant ways across different disciplines.* (Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/scientific-explanation/>)

I contend that the theory of explanation could be approached from the substantial application of the theory. The present dissertation attempts to propose an applicable theory of explanation.

The pragmatic definition of *interactional explanation* and the model of it are to be applied in the pragmatic and interaction analysis.

## **2.2 Attribution and Ordinary Explanation in Social Psychology**

Seeking explanation does not only form the ultimate purpose of the philosophy of science but also constitutes a fundamental way of life. Research and theorisation attempts in explanation can also be traced back to the research in common-sense psychology (Heider, 1958), where causal attribution illuminates the rational process of explanation.

### **2.2.1 Explanation and Attribution**

Heider (1958) approached the naïve analysis of action by attribution:

*Attribution, the linking of an event with its underlying conditions, involves a kind of unit formation. In the case of “can” a unit is formed between the possibility of success or failure and person or environment. If the success “belongs” to the person, then the person is felt to be responsible for it; if it belongs to the environment, then the environment is held accountable. Therefore, though “can” is a resultant of two contributing sources, it is sometimes ascribed more to the person and sometimes more to the environment. (Heider, 1958, p. 89)*

He further inquired into the conditions of attribution and the important properties of the person and of the environment. Personal and impersonal causalities have been classified by nominating numerous conditions of the person (abilities, personality traits and attitudes, passions, need, etc.) and environment (difficulty, physical positions, etc.)

Starting from the efforts by Heider, leading social psychologists, including Kelley (1967) and Weiner (1974) developed *Attribution Theory*. Kelley established and developed the *covariation model* of attribution. He (Kelley, 1973) proposed the attribution on three criteria: consensus, distinctiveness, and consistency. Following Kelley, Weiner (1974) developed a *three-dimensional model* of attribution. He believed that everyone strived to explain their behaviour and analyse the reasons for the consequences of their behaviour. Starting from the individual's attribution process, he explored the relationship between the individual's

attribution of success or failure and achievement behaviour. The three-dimensional perspectives he held are: stable theory (stable and unstable); locus of control (internal and external); and controllability (controllable or uncontrollable).

Weiner's *three-dimensional model* of attribution provides a series of systematic and specific attribution criteria, which can be easily applied into discourse analysis. The model has been commonly applied in crisis discourse analysis (e.g., Coombs, 2007). Recently some scholars (e.g., Yao & Qin, 2019) have introduced it into the discourse analysis of interpersonal trust restoration. The present study also attempts to apply this model in interaction analysis (see Chapter 5 and 6).

The common-sense social psychologists contend that human beings perceive things, people and events around them. Such perceptions form the base of the attribution.

*It has often been stressed, especially by phenomenologists, that the person feels that he is in direct contact with things and persons in his environment. ... He not only perceives people as having certain spatial and physical properties, but also can grasp even such intangibles as their wishes, needs, and emotions by some form of immediate apprehension.* (Heide, 1958, p. 22)

However, Weiner (1985) agreed that attributional studies mainly employed highly contextualised experimentation in achievement-related settings. Thus, authentic interaction observation has been rather scarce. There have been few attempts in empirical analysis of unsolicited attribution. The present study applies the attribution (Weiner 1974, 2018) process in the interactants' perception of the other parties' discourse based on authentic metadiscourse data. Despite the fact that attribution experiments have been conducted in different linguacultures, there have been few contrastive analyses. In the present dissertation, I avoid the mechanistic attribution standards and stress the pragmatic aspect of the attribution process from a sociocultural (Chinese) aspect in interaction. The relativity and flexibility of attributions are illustrated in Chapter 6 (i.e., Example 6.6).

### **2.2.2 Ordinary Explanation**

Social psychologist Antaki and his colleagues (Vayreda & Antaki 1991; Antaki & Leudar, 1992) argued that ordinary conversations contained much explaining, which could not be well

captured by an account. Following the critics, he reviewed the features of explanation research in public communication studies and social psychology (Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1**

*Features of research on social explanation in two traditions*

	Research on explanations held mentally	Research on explanations exchanged publicly
Types of explanation	Causality emphasised	Definition emphasised
Questions addressed	Accuracy and bias Information processing Effects on behaviour	Intention Mutual knowledge Social regulation Rhetoric
Types of theory	Social cognitive	Pragmatics Ethnomethodology Discourse analysis Symbolic interaction
Methods used	Laboratory studies Rating scales Questionnaires	Interviews Documents Linguistic corpora
Data	Individual's responses on controlled dimensions	Discourse

Source: Antaki, 1988, p. 6.

His review shows that in public communication discourse, explanations have been generally seen as revelations discursively constructed to reveal or challenge the social reality. In addition, attributional studies in social psychology have concentrated on how people explain their behaviours and their mental representation of causal explanation.

Antaki (1988, p. 8) contends that attribution theories have not been verified in ordinary conversations. He and his colleagues approached explanations in ordinary conversations by conversation analysis (see more in Section 2.4), and they regarded explanation as claim-backing, a type of conversation move or rhetorical device (Antaki & Leudar, 1990). Similar to Billig (1987), who took a rhetorical approach and focused on the argumentativeness of



explanation, Antaki (1996) also proposed a conversational argument model of ordinary explanation.

Likewise, the present study also focuses on explanations in interactions. I too deem explanation to be highly contextualised; it needs to be placed within the context of the interaction in order to be analysed. An explanation is never a free-standing utterance, as any statement in itself cannot prove that it is an explanation. It needs an explanatory relation as a premise (Antaki 1994, p. 2) in the context.

In contrast to conversation analysis of causal structures or a rhetorical analysis of claim, I regard the *explanation in interactions* as a *pragmatic* phenomenon, which is pragmatically sought, provided, interpreted and evaluated. This explanatory relation and the dynamics of *interactional explanations* are jointly constructed by interactants and determine whether the *interactional explanation* can fulfil the task assigned in interaction. I particularly focus on the pragmatics of *interactional explanations* and attempt to propose a theory for this phenomenon. Evaluation is the effect of people's perception. Consequently, in addition to the study on the pragmatics of *interactional explanation*, the present research also analyses the correlation between the interactants' evaluations of *interactional explanations* and the properties of the attribution of *interaction explanations*.

## 2.3 Explanation in Pragmatic Research

In this section, I go over prior explanation-related studies in pragmatics. Drawn from this review, linguacultural traits are also underlined in the current study of *interactional explanation*.

### 2.3.1 Explanation in Speech Act Realisation

Language philosopher J. L. Austin (1962) proposed the performative use of language and introduced the concepts of *locutionary act*, *illocutionary act*, and *perlocutionary act* to speech act theory. Presumably, speech acts are considered as universal concepts across languages, but when and how to perform a specific speech act varies from culture to culture (Gass & Selinker 2008). In pragmatic research, explanatory expressions have usually been involved in the studies of speech act realisation. Following Edmondson (1981) and Edmondson and House (1981), explanation has been identified as one of the core realisation strategies in the ground-breaking cross-cultural studies in the project of Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation Patterns

(CCSARP) (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). *An explanation or account of the cause that brought about the offence* is classified as one of the realisation strategies; The *grounder* (an indication of the reasons for the request) is considered as an important supportive move for making a request (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p. 205, 207).

Since then, many researchers have recognised explanation as an important linguistic strategy in realising speech acts of request and apology in different linguacultures. To name a few, Fukushima (1996) examined requests in English and Japanese; Zhang and Wang (1997) studied the apology in Chinese; Suszczyńska (2005) studied the apology in Hungarian; Bataineh and Bataineh (2008) contrasted the apology in English and Arabic; Kádár et al. (2018) studied ritual Chinese apology, and House and Kádár (2021) explored war apologies in German and Japanese, etc.

These studies have found that different frequencies of explanations occurred in speech act realisation from different linguacultures. For example, Zhang and Wang (1997) found that one special feature of the Chinese request was the high occurrence of the adjuncts to the Head act, especially, *grounder*. Chinese interactors seemed to use more explanatory expressions in their request. Interestingly, Fukushima (1996) found that, compared with English speakers, Japanese speakers used fewer explanatory expressions in requests. As linguacultural norms are discursive resources for speakers to carry out linguistic performance (Schwartz 2007, Sommer 2018), the cross-cultural study results show that explanations in speech acts are granted different pragmatic weights across different linguacultural norms.

There are also few speech act studies focused on the use of explanation. Meier (1996, 1997) studied the repair work (apology) in Austrian German and applies the differentiation of *Excuse* and *Justification* from the work of Scott and Lyman (1968). Meier discussed the high frequency of *Excuse* and *Justification* in Austrian data from the linguacultural aspect—Austrians frequently used excuses/justification where repair works were called for to cover up unpleasantness. Thus, the seriousness of the offence does not efficiently influence the use of explanation.

Beyond the realisation study of apology and request, *interactional explanation* is also related to the concept of trust and trustworthiness. Trust and trustworthiness are primarily psychological concepts, however discursive strategies may be employed to impact the perception of them. For example, Mao and Zhao (2022) investigates how trustworthiness is discursively negotiated based on the analysis of Chinese online medical crowd-funding posts, a request speech act event. They find both macro-discursive strategies and detailed linguistic

means of the construction of trustworthiness. The linguistic trustworthiness negotiation associates with the authenticity of an *interactional explanation*. The authenticity of *interactional explanation* constitutes the basis of its validity, which concerns the interactants' evaluation. By using *interactional explanations*, the interactants do incur an authenticity issue. In the present study, I take the view that interactants generally choose to trust the other party (Grice, 1975) unless the utterance involves lies that could be keenly detected by the interlocutors. The studies of lies (Barnes, 1994; Chen et al., 2013; He & Zhang, 2004; Weissman & Terkourafi 2019) are premised on non-authentic discourse in interaction. The study of *interactional explanation* does not have this premise.

### **2.3.2 Overinformativeness and Linguacultural Characteristics**

Another pragmatic concept, which is related to *interactional explanation*, is *overinformativeness*. In terms of the Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975), *overinformativeness* refers to the violation of the quantity maxim. Derived from this, Chen (2004, 2007) uses *interactional overinformativeness* to refer to the additional information provided to the proposition in exchanges. From a functional point of view, Chen (2004) argues that *overinformativeness* occurs in order to influence conversation development. Attached to the performance of a particular act, *overinformativeness* is a type of resource which is used to implement interactional strategies in order to enhance the likelihood of an effective conversation. Similarly, Qian (1997/2020, p. 224) argues that excessive information in interaction can be employed as a discursive strategy. Similarly, based on an investigation into patients' online medical consultation requests, Wang and Mao (forthcoming) found that *overinformative* response can be employed for the purposes of grounding, expanding, and disarming (see more in Edmondson, 1981).

The concept of *overinformativeness* is based on Cooperative Principle, while *interactional explanation* is intrinsically linked to a perceived information appeal in interaction: an *interactional explanation* is a response to the perceived information appeal. In other words, *interactional overinformativeness* refers to a piece of additional information in exchanges, whereas messages conveyed in *interactional explanation* constitute the core interaction. The present study regards *interactional explanation* as an independent pragmatic phenomenon, rather than a piece of additional information attached to another act. Naturally, the research on *interactional explanation* observes both the presence and absence of this pragmatic phenomenon (see more in Chapter 6).

Moreover, potential linguacultural differences play an important role in the present research on *interactional explanation*. The theory of *interactional overinformativeness* is primarily based on data in Chinese linguaculture, which could actually reflect a discursive preference of Chinese communicative preference (see more in Section 5.1.3). Accordingly, the present study uses the term *linguaculture* instead of *language* or *culture*, because the concept of linguaculture not only considers the language as the carrier of a culture, but also sees the language as a part of the culture. Linguaculture is one integrated concept, not two (Qian, 2020).

Furthermore, unlike the western science of philosophy (reviewed in section 2.1), the approach of traditional Chinese philosophy is represented in the employment of hexagrams (symbols) and words (explanations). The aim of traditional research is mainly to comment on and to explain the original texts of scriptures; textual research aims to interpret the meaning expressed by the scriptures. Chinese classics encompass systematic pragmatic thoughts. For example, among the oldest Chinese classics, *I Ching* or *Book of Changes* exhibits a macroscopic research paradigm in depth and breadth in its cosmological text and philosophical commentaries (Mao, 2014). Discovering the pragmatic principles of Chinese characteristics and pinning down the specific linguacultural characteristics of certain pragmatic phenomena are not only significant breakthroughs, but assurances of effective contrastive studies across linguacultures.

To sum up, an explanatory utterance has been customarily taken as a postulate in the examination and interpretation of speech act performance. As mentioned previously, I see the explanation in interaction as an independent pervasive pragmatic phenomenon in discourse. Thus, in the present study I explore the *interactional explanations* both within and beyond the performance of the speech acts of apology and request. I investigate its pragmatic function across linguacultures and its correlation with the accompanied speech acts (request and apology). I also examine the contextual influence on the use of *interactional explanation* together with the speech acts. In the study of (Chinese) interactants' evaluation of *interactional explanation*, I analyse the data from a Chinese linguacultural perspective with an aim to fully uncover the Chinese linguacultural characteristics of this pragmatic phenomenon.

#### **2.4 Accountability and Account in Sociology**

The present work on *interactional explanation* is also related to the sociological concept of *accountability*. Sociological studies of accountability date back to Garfinkel's ethnomethodology approach in the 1960s (Garfinkel, 1967, 1974). Similar to Austin (1957), Garfinkel's work also started with the analysis of judicial activities. He proposes the

ethnomethodological approach of sociology by arguing that members of the society produce the social order by collaborative sense-making activities. Consequently, there is an inherent reflexivity between activities of making sense of a social setting/order and the continuous construction of the social setting/order.

Robinson (2016) makes a multifaceted overview of the *account* literature and differentiates between two senses of accountability. In the first sense, accountability refers to the ‘intelligibility’ of the conduct, which means that what a person is doing is intelligible and so the conduct is accountable. Conversation analysis is the most adopted framework in ethnomethodological research and has produced a substantial body of work (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Clayman & Heritage, 2021), especially on ordinary practices (see Lynch, 2007, p. 510).

In conversation analysis, every turn in the conversation addresses the matters raised by the turn preceding it; the sequencing of conversation turns produced by the interactants are important for understanding social practices. Instead of focusing on individual utterances, conversation analysis is based entirely on turn-taking. Consequently, the explanation studies in conversation analysis tend to present a concept of *completion* (Mead, 1973, p. 446) rather than explanatory relations, which is based on the content of interactions. Mead argues that social activities generally require the *completion* in the action of others. As a result, a conversation turn is taken as an *explanation* of the previous turn. In the following example, J's utterance is seen as making a *completion* of P's by a further proposition that forms a disjunction:

P: I would have to ask them whether they mean that it [new industrial revolution] is purely a technological change.

J: or a complete reorganisation of society, the same way as the industrial revolution.

(Leudar & Antaki, 1988, p. 149)

In this sense of the sociological concept, *accountability* is also closely related to general expectations and understandings. These expectations and understanding could be reflected in linguistic indexicality. Harré (1988) argues that pronouns in conversations mark the relations of interactants in a social world and different languages encode social orders in the rules of their grammar to varying degrees. For example, Japanese encodes complex social orders in its honorifics system, while English encodes very little. In this sense, the social world is intelligible through pronoun use.

The second sense of *accountability* refers to the interactants' omnirelevant moral responsibility for their conduct. This sense of accountability emphasises normative implications of practices and actions in social interaction. The term *account* is usually employed in the research in this sense.

Scott and Lyman (1968, p. 46) proposed that “an account is a linguistic device employed whenever an action is subjected to valuative inquiry” and argued that “the honouring of an account represents the *restoration of equilibrium*.” Heritage (1988) argues that *accounts* “function to ‘repair’ the ubiquitous relevance of rules of conduct by protecting them from the ‘entropic’ process of attrition that could otherwise arise from the incidence of non-compliant actions” (p. 141). Robinson (2016) defines an account as “an attempt by one interlocutor to modify (e.g., change, explain, justify, clarify, interpret, rationalize, (re)characterize, etc.), either prospectively or retrospectively, other interlocutors’ understandings or assessments of conduct-in-interaction in terms of its ‘possible’ breach of relevance rules (i.e., to the point of accountability)” (pp. 15–16). In sum, *account* is considered as a remedial exchange in this research direction.

Scott and Lyman (1968) further defined accounts as the “statements made to explain untoward behaviour and bridge the gap between actions and expectations” and classified account into two types: *justification* and *excuse*. Based on the assumption of responsibility, interactants make *justifications* to portray offensive behaviour as less offensive or even positive; they make *excuses* to illustrate that the interactants’ intentions have been interfered with, for which they cannot be held responsible. This differentiation is of great importance in the court of defence.

*Justifications are accounts in which one accepts responsibility for the act in question, but denies the pejorative quality associated with it.*

*Excuses are accounts in which one admits that the act in question is bad, wrong, or inappropriate but denies full responsibility.*

(Ibid, p. 47)

In addition to the theoretical statements, Scott and Lyman also proposed five linguistic styles of account according to the social intimacy between/among the interactants. I summarise the linguistic styles proposed by Scott and Lyman in Table 2.2. They believed that accounts were presented in a variety of idioms in accordance with sociocultural norms. They also stated

that the acceptance of the account depended on the appropriateness of the employed idioms in specific situations.

The proposed linguistic styles based on the social intimacy of the interactants is intriguing. However, there are diverse factors which could influence account-giving in interaction beyond social intimacy. The weakness of their classification is, firstly, that the differences in the accounts between different degrees of social intimacy are not concluded from authentic empirical studies; and secondly, the verbal differences are not clear enough to enable further analysis. Scott and Lyman also agreed that the proposed linguistic styles were ambiguously separated in real interactions.

J. L Austin (1957) also discussed the differentiation between *justification* and *excuse* based on the assumption of responsibility. However, he also pointed out that these terms can be used independently or combined, and are used interchangeably by interactants in daily ordinary conversations, despite conceptualisation by the researchers. The meanings they convey might involve multiple conceptualisations in different areas. Austin discussed the philosophical methods in the study of the condition of excuses. His ideas on the topic have been of great significance in the legal nature and function of the law, as practised by lawyers and jurists.

Erving Goffman (1971, p. 112) regarded *accounts*, apologies, and requests as three main devices that could accomplish remedial work. *The function of remedial work is to change the meaning that otherwise might be given to an act, transforming what could be seen as offensive into what can be seen as acceptable* (ibid, p. 109). He analysed accounts according to the various levels of defence in legal practice.

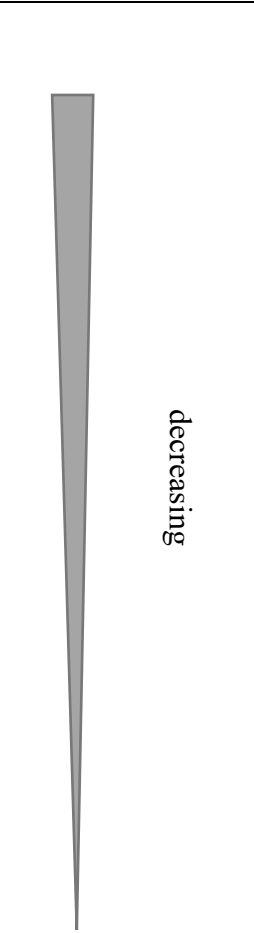
According to Goffman, a good account is one that “succeeds in restructuring the initial response of the offended and appreciably reducing the fault of the actor.” (Ibid, p. 112) He mentioned the authenticity of the account, but he did not regard authenticity as being important in determining whether the account is a good or bad one. He believed a false account could also be a good account, only with flexibility and proper wit. He also believed that the terms account, explanation, and excuse tend to be used interchangeably in common parlance.

In brief, the sociological stream of *accountability* studies in the first sense does not have the same focal point of *interactional explanation*, though the explanations in interactions are intelligible/accountable, similar to all other conducts. *Accounts*, serving as remedial means, emphasise the normative implications of practices and actions in social interaction. Compared to the studies in the first sense of sociological accountability, *accounts* are closer to the concept of *interactional explanation*; however, the pragmatic concept of *interactional explanation* is

concerned with information appeal in interaction rather than a situation requiring remedial exchange or a moral responsibility derived from normative social encounter. On the other hand, sociological studies of accounts are built upon “lively imagination” (Austin, 1957, p. 186). My research on *interactional explanation* endeavours to investigate authentic discourse data in order to establish an applicable working theory.

**Table 2.2**

***Linguistic styles of account according to social intimacy (Scott & Lyman, 1968)***

Linguistic styles of account	Social intimacy	Specific verbal style
Intimate	 decreasing	This verbal style employs single sounds or words, and jargon, to communicate whole ideas.
Casual		Typically, this verbal style employs ellipses, i.e., omissions, and slang.
Consultative		... There is a definite element of "objectivity," i.e., of non-subjective and technical terms.
Formal		Typically, this style is suited to occasions when an actor addresses an audience larger in number than six. Such situations [also] occur in bureaucratic organisations between persons who are hierarchically differentiated in status, or in the courtroom in the interaction between judge and defendant.
Frozen		Typically, interaction in the frozen style occurs between those where an irremovable barrier exists. The barrier may be of a material or a social nature, or both.

Based on Scott & Lyman, 1968, pp. 55–57)

## 2.5 Other Theories and Concepts Involved in the Study of Interactional Explanation

Explanation has been subject to academic inquiries in various disciplines. Explanation studies in philosophy of science concentrate on the truth condition of explanations in this area. The



theoretical research is mainly about what constitutes a valid universal explanation. Psychologists pay attention to the process of attribution in human cognition. The multiple dimensions of attribution have given much insight into how interactants make evaluations in interactions. In sociology, *accounts* that serve as remedial means emphasise the normative implications of practices and actions in social encounter. This sense of accountability is also interpreted in the discussion of pragmatic meaning (Haugh, 2013; Culpeper & Haugh, 2014).

I build on the prior explanation research to articulate my focus on the pragmatic *interactional explanation* phenomenon. I regard *interactional explanation* as a complex and pervasive discursive phenomenon. My research on this phenomenon examines the perspective of the interactants, as *interactional explanation* can only be well understood when it is contextualised. The perception of linguistic behaviours varies from context to context. The interactants' evaluation of *interactional explanation* is subject to contextual and interactional factors. Therefore, I integrate first order and second order analysis, and include both the etic and emic point of view in this present study on *interactional explanation*.

Linguacultural differences can influence the use of explanation in speech acts, and explanation has been taken as one of the strategies in speech act realisation studies. Therefore, in the current study, I examine explanation in apology and request from the standpoint of speech act set and speech act event.

Finally, the pragmatic concept of *interactional explanation* is inextricably linked to a perceived information appeal in interaction rather than a moral responsibility derived from normative social encounter, even though the practise of *interactional explanation* is inevitably reflective of interactional norms and rituals. Therefore, the present work involves concepts of interactional ritual and convention.

### ***2.5.1 First Order Analysis and Emic Point of View***

The first order analysis is the investigation of description directly from the informants; the second order analysis mainly refers to a theoretical construct (Watts et al., 1992). The first order and second order division has been applied in many (im)politeness studies in pragmatics. Similarly in the present study, I intend to obtain the perception and evaluation of the *interactional explanations*, which calls for the investigation of first order understandings.

Another closely related concept to the first order analysis is the emic point of view of the study. The emic approach explores how the participants understand the phenomenon in the study according to their normative systems in the local contexts, whereas the etic approach

represents a researcher's point of view. However, the division of first and second order analysis, or the etic and emic perspectives, is not easily made (Haugh 2007, Terkourafi 2011). More researchers recognise that the concepts are better seen as a continuum (Cheung et al., 2011). An extreme first order analysis or emic approach could leave no room for theorising the interactional phenomenon under research. An etic point of view could better abstract and define common phenomena.

In the next chapter, I specify the essential characteristics of *interactional explanations* and clarify the rationale for the specific studies accordingly.

### **2.5.2 *Speech Set and Speech Event***

Olshtain and Cohen (1983), Olshtain (1989) used the speech act set to refer to the set of strategies of the speech act of apology. Similar to the speech act of apology, request is usually realised by a set of strategies instead of one single utterance. There might be a linguistically fixed or finite set of direct or indirect means, but they are usually employed in combination by the interlocutors. Hymes (1974, p. 52) defined the concept of speech event as the activities that were directly governed by rules or norms for the use of speech. Accordingly, a speech event might comprise several speech acts instead of a single one.

In this dissertation, I take a broader view of the speech act set instead of seeing the speech acts from the unit of utterance. I also adopt the concept of speech event in the analysis of the speech acts. For example, in the speech event of request, a speech act of apology could appear at the beginning. The clarification of the reason for the request is the *grounder* within the request set. These *grounders* are analysed as *interactional explanations* in this speech event.

### **2.5.3 *Interactional Ritual and Convention***

Another important concept closely related to my study on *interactional explanation* is interactional ritual (Kádár, 2013). My research applies interactional ritual theory from the two following aspects. First, that the interactional ritual is driven by interpersonal relationships, so is *interactional explanation*. Secondly, *interactional explanations* themselves might be the exact linguistic expression of interactional ritual.

*'Ritual is a formalized and recurrent action, which is relationship forcing; that is, by operating, it reinforces/transforms interpersonal relationships. Ritual is realized as an embedded liminal (mini)performance, and this performance is bound to*

*relational history (and related moral order), or historicity in general (and related moral order). Ritual is an emotively invested action, as anthropological research has shown.'*

(Kádár, 2013, p. 12)

Accordingly, interactional ritual behaviours are those linguistic/pragmatic behaviours in interactions, which are formalised and recurrent under certain circumstances. Such ritual pragmatic behaviours stipulate and strengthen certain interpersonal relationships between the interactants. Behaving according to ritual demonstrates the interactants' compliance with some particular (historical) social norms and the respect or consideration to the other interacting party.

Thus, interactional ritual is relationship oriented. The phenomenon of interactional explanation is susceptible to various interpersonal connections. For example, Meier (1997) found that explaining was more likely to occur among Austrian German speakers when the situation involved a relationship with a friend. One of my research focal points is to examine the influence of interactional ritual over the use and evaluation of *interactional explanations*.

Kádár and House (2020a) further refined the concept of ritual in pragmatic studies:

– *Language use is ritual if it is conventionalised in a particular social unit. In ritual, rights and obligations prevail and participants know who and where they are.*

– *Ritual includes conventionalised utterances, the utterance-chains of conventional interactional structures and co-constructed interactions with conventionalised formal or topical features. It exists in both ceremonial and contact ritual forms, which are the two ends of a ritual topological scale.*

– *Ritual helps social units to reproduce themselves, and instances of ritual 'are amongst the most important means by which the interactional (and moral) order is reproduced and maintained.*

– *As ritual is communally oriented, and the participants of a ritual interaction are expected (or forced) to communally align themselves with the ritual process.*

(Kádár & House, 2020a, p. 6)

Interactants are fully aware of who and where they are while interacting and the awareness entails certain rights and obligations in the interaction, which are presented pragmatically and linguistically, namely, *conventionalised utterances, the utterance-chains of*

*conventional interactional structures and co-constructed interactions with conventionalised formal or topical features. Thus, interactional explanation could present itself as a form of ritual expression—ritual interactional explanations.*

### 3. The Pragmatic Concept of Explanation and the Rationale for the Studies

Dictionary definitions of *explanation* indicate the pragmatic aspect of the act of explaining, which reinforces the necessity for a proper pragmatic definition of explanation in interaction. *Interactional explanations* are more complicated than they appear to be. In this chapter, I provide examples to further illustrate the pragmatic concept of *interactional explanation*. I also discuss the essential attributes of this pragmatic phenomena. These attributes enable a multifaceted analysis of the phenomenon. I subsequently specify the rationale of the three major studies on *interactional explanations* reported in this work.

#### 3.1 The Pragmatic Concept of Interactional Explanation

The online dictionary service of Oxford Languages<sup>2</sup> gives two major definitions of *explanation*: (1) “a statement or account that makes something clear”; (2) “a reason or justification given for an action or belief.” These definitions explicitly show the pragmatic feature of the act of explaining—namely to make something clear or to justify an action or belief. Nonetheless, this interactional phenomenon is not yet properly defined and explored in current pragmatic research.

Therefore, the present study adopts a pragmatic perspective in order to examine the phenomenon of explanation in interactions. I define *interactional explanation* as the response to a perceived information appeal from the interaction. This interactional phenomenon encompasses the explanatory utterances that could involve diverse types of information based on perceived information-seeking in interactions. Whichever purpose or function the *interactional explanation* serves, it is pragmatically sought, provided, interpreted and evaluated.

I would like to share one example from my field notes to illustrate the pragmatic concept of *interactional explanation* and the underlying contrastive aspect in my research.

##### Example 3.1

A Chinese doctor practising Chinese traditional medicine in Budapest shared a challenging experience she had had with a Hungarian patient. This doctor had provided an acupuncture treatment to the patient. As acupuncture is not a singular treatment but

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<sup>2</sup> <https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/>

a series of therapies, the patient asked the doctor when she should attend for the next treatment while indicating her busy schedule. The doctor told her that she could come regularly—once a week—for acupuncture. They then said goodbye and the doctor left the acupuncture room. After some time had passed, this patient approached a Hungarian doctor working at the clinic who is able to speak Chinese. This colleague told the Chinese doctor in Chinese that the patient she has just treated was asking him to help her as an interpreter. The patient wanted to know when she should come for her next acupuncture treatment. The Chinese doctor was puzzled since she has already told the patient, just a while ago, the answer to this question.

(Field note collected on 14 November 2017)

In this particular incident, the Hungarian patient had been seeking information for a proper behaviour in order to receive acupuncture treatment by the Chinese doctor, while the Chinese doctor had offered a proper clarification for the patient to make the best use of the treatment. However, the information sought by the patient was not fulfilled by the *interactional explanation* of the Chinese doctor. While the Hungarian patient asked for a specific appointment, possibly with a date and a time, the Chinese doctor offered a time frame for the treatment which was, in her mind, in the patient's best interest.

From the perspective of pragmatics research, the patient, while asking the “when” question, presupposed that a “when” question in the context called for an answer of a definite appointment with specific date and time. The doctor, while giving an answer of “once a week” to the patient, implicated a flexible timeframe so that the patient could freely choose their next treatment in the given timeframe. However, the messages conveyed in both the presupposition and the implicature have not been communicated effectively. Thus, the interaction demonstrates a pragmatic failure. Unfortunately, there was no possibility to schedule an interview with the patient and check her perception and evaluation of the interaction with the doctor. But similarly to the doctor who described the experience as frustrating, the patient might also have been puzzled and frustrated. It is realistic to assume that the doctor's explanatory message had been perceived by the patient as a breach of the cooperative principle, i.e., the maxim of quantity and the maxim of manner (Grice, 1975).

From the perspective of *interactional explanation*, the patient's “when” question was a direct information appeal within the frame of the interaction; the doctor's answer constitutes an *interactional explanation* as it is the response to this information appeal. Unfortunately, this particular *interactional explanation* is not sufficient enough to fulfil the patient's information

appeal. The divergence between the *interactional explanation* and the information appeal in this case is derived from many factors, for example, different institutional (hospital) conventions, different perceptions of the doctor–patient relationship, and different interactional rituals applied in the doctor–patient discourse, etc.

The next example is a very short verbal exchange at an Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) event between the mixed martial art athletes Khabib Nurmagomedov from Russia and Conor McGregor from Ireland. During the so-called “trash talk” prior to the match, McGregor crossed the line by insulting Nurmagomedov with religious slurs (O’Toole, J. n.d.). Later, while fighting the UFC 229 fight, McGregor and Nurmagomedov exchanged words, which were overheard in the live broadcasting and reported online (ibid.). Other online match footage also exposed this brief exchange (Kash, 2018; see also MMA News Depot, 2018; Searles, 2018, etc.). The short exchange is listed below:

#### Example 3.2

Nurmagomedov: Let’s talk now.

McGregor: It’s only for business

([www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpqb2Xc00OI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpqb2Xc00OI))

In the second round of the fight, Nurmagomedov initiated this very brief interaction while raining down punches on McGregor. The utterance seems to refer to McGregor’s disparaging “talk” in the previous game promotion, the “trash talk.” McGregor reacted to Nurmagomedov and told him “It’s only for business.” Here “It” in McGregor’s utterance should refer to the fact that his taunting talk has crossed lines before the fight. Thus, McGregor perceived the information appeal, “what is the cause for the transgression” from the interaction. His utterance “It’s only for business” is an *interactional explanation*, which offers the cause that has brought about his earlier offence to Nurmagomedov.

In the studies of apology speech act, explanation is one of many realisation strategies (Cohen & Olshtain 1981, 1985; Olshtain, 1989). The independent use of the strategy of explanation in Example 3.2 may sufficiently realise an apology (Kádár & House, 2019, p. 4). Many online news about the fight also used headlines like “Conor McGregor apologized to Khabib mid fight” (see Searles, 2018; MMA New Depot, 2018; for more detail). However, the postulate of an *interactional explanation* being the realisation of the speech act of apology is limited to the second-order perspective. This particular interactional explanation challenges the recognition of a speech act of apology in that the interaction itself does not reflect whether the

utterance is perceived as an apology by the interactants. This is a question of the first order and second order conceptualisation of speech acts. Kádár and Haugh (2013) define this distinction as follows:

*“The terminology of first-order and second-order is used in various fields of linguistics, as well as other areas. In general, a first-order conceptualization refers to the way in which a phenomenon is perceived by its users, while second-order describes a more abstract, scientific conceptualization of the given phenomenon.”* (p. 41)

From the first-order perspective, in Example 3.2, what McGregor’s utterance meant to Nurmagomedov cannot be answered without an interview with Nurmagomedov himself. Fortunately, this UFC event has attracted attention for a very long time. Hence, many follow-up events have taken place and have been shared online. I made the following transcription of a video in which Nurmagomedov talked about this specific piece of McGregor’s utterance in a meeting with his fans.

Nurmagomedov: ... He tried to talk with me about “it’s only business,” you know. This meant for me, “please, calm down. Don’t smash me.”

Man: To calm you down.

Nurmagomedov: Yes. “It’s only for business,” you know, he tried to get me to relax. We already finished three rounds’ fights. And then he beginning [begins to] try to talk about this only business. It just showed his weakness.

([www.youtube.com/watch?v=ssT2-Abh9cQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ssT2-Abh9cQ))

One personal Russian contact confirms that there is an expression ‘Пошли, поговорим’ (‘let’s go out to talk’) in Russian. This expression ALWAYS means fighting by fists, instead of a real talk. With this piece of specific linguacultural knowledge in mind, it becomes apparent that Nurmagomedov perceived McGregor’s words as showing weakness and begging for mercy in the fight. His perception does not necessarily reflect an apology. Even if McGregor had indeed genuinely made an apology for what he did in the “trash talk,” his *interactional explanation* “It’s only for business” has not been understood by Nurmagomedov as an apology.

In view of the analysis above, *interactional explanation* conveys information beyond the dictionary definition. The concept of explanation in speech act theories is not sufficient for



a thorough understanding of the pragmatic phenomenon in interactions. It is, therefore, necessary to make a definition of *interactional explanation* as a pragmatic phenomenon in interaction. This pragmatic definition introduces a new perspective to view and analyse interactions.

My research on *interactional explanation* constitutes a meso-layer of explanation research between the two traditions of explanation study in psychology and in public discourse (Antaki, 1988). Based on the review of explanation studies by Antaki (see Table 2.1 in Chapter 2), I extend the explanation study into the interactional analysis and insert an additional column (Column 3) into the table. The third column of Table 3.1 introduces the feature of *interactional explanation* research.

**Table 3.1**

*Features of research on explanation*

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
	Research on explanations held mentally	Research on explanations in interactions	Research on explanations in public discourse
Types of explanation	Causality emphasised	Interaction emphasised	Definition emphasised
Questions addressed	Accuracy and bias Information processing Effects on behaviour	Discourse Culture Norm	Intention Mutual knowledge Social regulation Rhetoric
Types of theory	Social cognitive	Pragmatics Speech act (Im)politeness Interactional ritual, etc.	Pragmatics Ethnomethodology Discourse analysis Symbolic interaction
Methods used	Laboratory studies Rating scales Questionnaires	Corpora Survey and interviews Experiments	Interviews Documents Linguistic corpora
Data	Individual's responses on controlled dimensions	Corpora, discourse metadiscourse Controlled individual responses	Discourse

(Columns 1, 2, and 4 are from Antaki, 1988, p. 6. Column 3 is added to present the work on explanation in interactions.)

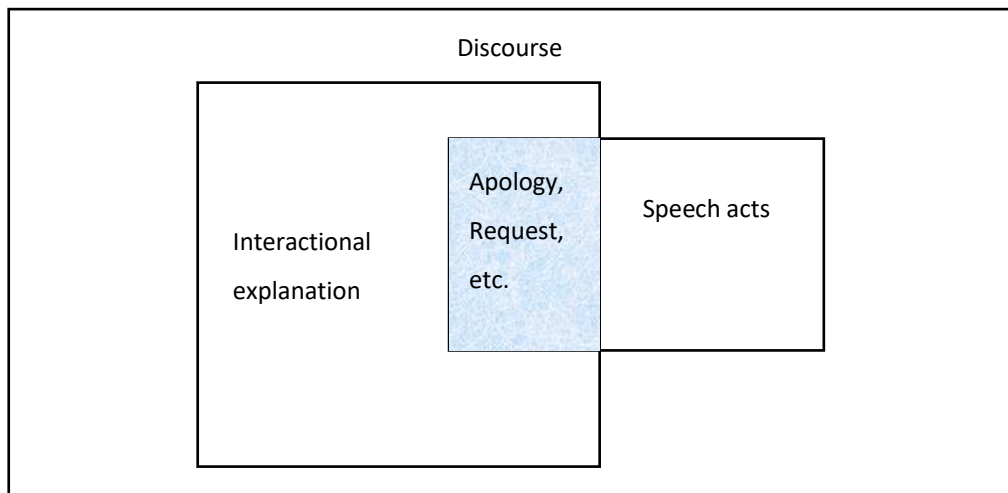
The research on explanation in interaction focuses on the explanatory utterances (and the absence of them) that arise in discourse. Research on *interactional explanation* stresses the dynamic interactional side of the “making” of an explanation. In addition to the public

discourse and research data from the explanation research traditions, *interactional explanation* study also includes data from discourse corpora, spoken and written discourse, and metadiscourse data collected from designed production tasks, surveys and interviews. Corpora investigation and discourse analysis are the most commonly used research methodology.

The most recognisable attribute of *interactional explanation* is its pervasive occurrence in interactions. This discursive phenomenon appears frequently in both spoken and written discourses of all kinds. Figure 3.1 presents the relationship between interactional explanation, discourse and certain speech acts. As a response to a perceived information appeal, the discursive *interactional explanation* co-constructs one exchange between the interactants. Note that I take the concept of speech act set and speech act event in the present work instead of seeing speech act as a unit of utterance (see Section 2.3.1). The present study views *interactional explanation* function independently, but whether this particular exchange of interactional explanation forms a certain (part of) speech act depends on the particular interaction (House et al., 2021). Consequently, there is an overlapping area of interactional explanation and some speech acts.

**Figure 3.1<sup>3</sup>**

*Interactional explanation (IE), discourse and speech act.*



An *interactional explanation* communicates more than a simple declarative message and is provided, interpreted and evaluated in the real time of the interaction. The perceived

<sup>3</sup> To present a definite relationship between IE and speech acts is not easy in no small part because there are many theories of speech acts. In the present study, I use the concept of speech act event/set instead of the classical speech act theory, which focused on utterances. Figure 3.1 presents that an IE is a discursive phenomenon, which could constitute 1) a part of a discourse while being independent of a speech act event/set; 2) a part of a speech act event/set, as a strategy of realising the speech acts.

information appeal is usually pertinent to certain (linguistic) behaviour either taking place or being alluded to in the interaction. The information appeal can be direct or indirect, which is either explicitly or implicitly suggested in the interaction. The incident in Example 3.1 embodies the direct information appeal with an interrogation—a question. Situations also occur in which information appeals are not explicit and are without any surface (linguistic) cues (see Example 3.2 and Chapter 4).

Furthermore, *interactional explanation* frequently accompanies the performance of certain established speech acts. An *interactional explanation* manifests itself in interaction and exerts illocutionary force as a response to some sort of questioning—an information appeal. The “questioning” can involve a variety of requests for information, so an *interactional explanation* can offer diverse information and serve various interactional purposes in interaction. For example, *interactional explanation* accompanies the speech acts of apology and request in order to assist the realisation of the speech acts.

Last but not least, explanations in interactions are not only pragmatically sought and provided, they are also pragmatically interpreted and evaluated. The interactants tend to evaluate the *interactional explanation* immediately in the interaction. The discussion of Example 3.1 and 3.2 both demonstrate the evaluative perception of the interactants. The effectiveness of the interaction is somehow determined by the interactant’s evaluation of *interactional explanation*. An effective *interactional explanation* can guarantee a peaceful interaction, whereas an inadequate one might lead to a pragmatic failure or even interaction breakdown.

These inherent attributes of the *interactional explanation* mentioned above are interconnected and generate multiple pragmatic research potentials from various aspects of the phenomenon (see more in Section 3.2).

### **3.2 Rationale for the Following Studies on Interactional Explanation**

*Interactional explanation* is a pervasive pragmatic phenomenon. One primary objective of the study is to examine the linguistic representation of the phenomenon. An investigation of general discourse corpora can determine whether the phenomenon could be efficiently located in interactions. The research I conduct on the linguistic features of *interactional explanation* using various corpora in English and Chinese is presented in Chapter 4. I investigate the concurrence of causal connectives and *interactional explanations*, since causation has been

well documented in previous literature on explanation research. By manually coding sample datasets, various signalling devices, recognisable patterns, and forms that might distinguish *interactional explanation* are also discovered in addition to causal connectives. The forms of explicit information appeals are also explored, since *interactional explanations* do not stand alone without them.

Secondly, *interactional explanations* occur with certain speech acts, in particular, the speech act of request and apology. An explanation or account in the speech act of a request or apology may indeed be accorded varied weights by different linguacultures, according to earlier contrastive pragmatic study (to name a few, Fukushima, 1996; Meier, 1997; Zhang & Wang, 1997; Huang, 2001; Bataineh & Bataineh, 2008; Kádár et al., 2018; Bippus & Young 2019). However, previous speech acts research typically takes the pragmatic function of explanatory utterances in interactions for granted. It has never been investigated whether there is a connection between the effectiveness of these speech acts and the explanation strategy. Further research has not focused on which factors affect the use of *interactional explanations* in the performance of these speech acts.

In Chapter 5, I focus on the interactional explanation in the speech acts of request and apology. Data from email requests in Chinese and German are analysed to determine the function and implication of *interactional explanation* in the speech act of request. Online surveys are conducted and analysed to determine the perception and evaluation of *interactional explanation* in requests from Chinese and German linguacultural insiders. In addition, I conduct two meta-analyses on the apology realisation research to examine the use and factors that affect the use of explanation strategy in different linguacultures.

Finally, explanation in interactions is pragmatically interpreted and evaluated by the interactants. The evaluation of *interactional explanation* plays a critical role in interactions because a proper *interactional explanation* can ensure a peaceful and smooth interaction, while an insufficient one would probably result in a pragmatic failure and interaction breakdown. The data of the first order perception and evaluation of the efficacy of interactional explanations hold the key to understanding the crucial role of an interactional explanation. In Chapter 6, I use the method of ex post facto interviews (House 2008, 2018; Haugh & Kádár 2017, p. 608) to collect metadiscourse data about interactional experiences. I use appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005) to analyse the data and determine the perception and evaluations made by the interactants. Furthermore, I study the factors that influence the interpretation and evaluation of the interactional explanations.

The three major research conducted in this thesis involve different types of data, collected by different methods. Detailed research design and data descriptions are reported in the following chapters respectively. In the next chapter, I first look into the linguistic features of interactional interaction.

#### 4. Linguistic Features of Interactional Explanation

In this chapter, I make an exploration of the linguistic and discursive features of *interactional explanation* based on different discourse corpora. I design the parallel studies in English and Chinese, but I do not intend to make a comprehensive contrastive study. First there have been no previous studies on the linguistic features of *interactional explanation*, which should have been the base of a comprehensive contrastive study. Accordingly, the two parallel studies in English and Chinese are both explorative. Secondly, a contrastive study requires comparable datasets in the two languages. The present work intends to explore the linguistic features of *interactional explanation* as much as possible. In this manner, research corpora of different types and sizes are used as data sources. Thus, the present studies expect to demonstrate and discuss contrastive similarities and/or differences of *interactional explanation* in the two languages with the aid of the common qualities by the parallel study design.

I first explored an open discourse corpus in English from Google Research.<sup>4</sup> The automatic text search and manual coding show that interactants choose diverse linguistic indicators to mark *interactional explanations*. However, a considerable proportion of the *interactional explanations* do not bear linguistic markers. Following exploration of the English corpora, I conduct similar text searches in the Chinese corpora. The findings indicate that a variety of linguistic devices are also employed in Chinese. These linguistic devices are similar to those found in the English data. The statistical comparison also shows a general similarity in the frequency of this device of *interactional explanation* in the two languages. Based on the findings, I contend that linguistic markers of *interactional explanations* are largely dispensable.

##### 4.1 The Linguistic Features of *Interactional Explanations* in the CCPE-M Corpus

In this section, I examine the linguistic features of *interactional explanation* in an open corpus of conversation data from Google Research, Coached Conversational Preference Elicitation dataset for Movies (CCPE-M).

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<sup>4</sup> Google research (<https://research.google/>) is a platform where the Google research team regularly share research projects as open source.

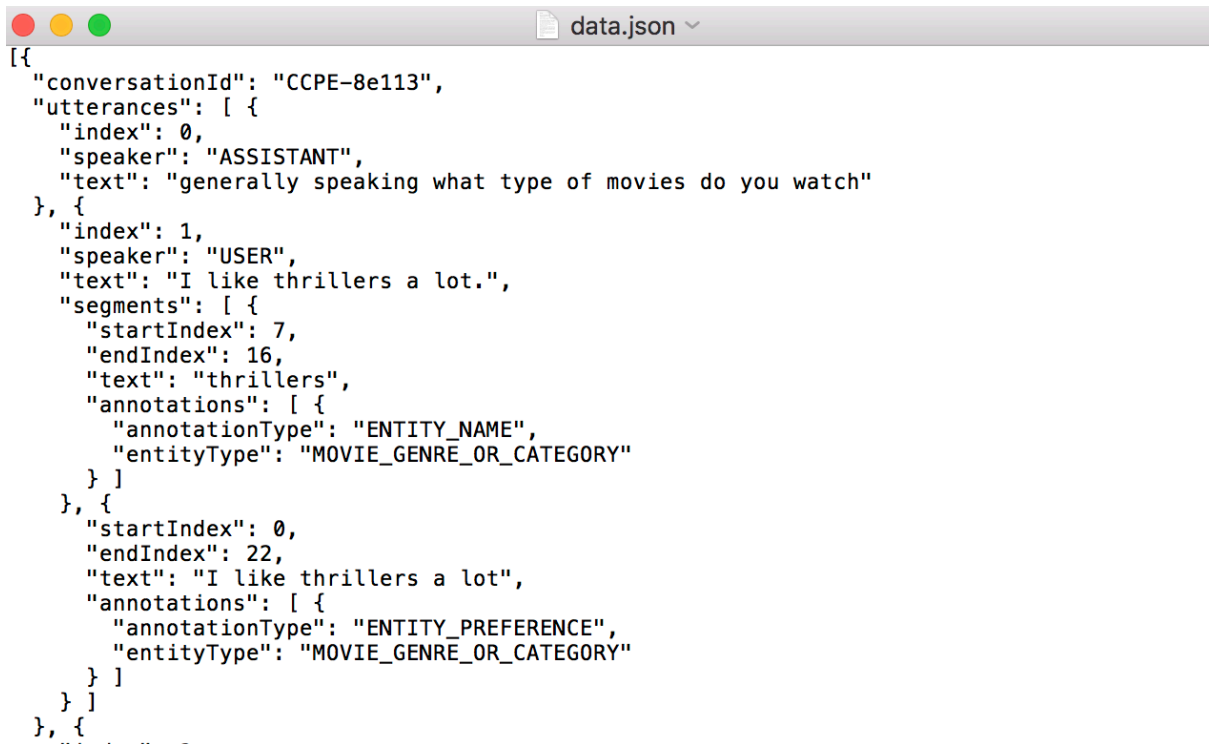
### 4.1.1 Data Description

Coached Conversational Preference Elicitation dataset for Movies (hereinafter referred to as the CCPE-M Corpus), is an open conversation corpus from Google Research (<https://research.google/tools/datasets/coached-conversational-preference-elicitation/>). It is a natural language conversational preference corpus, which is established as a training dataset for systems to understand users' preferences.

The conversations in CCPE-M have been collected by the means of Coached Conversational Preference Elicitation methodology (Radlinski et al., 2019). Every conversation in the corpus consists of two participants: one asks the other's likes and dislikes about movies and the reasons for their preferences; the other responds. Crowd-sourced workers were recruited for building the corpus (ibid.). Thus, each conversation in the dataset revolves around specific preferences and the explanations of these preferences.

#### Figure 4.1

*The CCPE-M data in JSON format.*



```
[{
  "conversationId": "CCPE-8e113",
  "utterances": [ {
    "index": 0,
    "speaker": "ASSISTANT",
    "text": "generally speaking what type of movies do you watch"
  }, {
    "index": 1,
    "speaker": "USER",
    "text": "I like thrillers a lot.",
    "segments": [ {
      "startIndex": 7,
      "endIndex": 16,
      "text": "thrillers",
      "annotations": [ {
        "annotationType": "ENTITY_NAME",
        "entityType": "MOVIE_GENRE_OR_CATEGORY"
      } ]
    } ]
  }, {
    "startIndex": 0,
    "endIndex": 22,
    "text": "I like thrillers a lot",
    "annotations": [ {
      "annotationType": "ENTITY_PREFERENCE",
      "entityType": "MOVIE_GENRE_OR_CATEGORY"
    } ]
  } ]
}, {
```

The CCPE-M corpus is a task-oriented natural language dataset. The 502 conversations in the dataset have an average of 22 turns and a median duration of 3 minutes and 36 seconds (Radlinski et al., 2019). Every conversation involves the elicitation of movie preferences and the respective explanation for these movie preferences. The conversational corpus particularly

contains a universal information appeal which corresponds to *interactional explanations*. Thus, it fits the need of the present study in that it provides an intensive dataset of the *interactional explanation* and offers a valid base for the exploration of its specific linguistic patterns.

The CCPE-M corpus is provided in JSON format (<https://github.com/google-research-datasets/ccpe>). Figure 4.1 presents a snapshot of the annotated data.

As illustrated in Figure 4.1, every conversation in the JSON file has one unique ID (e.g., “conversationId”: “CCPE-8e113”) with diverse annotations including the entity preference, movie genre and other aspects of the movie preferences. For example, the following annotation categories can be seen in Figure 4.1: ENTITY\_NAME, ENTITY\_PREFERENCE, MOVIE\_GENRE\_OR\_CATEGORY. Nevertheless, these annotations convey no indication of the linguistic features of the texts, so they do not provide direct information for the present study. To be able to conduct text searches and text analysis, I draw on the original conversations in the corpus in the form of textual data for the present study. The JSON format file is converted into MS-WORD textual files.

I maintain the 502 conversation IDs and add serial numbers 001 to 502 at the beginning of each conversation ID. Each conversation is seen as one independent case. I then upload the 502 conversations into NVivo 12, a qualitative data analysis tool to make the following textual analysis.

#### **4.1.2 Methodology**

*Explanation* somehow entails a causal relation in the utterance. In addition, causation has been well assumed in earlier literature of explanation studies. Consequently, I start the investigation with a text search of the concurrence of causal connectives and explanation. As explanations might not always bear obvious causal connectives, in addition to the text search of causal connectives, I make a manual coding to scrutinise possible linguistic features based on sample data from the CCPE-M Corpus. As *interactional explanations* do not stand alone without information appeals, the forms of the information appeals are indicative of certain discursive features of the pragmatic phenomenon. How information appeals are conveyed in the interactions is also manually coded.

I use the qualitative data analysis tool NVivo 12 in this study. NVivo 12 is a qualitative data analysis (QDA) tool that helps organise and analyse unstructured or semi-structured datasets to find hidden trends and insights ([www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software/home](http://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software/home)). It works with various textual data, such as data collected from



interviews, social media or webpages. NVivo has been widely applied in the fields of anthropology, communication studies and psychology. One of the advantages of choosing NVivo12 for the present project is that it provides both an automatic text search function and a manual coding function. Thus, it allows flexibility in combining the results and approximating the general trend of the linguistic features of *interactional explanation*.

I implemented the first manual coding in February 2020 based on the automatic text search done by Nvivo 12. Since I am the only coder in the present study, following the first coding, I completed the second and third coding in November 2020 and July 2021 respectively. Coding three times within a nine-month interval ensures that the present coding results are reliable.

#### 4.1.3 Text Search

I begin the study with a text search of causal connectives. Altenberg (1984) summarises four different types of grammatical causal linking: adverbial links, prepositional links, subordination and clause-integrated links. Causal connections can also be introduced by casual verbs and nouns, prepositional phrases or conjunctions (Greenbaum, 1996; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Among all the possible causal links studied, the conjunctions *because* and *for* are among the most frequently used. I draw on the previously mentioned research results of linguistic studies and begin the text search of *because* and *for* in the CCPE-M corpus using Nvivo 12.

**Text search of causal links *because* and *cuz/cos*.** The CCPE-M corpus is a spoken language corpus, so it is necessary to include the informal variant of *because* into the text search. Tables 4.1 and Table 4.2 summarise the text search results of *because* and its informal variant *cuz/cos*. Among the 502 conversations in the CCPE-M corpus, there are 222 conversations containing the conjunction *because* to indicate explanatory utterances. This figure means that 44.22% of the conversations in the CCPE-M corpus involve *because* as a causal link to indicate the explanations for movie preferences. Accordingly, I presume that *because* is only used by less than half of the interactants to explain their preferences (or disfavour) in the interactions. Among the 222 conversations using *because*, more than half of them (55.85%) use *because* only once. As every conversation involves the elicitation of explanations for preference and disfavour for multiple movies or movie genres, as well as the fact that the interactants explain their preferences with multiple turns, it is highly arguable that

*because* is not used to indicate the explanatory utterance in every turn of such explanatory interactions.

**Table 4.1**

*The frequency of because in the CCPE-M corpus*

Frequency of <i>because</i> in the conversation	Number of conversations (%)	Percentage in CCPE-M corpus (502)
1	124 (55.86%)	24.70%
2	55 (24.77%)	10.96%
3	25 (11.26%)	4.98%
4	11 (4.95%)	2.19%
5	5 (2.25%)	0.996%
6	2 (0.9%)	0.398%
Sum /	222 (100%)	44.22%

Examples 4.1 to 4.3 are *interactional explanations* marked by the causal connective *because*. The interactants in the CCPE-M corpus are ASNT and USER. The ASNT takes up the role of eliciting movie preferences. The USER talks about their movie preferences and explains their preferences. The serial numbers of the CCPE-M conversations are displayed at the end in brackets.

Example 4.1

ASNT: What about those genres do you like?

USER: Well, I love documentaries *because* they're great biopics, they're great overviews about a person's life and what they did. (156 CCPE-M)

Example 4.2

ASNT: What did you like or dislike about this title?

USER: First of all it's great *because* it has a cast that's Asian which is very unusual for a romantic comedy. (214 CCPE-M)

Example 4.3

ASNT: Why do you like this type of movie?

USER: I like historical movies, historical non-fiction movies, and I like them *because* they are usually truthful and ha[ve] good acting and give you a glance into the past.

(243 CCPE-M)

The above three examples present interactional explanations in reaction to the ASNT's explicit causal investigating inquiries led by "why" and "what about." Preceded by "what about" instead of "what," the eliciting question in Example 4.1 for the USER's movie preference stresses an explication of the preferred genre, since the USER already communicated that documentary was one favoured movie genre in previous turns. The movie involved in the ASNT's inquiry in Example 4.2 is *Crazy Rich Asians*. The USER's explanation is to clarify the reason for the preference over this specific movie. *The interactional explanation* in Example 4.3 is a reaction to the explicit appeal "why do you like this type of movie?". *The interactional explanations* in the three examples contain different types of information, stressing different aspects of movie preferences: i.e., the content of a movie genre (documentaries), the truthfulness of another genre (historical non-fiction), and the (Asian) cast of a particular movie. As different people may enjoy distinct aspect(s) of a particular movie or a particular genre of movie, different USERS' *interactional explanations* might involve different aspects of a movie or a movie genre.

**Table 4.2**

*The frequency of cuz/cos in the CCPE-M corpus*

Frequency of <i>cuz/cos</i> in one conversation	Number of conversations (%)	Percentage in CCPE-M corpus
1	65 (65.66%)	12.95%
2	25 (25.25%)	4.98%
3	8 (8.08%)	1.59%
4	1 (1.01%)	0.199%
sum /	99 (100%)	19.72%

Table 4.2 shows the text search results of *cuz/cos*. The results are similar to the text search of *because*. Ninety-nine conversations involve the use of *cuz* or *cos*, and most of these conversations involve the use of *cuz* or *cos* only once. Examples 4.4 to 4.6 are *interactional explanations* marked by the causal connective *cuz*.

## Example 4.4

ASNT: What scene do you like the best?

USER: Probably the most memorable one is the murder at the lake, just  *cuz*  it's really vivid and horrific to watch. But it's very memorable. (001 CCPE-M)

## Example 4.5

ASNT: What type of the movie do you not like?

USER: I'm not a big fan of horror movies. Not because they're scary, just  *cuz*  I don't. I'm not a fan of the genre. (029 CCPE-M)

## Example 4.6

ASNT: Why do you like this type of movie?

USER:  *Cuz*  it allows me to learn something that I wouldn't have known in previous. I love to learn anything that I can. (024 CCPE-M)

In Example 4.4 and Example 4.5, the USERS'  *interactional explanations*  are the reactions to the ASNT's "What" questions. These eliciting inquiries themselves do not indicate any causal exploration, but the USERS have made explanations right after answering the "what" question and using the causal connectives to mark these explanations. It indicates that the USERS should have perceived the information appeals in the interaction for the explanation of their minimal answers to the "what" questions. This could result from the USER's experiences in the interaction with the ASNT. The ASNT could have, in previous turns, asked causal explorative questions right after the "what" question. The  *interactional explanations*  constitute natural complements to the answers of the "what" questions, as full-form responses are usually preferred over minimal answers (Enfield et al., 2010).

In Example 4.6, the USER's  *interactional explanation*  is a reaction to the ASNT's explicit causal exploratory "why" question. Similar to the explanations in the examples of  *because* , different USERS have stressed different characteristics of a movie (a vivid scene in Example 4.4) or a movie genre in the contents of their  *interactional explanations* .

**Text search of causal links  *for* .** The text search for another highly frequent causal link  *for*  is relatively complicated. As well as being a causal connective,  *for*  can also be a part of multiple grammatical functions. The automatic text search finds 374 occurrences of  *for*  in the

corpus, but not all of these occurrences intend to mark explanatory utterances. I carried out a manual check of every reference of the occurrence from the automatic search results. Table 4.3 shows the final text search results.

**Table 4.3**

*The frequency of for in the CCPE-M corpus*

Number of conversations (%)	Function	Percentage in CCPE-M corpus
26 (6.95%)	a. Indicating explanatory utterance for movie preference	5.78%
237 (63.37%)	b. Interactional explanation in expressing gratitude	47.21%
111 (29.68%)	c. Others	21.51%
Sum 374 (100%)	/	74.5%

The manual check found that only 26 out of the total 374 occurrences of *for* indicate *interactional explanations* for movie preference. These occurrences are not limited to the conjunction “for” but mainly include propositional causal links (Altenberg, 1984). Here are some examples from the corpus:

Example 4.7

ASNT: Why do you like those kinds of movies?

USER: I like comedies because they are not too serious, and I like dramas *for* their suspense and adventure in them. (026 CCPE-M)

Example 4.8

ASNT: What did you like about that kind of film?

USER: I liked them as I said, I liked them *for* the fact that they're based on true stories. I liked that they had very good acting, and they were just very very intriguing.

(050 CCPE-M)

Example 4.9

ASNT: What is another one of your favourite movies?

USER: I won't say that one cuz it's too old, and I like it just *for* the music.

(241 CCPE-M)

The proposition “for” connects noun phrases or noun clauses indicating the *interactional explanations* in the three examples. Examples 4.7 and 4.8 involve reactions to the explicit information appeals in the form of “Why” and “What ... about” questions. In Example 4.9, the *interactional explanation* is the response to a “what” question. As full-form response is usually preferred over a minimal one and non-answer responses tend to be accompanied by explanations (Levinson, 1983, 307ff), the interactional explanation (“I like it just for the music”) in Example 4.9 is to complement and further explain the USER’s unwillingness to say the old movie’s name.

One interesting finding of causal connective use in movie preference data is that most occurrences of *for* (63.37%) as propositional causal links are used in gratitude expressions by the ASNTs. Out of the 374 occurrences of *for*, 237 occurrences are used in the *thanking note* indicating the reason for showing gratitude. Searle (1969, p. 65) describes the speech act of *thank* as an illocutionary act performed by a speaker based on an act that benefited or intended to benefit him/her. In terms of the speech act, this type of “for” use is classified as a marker of *grounder* in the speech of thank similar to the *grounder* in the speech act of request (Edmondson, 1981; House & Edmondson, 1981; House and Kádár, 2021).

This frequent use of *for* in Thank is a marker of a type of ritual/conventional *interactional explanation* in this speech act in English. The speaker (ASNT in CCPE-M) perceived the appeal for this message and provided it in their Thanks. The *interactional explanation* used in the speech act of thank has been regarded as a linguistic routine and convention in English thanking (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986). Nevertheless, this type of *interactional explanation* serves a particular pragmatic function in the speech act of Thank. This function may be observed if we compare “thank you” and “thank you for your feedback”.

Rubin (1983) also argued that this routine of thanking performed the function of signalling the conclusion of a conversation. Indeed, these thanking utterances mostly appear at the end of conversations in the CCPE-M corpus. Examples 4.10 to 4.14 illustrate the use of *for* in the speech act of thank:

Example 4.10

ASNT: Thank you so much *for* your help. (006 CCPE-M)

## Example 4.11

ASNT: Thank you *for* your feedback. (024 CCPE-M)

## Example 4.12

ASNT: Thank you *for* your time. (030 CCPE-M)

## Example 4.13

ASNT: Thank you *for* the information. (059 CCPE-M)

## Example 4.14

ASNT: Thank you *for* sharing. (080 CCPE-M)

Similar to the *interactional explanations* of movie preferences, these examples present very different aspects of information stressed by different interactants: some stress the contents of the interactions (e.g., your feedback, information); some stress the resources (e.g., your time, your help); some stress the behaviour and attitude (e.g., your feedback, sharing), etc.

The text search of *because* (including the colloquial variant *cuz/cos*) and *for* indicate that causal connectives are not highly frequently used in marking *interactional explanations*. Given the statistics of the text search, I contend that *interactional explanations* are not necessarily indicated by causal connectives. But the question whether *interactional explanations* bear other linguistic features or patterns remains unanswered.

In the next section, I illustrate the search for features and patterns of *interactional explanations* using a manual coding of a random sample from the CCPE-M corpus.

#### 4.1.4 Manual Coding

To further explore the linguistic features of *interactional explanations*, a thorough examination of the data is necessary. Therefore, I manually code a sample corpus extracted from the CCPE-M corpus. The manual examination facilitates the comprehensive investigation of the indicative forms and patterns of *interactional explanations*.

**Random sample.** I use Python programme to generate 50 random serial numbers<sup>5</sup> of conversation in the CCPE-M corpus. The conversations with these serial numbers constitute the random sample of the CCPE-M corpus. Furthermore, I manually code the linguistic and discursive markers that the interactants use to mark the *interactional explanations* in this random sample.

**Causal connectives *because* and *for* in the random sample.** Among the 50 conversations in the random sample, the interactants use *because* in 19 conversations; most of the conversations involve *because* once (68.42%). The causal version of the connective *cuz/cos* appears in eight conversations, and six of them only involve *cuz/cos* once. The details of the coding results are shown in Tables 4.4 and 4.5. The frequency of the occurrences of *because* and *cuz/cos* in the random sample are 38% and 16% respectively, which are similar enough to the text search in the complete CCPE-M corpus (44.22% and 19.72%) in previous Section 4.1.3. Thus, a manual coding of this random sample can approximate the trend of causal connectives that are indicative of *interactional explanations* in the CCPE-M corpus.

**Table 4.4**

*The frequency of because in the random sample of the CCPE-M corpus*

	Number Of conversations (%)	Frequency of <i>because</i> in one conversation	Percentage in the random sample
	13 (68.42%)	1	26%
	2 (10.53%)	2	4%
	4 (21.05%)	3	8%
sum	19 (100%)	/	38%

**Table 4.5**

*The frequency of cuz/cos in the random sample of the CCPE-M corpus*

	Number Of conversations (%)	Frequency of <i>cuz/cos</i> in one conversation	Percentage in the random sample
	6 (75%)	1	12%
	2 (25%)	2	4%
sum	8 (100%)	/	16%

<sup>5</sup> Random list of the conversation ID numbers [338, 295, 330, 16, 371, 178, 385, 347, 407, 225, 493, 131, 73, 498, 250, 198, 367, 262, 483, 323, 34, 12, 414, 196, 112, 456, 393, 78, 66, 104, 117, 378, 95, 209, 449, 168, 97, 169, 310, 303, 195, 230, 164, 36, 59, 87, 336, 342, 403, 380].



The text search of the causal connectives *because* and *for* in the random sample shows a very similar frequency of occurrences to that of the search in the CCPE-M corpus. Thus, a thorough examination of the random sample can approximate the linguistic features of *interactional explanations* in general.

Similar to the automatic text search of the causal link *for* in the complete CCPE-M corpus, the text search for *for* in the random sample involves occurrences with diverse functions. The automatic text search finds 37 occurrences of *for* in the random sample, which is also approximately in proportion to the gross frequency of *for* in the CCPE-M corpus. I completed a manual check of every occurrence of *for* in the various contexts and classified the results according to the different functions of *for*. Among the 37 occurrences of *for*, only one is indicative of an *interactional explanation*. Almost half of the occurrences of *for* mark the *grounder* in the speech act of thank. A summary of the text search results is shown in Table 4.6.

**Table 4.6**

*The frequency of for in the random sample of CCPE-M corpus*

Number of conversations (%)	Function	Percentage in the random sample
1 (2.7%)	a. Indicating explanatory utterance for movie preference	2%
18 (48.65%)	b. Interactional explanation in expressing gratitude	36%
18 (48.65%)	c. Others	36%
Sum	37 (100%)	74%

**Manual coding.** As *interactional explanations* are highly interactive, I manually coded the linguistic features and patterns of the *interactional explanations* and the corresponding information appeals in the random sample of the CCPE-M corpus.

There are two major common informational appeals in every conversation in the CCPE-M corpus:

1. The appeal for the preference and disfavour for a specific movie, or a specific movie genre.
2. The appeal for the explanation of the movie/genre preference or disfavour.

The first common information appeal is usually fulfilled by simple and short noun phrases, for example, a name of a particular movie genre (i.e., drama, action or comedy) or a specific movie name. The USER might not continue with a complement of the explanation of the told preference or disfavour. The second information appeal triggers *interactional explanations* and usually involves a more diverse lexica as well as sentence patterns from different interactants.

**Table 4.7**

*The forms and patterns marking interactional explanations in the random sample*

	Number of conversations (%)	Occurrences in conversation (total occurrences)
<b>a. Adverbs</b>		
actually	6 (12%)	1 (6)
just	41 (82%)	1–10 (117)
really	35 (70%)	1–9 (93)
<b>b. Sentence patterns</b>		
I always (verb)	4 (8%)	1 (4)
I mean (that)	5 (10%)	1–2 (6)
I guess (that)	4 (8%)	1–2 (5)
I thought (that)	4 (8%)	1 (4)
I verb (negation), but ...	14 (28%)	1–2 (16)
<b>c. Discourse particle</b>		
You know	12 (24%)	1–2 (18)
<b>d. Causal connectives</b>		
because	19 (38%)	1–3 (29)
cuz/cos	8 (16%)	1–2 (10)
so	5 (10%)	1–2 (6)
for	19 (38%)	1–2 (22)
<b>e. Causal noun</b>		
reason	1 (2%)	1 (1)
<b>f. Non-marker</b>		
	30 (60%)	1–4 (54)

The manual coding indicates that the interactants use diverse patterns to explain their actual opinion about their movie preference or their perception of the movies, in addition to the causal connectives like *because* and *for*. Moreover, these forms and sentence patterns are repetitive in the sample dataset. I summarise the manual coding results in Table 4.7.

As shown in Table 4.7, instead of using causal connectives, the interactants adopted adverbs the most frequently to emphasise *interactional explanations*. The adverbs *just* and *really* appear in high frequencies in the random sample. In addition to the adverbs, the interactants also tended to use verbs with a disposition to start the sentence and to suggest their intentions of making *interactional explanations*. Such sentence patterns usually start with the first-person pronoun *I* as well as with some interpretive action verbs showing implicit causality (Fiedler & Semin, 1988, p. 25), for example, *I guess*, *I mean*, etc. A negation format of such a pattern also exists, which usually starts with the negative of the same pronoun+verb pattern and is followed by a “but” compound sentence to introduce the *interactional explanation*. Some discourse particles are also used to suggest *interactional explanations*. The most frequently used one is “you know.” By “you know,” the interactants present the interactional explanations as a joint act with the other party, which presents the intersubjectivity of the pragmatic behaviour in the interaction. The following Example 4.15 and 4.16 illustrate most of the findings above.

#### Example 4.15

016\_CCPE-55417 (unique ID)

- 0 ASNT What kinds of movies do you like?
- 1 USER I really like romance movies.
- 2 ASNT Well, tell me why do you like romance movies?
- 3 USER **Just** really pulls at my heart strings and, you know, makes me wish sometimes I can be in that situation.
- 4 ASNT cool, what is your favourite movie?
- 5 USER My favourite movie would probably be sunshine and the eternal mind.
- 6 ASNT alright, why is that your favourite movie?
- 7 USER It's **just** a roller coaster of emotions, and the story's great. And **just** get to experience a lot of emotions throughout the movie.
- 8 ASNT Interesting, is there a movie you do not like?
- 9 USER I really don't like 50 First Dates.

- 10 ASNT oh, Why not?
- 11 USER It **just** felt really repetitive. Like experiencing the same day every day.  
**Just** There wasn't really anything new, and I **just** felt bad for the main character.
- 12 ASNT Ok, then have you seen the movie The Spy Who Dumped Me
- 13 USER I have not.
- 14 ASNT have you heard of it?
- 15 USER I have not.
- 16 USER I have heard of it, but I have not seen it.
- 17 ASNT Then surely you have seen Logan
- 18 USER Yes, I have. Logan is a great movie.
- 19 ASNT What is it about this kinds of movies that you like or dislike?
- 20 USER Well, **I** was hoping there **wasn't** any romance, **but** it was a really heartfelt story and sad in the end, and I **really** liked the character development they went through.
- 21 ASNT Wonderful. thank you for sharing. Good bye.

All the coded patterns are highlighted in bold in the cited examples. Example 4.15 features the use of *just* in indicating interactional explanations. The adverb *just* means *simply*, *really* or *completely* according to the Oxford dictionary, and it was highly used by the interactant in Example 4.15 to emphasise the explanations of their individual movie preferences. Example 4.15 also involves one example of the negation sentence pattern “I (be/do) negation, but ...” (turn 20). Usually, in the negation, the interactant denies some simple presumption; then in the following compound sentence lead by *but* they offer their *interactional explanation* in detail.

Example 4.16 sees another typical case, in which the interactant intensively uses *really* in the utterances to prelude the explanations for movie preferences, and to emphasise the elaboration of the explanations of their preferences.

#### Example 4.16

097\_CCPE-8b29e

- 0 ASNT Awesome, well what kinds of movies do you like?
- 1 USER I **really** love comedy movies.
- 2 ASNT Well, tell me why do you like comedy movies

- 3 USER *You know* there's a lot of stress in life and I *just* like to kickback, put on a funny movie and *just* laugh a lot.
- 4 ASNT cool, what is your favourite movie
- 5 USER I *really* love road trip.
- 6 ASNT alright, why is that your favourite movie
- 7 USER The characters getting in a lot of silly situation and I *just* pretty much laugh the entire situation.
- 8 ASNT Interesting, is there a movie you do not like
- 9 USER I don't like Paul Blart: Mall Cop.
- 10 ASNT oh, Why not?
- 11 USER Didn't *really* like the main character and *just* the entire situation of the movie *just* didn't *really* sit with me.
- 12 ASNT Ok, then have you seen the movie Johnny English Strikes Again
- 13 USER I have.
- 14 ASNT What is it about this kinds of movies that you like or dislike?
- 15 USER It was *really* interesting to see a character completely oblivious in serious situations, and I laughed a lot during the movie.
- 16 ASNT Wonderful. thank you for sharing. Good bye.

The adverb *really* is used to state what is fact or the truth about something, or to emphasise something you are saying or an opinion you are giving, according to the Oxford dictionary. Thus, the adverb *really* works similarly as *just* in indicating the explanatory utterances. The two adverbs, *just* and *really*, are functionally interchangeable.

In addition to the adverbs *just* and *really*, Example 4.16 also includes the discourse particle *you know* in turn 3. *You know* is used to introduce the USER's explanations. The phrase involves the viewpoint from the ASNT's perspective and presents the pragmatics of the *interactional explanation* as a justification of the interactants' preferences for the movies.

One more interesting result of the manual coding is that more than half of the conversations in the random sample contained *interactional explanations* without any linguistic markers (see the row of non-marker in Table 4.6). This finding indicates that the interactants tend to recognise *interactional explanations* without linguistic cues.

Subsequently, I manually coded the forms of information appeals in the random sample of the CCPE-M corpus. The coding details are summarised in Table 4.8. Explicit information appeals are mainly elicited by wh-questions and yes-no questions. The yes-no questions are

usually taken by the USER as the indirect speech act of request—the surface yes/no questions do not simply ask for “yes” or “no” answers but for the clarification of topics. Correspondingly, the information appeals in the random sample are not always in the explicit format, for example, a “why” question (i.e., the underlined information appeals in Examples 4.15 and 4.16). Information appeals can be implicitly conveyed and understood as such during the interactions. The coding statistics show that interactants sometimes provided *interactional explanations* without being explicitly asked, which means these *interactional explanations* appeared without any prepositioned verbal information appeals (30% in the sample corpus).

**Table 4.8**

*The linguistic features of the information appeal in the random sample*

	Number of conversations (%)	Occurrence in conversation
“What” question	50 (100%)	109
“Why” question	31 (62%)	59
“Can” question	13 (26%)	17
Other yes/no question	4 (8%)	4
“How come” question	1 (2%)	1
Confirmative question	9 (18%)	10
Sum	108	200
Interactional explanations offered without prepositioned information appeal	18 (30%)	26

These findings indicate that interactants tend to recognise what is going on in interactions. The interactants’ acute perception of the information appeal and the *interactional explanation* leave linguistic markers dispensable.

#### **4.1.5 Summary**

The CCPE-M corpus is an open conversational corpus with intensive explanatory discourse. Having completed the automatic text search and manual coding, I conclude that interactants use diverse types of indications to signal their *interactional explanations*. These indications range from multiple causal connectives, adverbs, discourse particles, to particular sentence patterns with the dispositional use of interpretive verbs. These indications facilitate

the pragmatics of *interactional explanations* in the discourse and ensure the interactants' understanding of the specific aspects of the interactional topic. On the other hand, the information appeals for the *interactional explanations* are also expressed in a variety of ways (see Table 4.7).

Nevertheless, 60% of the conversations in the corpus consist of *interactional explanations* without any linguistic markers. Furthermore, 30% of the conversations in the corpus consist of *interactional explanations* without any prepositioned information appeals. These figures indicate that the interactants tend to recognise both the information appeals and the *interactional explanations* without linguistic cues.

On the one hand, the interactants' recognition ensures that the provision of *interactional explanations* does not depend on the expression of information appeals, but on the perception of information appeals by the interactants. Informational appeals can be perceived by the interactants without any explicit or implicit verbal indication. On the other hand, the interactants' recognition also ensures that the *interactional explanations* can be understood without any verbal marking. Thus, the surface linguistic cues are not essential or necessary in the expression of *interactional explanations* or information appeals.

Another finding from the coding of the CCPE-M corpus concerns the *contents* of *interactional explanations*. Even when the interactants are to fulfil one common information appeal, different interactants offered different *contents* in the *interactional explanations*. The *interactional explanations* stress very different aspects of the topics (one particular movie or a movie genre). The diverse contents of *interactional explanations* determine that they comprise diverse information and serve diverse functions in the interactions.

The exploration of the CCPE-M corpus also affirms the fact that the *interactional explanations* occur commonly in discourse. In addition, *interactional explanations* accompany some speech acts. For example, the finding of the propositional “for” in the speech act of thank exemplifies the interface of *interactional explanation* and the speech acts, which involves the conventional linguistic routine as well as the interactional ritual. Such interfaces open multiple interesting research prospects.

In the following section, I would like to explore the linguistic cues of this pragmatic phenomenon in Chinese.

## 4.2 Linguistic Features of Interactional Explanations in Chinese Data

In this section, I examine the *interactional explanations* in the Chinese corpora to find some answers. Chinese is chosen in the present study mainly because it is my native language. Moreover, Chinese is a language frequently used in contrastive studies with Indo-European languages in both theoretical and applied linguistic research. The observation of *interactional explanations* in Chinese creates a substantial foundation on which to answer, at least partially, the question of the common linguistic features of *interactional explanations*.

Since there is no counterpart of the CCPE-M corpus available in Chinese, I include multiple Chinese corpora and adjust the methodologies in the text searches to inspect the features of *interactional explanations* in Chinese discourse and compare the findings with those found during the exploration of English corpora.

### 4.2.1 Data Description

Multiple Chinese corpora have been included in the present study (six in total). As the study focuses on an interactional phenomenon, the text search is conducted in the spoken data of four Chinese corpora. These four corpora include spoken Chinese data in differing proportions. In addition, I also include one open-source online discourse corpus in traditional Chinese,<sup>6</sup> since traditional Chinese remains in use. Finally, a small corpus of public apology is included for the purpose of manual coding.

In the following, I will introduce these corpora one by one. Table 4.9 presents a summary of all the corpora investigated in this section.

The Modern Chinese General Balanced Corpus has been compiled by the National Language Commission since the late 1990s. The corpus includes Chinese texts from 1919 to 2002 and amounts to over 100 million characters. The versatility and balance of the corpus are realised through the wide distribution and proportional control of the corpus samples. The compilers choose certain types of spoken data, which are coherent and clear, consistent with the expression of the written language. These data consist of scripts cross talks, talk shows and speech recordings, etc. The spoken data takes up less than 1% of the total corpus. Unfortunately,

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<sup>6</sup> Traditional characters (“繁体字” the complex form of Chinese characters) refer to the font of Chinese characters that was commonly used by Chinese people globally until the simplified version was introduced in 1956. Traditional characters remain in use among domestic and overseas Chinese communities, especially in various cultural activities. The difference between simplified and traditional Chinese lies in the fonts; people in the regions that use traditional Chinese are often the users of Minnan Dialect (Hokkien) and Cantonese.



the online platform of the corpus does not provide the specified search function within the spoken data.

BCC Corpus is an online corpus compiled by the Beijing Language and Culture University (BLCU) Corpus Centre (BCC). The corpus is a large online data system designed for language ontology and applied research. The total amount of Chinese in the corpus is about 15 billion characters, including newspapers (2 billion), literature (3 billion), Weibo (3 billion), technology (3 billion), comprehensive texts (1 billion) and ancient Chinese texts (2 billion). Weibo<sup>7</sup> is a microblogging site and one of the largest online social media in China. Weibo online discourse share the most common features with the spoken language, due to the discursive nature of microblogging. Thus, the three billion Weibo data from the year 2013 has been used as the spoken language data by the compiler, and it takes up 20% of the total corpus volume (Xun et al., 2016). The online platform of the corpus provides the specified search function within the Weibo (discourse) data.

The CCL Corpus is compiled by the Centre for Chinese Linguistics (CCL) at Peking University. The Corpus consists of nearly 1.2 billion bytes, which is approximately 0.6 billion Chinese characters. Two-thirds of the corpus is contemporary Chinese, which amounts to 40 million Chinese characters. The spoken language data in the corpus takes up only 0.25% (Zhan et al., 2019), and the data is mostly from TV dialogue programmes in 2010. The online platform of the corpus provides the specified search function within the spoken data.

The Media Language Corpus (MLC) compiled by the Communication University of China is an open spoken media language corpus online. The corpus includes the transcripts of 34,039 radio and television programmes from 2008 to 2013. The total number of Chinese characters is 200,071,896. The corpus includes diverse media programme styles, among which two-party, three-party and multiparty dialogues are the major types of programmes included in the present study. The online platform of the corpus provides the specified search functions within the different styles of media programmes.

The above four corpora are all in simplified modern Chinese. Due to this limitation and considering the possible vernacular differences, I also include an online open-source discourse corpus in traditional Chinese. The corpus is collected from the online PTT Gossiping forum (<https://github.com/zake7749/Gossiping-Chinese-Corpus>). It is a training Question-and-Answer conversation corpus for the automatic system. But unlike the CCPE-M corpus, the PTT gossiping data is composed of one round of question-and-answer sessions instead of

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<sup>7</sup> See [www.weibo.com](http://www.weibo.com)

multi-turn conversations (Kai-Chou Yang, 2019). It does not have a common theme such as the movie preference in the CCPE-M corpus either.

**Table 4.9**

*Chinese corpora list*

Corpus	Type of data	Source
1 Modern Chinese General Balanced Corpus compiled (国家语委现代汉语通用平衡语料库)	General corpus in simplified Chinese	<a href="http://corpus.zhonghuayuwen.org/index.aspx">http://corpus.zhonghuayuwen.org/index.aspx</a>
2 BCC Corpus (BCC 汉语语料库)	General corpus in simplified Chinese	<a href="http://bcc.blcu.edu.cn">http://bcc.blcu.edu.cn</a>
3 CCL Corpus (北京大学 CCL 语料库)	General corpus in simplified Chinese	<a href="http://ccl.pku.edu.cn:8080/ccl_corpus">http://ccl.pku.edu.cn:8080/ccl_corpus</a>
4 Media Language Corpus (MLC) (中国传媒大学媒体文本语料库)	General corpus in simplified Chinese	<a href="https://ling.cuc.edu.cn/RawPub/">https://ling.cuc.edu.cn/RawPub/</a>
5 PTT Gossiping forum data	Online open-source discourse corpus in traditional Chinese	<a href="https://github.com/zake7749/Gossiping-Chinese-Corpus">https://github.com/zake7749/Gossiping-Chinese-Corpus</a>
6 A small corpus of public apologies in Chinese	Corpus of public apology in simplified and traditional Chinese	<a href="http://www.youtube.com">www.youtube.com</a> and <a href="http://www.youku.com">www.youku.com</a>

Finally, in order to make a manual examination of the linguistic features and patterns of *interactional explanation* in Chinese, I also include a small corpus of public apologies from Chinese-speaking areas. These public apologies are collected from public video sharing websites ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and [www.youku.com](http://www.youku.com)) and are transcribed by the researcher.

#### 4.2.2 Methodology

As this is a parallel study to the one in Section 4.1, the methodologies adopted in this section are generally the same. I completed an automatic text search of causal connectives and manually coded a small corpus.

The Chinese corpora resources mentioned above are all available online. Instead of using NVivo 12, the text search in Chinese was conducted online using the different functions provided on these online platforms. I set up the text search range of spoken data and made a text search of the key causal connectives in Chinese. Among the corpora, only the Modern Chinese General Balanced Corpus does not offer the range setting function. The text search results of different corpora in Chinese are compared to the results of the text search in the CCPE-M corpus.

Figure 4.2 is a snapshot of the text search of *yinwei* (“因为”), the counterpart of the English conjunction *because*, in the MLC corpus online.

The snapshot in Figure 4.2 captures the text search of *yinwei* in the MLC Corpus data. The red border highlights the major descriptions of the search results. From left to right, the four highlighting circles are the corpus type (two party dialogue); the number of dialogues (1,437) that include the keyword *yinwei*; the total amount of characters (8,761,240) included in these texts; and most importantly, the number of occurrences (18,910) of *yinwei* in these texts.

**Figure 4.2**

*A snapshot of the text search in the MLC corpus.*

媒体语言语料库(MLC)  
Media Language Corpus

首页 | 高级检索 | 检索范

语料形式:  生语料  熟语料

左右字数: 左 20 | 右 20

检索结果显示方式:  字数  小句  句子  段落

检索范围: 形式: 对话 语体: **二人谈** 对象: 大众 语料规模: **1,437个文本**, **8,761,240字次**。 检索结果: 在1,317个文本中检索出**18,910条记录**。

作用。 第二个背景就是福建优势。因为福建跟台湾确实有天然优势, 很多先天优势。 查阅

以文化游。 更多的是一种感情游。因为这是中国的宝岛, 所以它的美好风光, 它各种 查阅

这个应该来讲, 数量会有大的突破, 为什么? 因为质量会有提高, 旅游质量会有提高。也经过这 查阅

部分, 我希望能够让来的人的年龄层往下下降, 因为我感觉未来两岸发展, 非常需要年轻朋友支持 查阅

, 他也辅选一位新党的“立委”叫做姚立明, 因为他是读法律的, 跟着姚立明一段时间以后, 1 查阅

抬高了, 抬高了第一点。 第二点, 因为陈长文等于是马英九智囊重要核心之一, 也因 查阅

为陈长文等于是马英九智囊重要核心之一, 也 因为这样进入了马营, 这个时候他在马营效力。2 查阅

The present research aims to identify the linguistic and discursive features of *interactional explanations*. The findings from the text search in the five corpora could only indicate the approximate frequency of the causal connectives in general discourse. A manual

coding can complement the text search and provide an examination of the discourse. However, in contrast to the CCPE-M corpus, the Chinese corpora in the study do not centre on explanatory information. There are no common themes in these corpora respectively. This type and size of the corpora makes the manual coding difficult.

In order to solve this problem, I took advantage of the occurrence of *interactional explanation* in speech acts. I manually coded the *interactional explanations* in a small corpus of public apologies from Chinese-speaking areas in order to find their linguistic features and patterns in addition to the causal connectives in Chinese. The coding results are contrasted and discussed in comparison with those of the CCPE-M corpus.

#### 4.2.3 Text Search

The connection between *interactional explanations* and causal connectives transcends the differences between languages. I began the investigation with a text search of causal connectives in Chinese.

Similarly to English, there are many types of causal connectives in the Chinese language. The text search in Chinese had to make sure that the results could be comparable to the text search in English. The closest counterparts of *because* and *for* in the text search in English are the two causal connectives *yinwei* and *weile* in Chinese. To make sure these two Chinese causal connectives are representative, I made a frequency search of a list of causal connectives in the four Chinese corpora in the study. The list included *yinwei* (“因为”, because), *name* (“那么”, so), *weile* (“为了”, for), *youyu* (“由于”, owing to), *yibian* (“以便”, so that), *yinci* (“因此”, so), and *suoyi* (“所以”, so). This frequency search confirmed that the counterpart of *because* in Chinese, *yinwei* (“因为”, because), is the most frequently adopted causal connective among them all. In addition, Chinese linguists recognise that *yinwei* and *weile* are the two most frequently used causal connectives in Chinese (Lv 1982/2014, p. 542). However, a text search of *weile* in Chinese would be similar to a text search of *for* in the CCPE-M corpus because *weile* can be found in many different grammatical structures. Considering this, the final text search used the form of *shiweile* (“是为了”), which literally means *is for* in English, in order to make a focused search result.

**Text search of causal link *yinwei* (because).** The word *yinwei* works as a causal conjunction in the same way as *because* in English. The text search of *yinwei* in the four

established Chinese corpora is shown in Table 4.10. The frequency of *because* in the CCPE-M corpus is also calculated and presented in the last row in Table 4.10 for comparison.

The text search showed that the causal connective *yinwei* and *because* in different Chinese and English corpora occurred at a low frequency in general. Compared to the frequency of *because* in the CCPE-M corpus (0.21%), the most similar search result in the Chinese corpora is the dialogue corpus in the MLC corpus, especially in the two-party dialogue corpus (0.22%). The MLC corpus is a media corpus consisting of audio and video discourse data. This is arguably the most similar type of discourse to the CCPE-M discourse, especially the two-party dialogues, which are the most similar type to the conversations in the CCPE-M corpus. The search results in the three-party and multiparty dialogues also exhibit high similarities in the frequency of causal connections *yinwei* in the CCPE-M corpus.

**Table 4.10**

*The text search of causal connective yinwei in Chinese corpora*

	Number of occurrences of <i>Yinwei</i> (because)	Spoken (total) data (characters/words)	Frequency in spoken data (%)
(a) Modern Chinese General Balanced Corpus	8,817	110,000,000	0.008%
(b) BCC Corpus	340,243	3,000,000,000	0.01%
(c) CCL Corpus	1,876	1,540,861	0.12%
(d) MLC Corpus (2 parties)	18,910	8,761,240	0.22%
(e) MLC Corpus (3 parties)	7,636	4,329,511	0.18%
(f) MLC Corpus (multiparty)	2,353	1,321,854	0.18%
CCPE-M Corpus	390	188,094	0.21%

Comparatively speaking, the CCL corpus also presents a considerable similarity in the search results of the causal conjunction *yinwei* to the English counterpart among the other three Chinese corpora. The reason should lie in the type and nature of the spoken data included in the CCL corpus. The spoken data in the CCL corpus consists partially of a similar type of discourse to that of the MLC corpus. However, the BCC corpus takes the social media Weibo data as spoken data. Though Weibo discourse holds great similarity to spoken language, the

themes of the discourse, styles of content development (online comments), the number of participants, the size and the number of turns of every interaction, etc., all contribute to the exceptionally low frequency of the causal conjunction in the BCC corpus.

Among the four Chinese corpora, the online platform of the Modern Chinese General Balanced Corpus presents the largest discrepancy in the use of the causal conjunction *yinwei* and *because*. This disparity is expected, since the text search and the frequency calculation has been made based on the total volume of the corpus as its online platform is not equipped with the function of specific range setting for spoken data. This explains why the search results of this corpus are completely different from those of the others. It might indicate that the frequency of this causal connective is much lower in the written corpus than in the spoken one. But arguably, the text search of the causal conjunction in the Modern Chinese General Balanced Corpus is not comparable.

To illustrate how the causal conjunction *yinwei* is used, I cite several examples from the MLA and CCL corpora. The examples cited in the present section are taken from the list of automatic text searches of causal connectives.

#### Example 4.17

上文：好，随便聊，好。

参与者：这个，行行行，这个…，我能够参加哈这个会，确实感觉荣幸，这…以满族人身份参加，更觉得荣幸。**因为**这个我们满族在这个从孙中山打倒清朝皇帝“驱逐鞑虏、鞑虏，恢复中华”这满族就一头折地，那么之后嘛，……所以那么这个所以，今天能够来的以满族人身份嘛来参加我接到通知，北京市局啊……

(\当代\口语\1982年北京话调查资料 CCL Corpus)

Preceding text: Okay. Just casual chat. Okay.

Participant: This, yes, yes, yes, this... I really feel honoured to participate in this meeting. This ... I feel even more honoured to participate as a Manchu, **because** we Manchus since Sun Yat-sen's "Deport the Tartars and restore China" defeated the Qing emperor, the Manchus are frustrated, so after that, ... so, (it is an honour that) I can come today as Manchus to participate in the meeting, I received the message from Beijing Municipal Bureau ...

(Contemporary\Spoken\1982 Beijing dialect survey data CCL Corpus)

Example 4.17 is an excerpt from the CCL corpus. The spoken data has been collected from a survey of the Beijing dialect conducted in 1982. In the excerpt, the participant of the survey expresses his pleasure and honour at being invited to participate in the survey with *interactional explanations* indicated by *yinwei*. Without any explicit prepositioned information appeal from the interviewer, the participant perceived the appeal for the explanation of his excitement at meeting the interviewer. The participant used the causal conjunction *yinwei* to stress his individual historical experience and personal feeling. A different participant in the same survey might very well offer a different *interactional expression*, and even perceive different or no such information appeals from the same interaction.

#### Example 4.18

上文：我这我这北京话有水分。

参与者：我一直 zho4 不断出外啊，**所以**，**因为**我那时候是这个断不了跑外，断不了出，反正一年出去个三趟两趟断不了，**所以**对当地的这个，啊，反正，迁就吧，这也可能。E N G，其次呢，**因为**我爱人是汉人，好几十年一块儿，这语言之间呢，就不可能没有没有什么，**所以**我这北京话是、是有水分。

(\当代\口语\1982年北京话调查资料 CCL Corpus)

Preceding text: My Beijing dialect has been watered down (adulterated).

Participant: I kept going out (for business), **so**, **because** I couldn't stop running outside (of Beijing) at that time, I couldn't stop going out. Anyway, I couldn't stop going out three times a year, **so** my local one (dialect), ah, anyway, barely counts, this is possible. Secondly, **because** my spouse is a Han, and we have been together for decades. It is impossible to have nothing (influenced) in the languages, **so** my Beijing dialect has indeed been watered (adulterated).

(Contemporary\Spoken\1982 Beijing dialect survey data CCL Corpus)

Example 4.18 is also taken from the CCL corpus. The example is cited to illustrate a causal connective pair in Chinese, *yinwei* and *suoyi* (“所以”, so). The participant used twice this causal connective pair to indicate two *interactional explanations*. The Chinese *suoyi* is usually used together with *yinwei* in the same sentence. In the English translation I separated the original sentence into two in order not to leave the English “so” out to make it grammatically acceptable. The preceding text of this excerpt does not include explicit informational appeal, but, similar to Example 4.17, the content of the *interactional expressions*

stresses the individual experiences of the participant: being influenced by going out of Beijing (for business) and being influenced by the accent of the family member. A different participant, talking about a similar topic, might perceive different information appeals from the interview interaction and provide different interactional explanation contents.

#### Example 4.19

鲁豫：1998 年到现在确实很久了，你那时候的状态完完全全就是个小孩子，不过有点遗憾太平公主里的声音不是你的。

周迅：对，是配的音。**因为**当时导演觉得我的声音太粗鲁，不像小孩儿。

(当代\口语\电视访谈\鲁豫有约 红伶 CCL Corpus)

Lu Yu: It has been a long time since 1998. You were totally like a child at that time, but it is a pity that the voice of the *Princess Taiping* (a Chinese TV play about the princess in Tang dynasty) is not yours.

Zhou Xun: Yes, it was dubbed, **because** the director thought my voice was too rude, not like a child.

(Contemporary\Spoken\TV Interview\Lu Yu You Yue Hong Ling CCL Corpus)

Example 4.19 is from a TV interview in 2010. The causal link *yinwei* indicates the *interactional explanation* for the dubbing of one role the interviewee (Zhou Xun, an actress) played. The interviewer did not offer an explicit information appeal, but “it is a pity” indicates the interviewer’s expectation for the voice of the actress. And the actress interviewee perceived this “pity” as an information appeal for an explanation of the dubbing. In her following utterance, she first confirmed the dubbing and subsequently used *yinwei* to mark the *interactional explanation* for the dubbing.

This piece of *interactional explanation* is other-oriented, as it is not the interactant’s own choice to make her voice dubbed, and it is also not her choice to decide what the director feels about her voice. Without explicit elicitation, the interviewee might very well choose not to mention the particular piece of information after the confirmative response in interaction. The particular context and the interpersonal relations between the interlocutors could both influence the presence and the content of a piece of *interactional explanation*.

The following Examples are both from the CCTV news commentary programmes in the MLC corpus.



## Example 4.20

记者：为什么会喜欢？

台湾民众：**因为**很好吃。

台湾民众：很有名，**就**过来尝一尝。

台湾民众：很有名，很多香港人都来吃。

(中央电视台 2010-09-24 MLC Corpus)

(Reporter: Why do you like it?)

Taiwanese people: **Because** it's delicious.

Taiwanese people: It's very famous, **so** (we) come and have a taste.

Taiwanese people: Very famous. Many people from Hong Kong come to eat here.)

(China Central Television 2010-09-24 MLC Corpus)

Example 4.20 is taken from a multiparty dialogue programme. The reporter in the excerpt used a “why” question (“why do you like it [the food]?”) to explicitly express an information appeal for the explanation(s) of the people’s preference for the food at one particular restaurant. The first interviewee fulfilled the information appeal by an *interactional explanation* led by *yinwei*, and this piece of *interactional explanation* stresses the nature of the food, “Because it’s delicious.” The second *interactional explanation* is indicated by an adverb *jiu* (“就”, so). This adverb is a polysemous word (Zan et al., 2010). In the present context, it indicates what happens naturally under a certain condition or situation. Thus, it can be translated as “so” in the utterance, which stresses that “It’s very famous” is the condition by which people come and taste the food. The third interviewee made the *interactional explanation* without any causal link or linguistic markers. The third *interactional explanation* is the same as the second one, “very famous,” which is a quality or a condition of being well known. The example confirms that the same information appeal might elicit diverse *interactional explanations* from different interactants. The messages conveyed in the *interactional explanations* by individual interactants could stress various aspects of the topic in the interaction.

Similarly to English, there are other causal links in Chinese than *yinwei*. For example, the Chinese *suoyi* (“所以”, so) in Example 4.18 and *jiu* (“就”, so) shown in Example 4.20 both indicate certain causal relations and mark the preceding *interactional explanations*. The two connectives *suoyi* and *jiu* are discussed in the above examples only because they accompany the *yinwei* in the discourse of *interactional explanation*. As mentioned previously, *suoyi* in

Chinese constantly accompanies *yinwei* in the form of a causal connective pair. Moreover, *jiu* is a polysemous word; a text search of a polysemous connective cannot efficiently locate the phenomenon of *interactional explanations*.

**Text search of causal link *shiweile* (is for).** In the following, I carried out a text search of *shiweile*, which literally means “is for” in English. Firstly, I chose *shiweile* so that the search results could be compared to the text search of “for” in the CCPE-M corpus, recorded in Section 4.1.2. Secondly, the text search was made for *shiweile* (is for) rather than *weile* (for) mainly because *weile* in Chinese can be found in many different grammatical structures, similarly to the text search of *for* in CCPE-M corpus. The simple text search can create miscellaneous results, and a manual screening of the text search results from multiple giant corpora was beyond the realms of possibility. Together with *shi* (is), the phrase *shiweile* in Chinese emphasises that the following message is an explanatory text of certain purpose(s). Thus, the search results would most precisely locate the *interactional explanations* in the corpora.

**Table 4.11**

*The text search of causal connective shiweile in Chinese corpora*

	Number of occurrences of <i>shiweile</i> (is for)	Number of occurrences of <i>yinwei</i> (because)	Ratio of <i>shiweile</i> and <i>yinwei</i>
(a) Modern Chinese General Balanced Corpus	1,227	8,817	0.14
(b) BCC Corpus	17,507	340,243	0.05
(c) CCL Corpus	115	1,876	0.06
(d) MLC Corpus (2 parties)	678	18,910	0.04
(e) MLC Corpus (3 parties)	442	7,636	0.06
(f) MLC Corpus (multiparty)	110	2,353	0.05
CCPE-M Corpus	28	390	0.07

Similar to the search results of the causal connectives *for* and *because* in the English corpus, the text search result shows that *shiweile* is also used much less than *yinwei* in Chinese corpora. Due to the difference in occurrence, I calculated the ratio of the occurrences of

*shiweile* in relation to the occurrences of *yinwei* in all corpora respectively in order to understand its comparative frequency in the Chinese corpora.

The search results of *shiweile* and the comparative ratio to the results of *yinwei* are presented in Table 4.11. The ratios show that, except in the Modern Chinese General Balanced Corpus, the use of *shiweile* in the Chinese corpora is very similar to the CCPE-M corpus. Thus, it is reasonable to tentatively conclude that causal connectives in Chinese and English are generally used in a similar frequency.

I cite the following examples to illustrate the use of *shiweile* in Chinese.

#### Example 4.21

梁冬： 什么传统？

曲黎敏： 这个是古代是这样，就是中国古代他（孔子）认为凡是……比如你没结婚，你这个人孤老嘛——孤寡，没结婚或者你丧偶。就是这样，像这种人呢由国家来养你，可是国家不白养你，国家要让你干吗去呢，要让你去民间采诗。采诗是为什么呢？**是为了**知道民风如何，就是老百姓在没在编歌骂我呀。

(当代\口语\对话\梁冬对话曲黎敏 CCL Corpus)

Liang Dong: What tradition?

Qu Limin: This is the case in ancient times. In ancient China, he (Confucius) argued that those who were not married, childless—unmarried or widowed, these people were to be supported by the state. But the state would not support you fully free of charge. What would the state ask you to do then? The state asked you to collect the folk poems among the people. Why (does the state want) to collect the folk poems? It was (done) **for** learning what the folkway was like, whether people were composing poems and folksongs condemning me (the ruler of the state).

(Contemporary\Spoken\Dialogue\Liang Dong Dialogue Qu Limei CCL Corpus)

Example 4.21 is from a TV dialogue programme on Chinese studies in the CCL corpus. The interactant (Qu Limin) talked about the Chinese tradition in the *Book of Songs* and how Confucius decided what poems to be included in the *Book*. In the example, Qu was making a talk similar to a public lecture. Since there is an invisible audience for such talk, Qu perceived the information appeal for the explanation of making a collection of folk songs and poems. She

herself explicitly presented the information appeal, “Why (does the state want) to collect the folk poems?” Then she fulfilled the information appeal using *shiweile* to indicate the *interactional explanation*, which is for the state to find the folkway.

In this example, the interactants are cooperating in making a public talk similar to a lecture, in which their roles are to offer information on the topic of discussion. Thus, the presence of the *interactional explanation* is usually taken for granted. However, the pragmatic phenomenon becomes salient when an absence of *interactional explanation* occurs on the same occasion (see the example of Paul Dirac in Chapter 1).

#### Example 4.22

梁冬：太深刻了！

王东岳：也就是我们的感知系统、精神系统，不是为了求得真理，而是为了求得生存。它是这样设定的，然后你说真理，你说真知，这不是荒唐吗？

（当代\口语\对话\梁冬对话王东岳文字版 CCL Corpus）

Liang Dong: It's too profound!

Wang Dongyue: That is, our perception system and spiritual system are not for seeking truth, but for survival. It has been set up like this, and then you talk about the truth and you talk about the true knowledge. Isn't it absurd?

(Contemporary\Spoken\Dialogue\Liang Dong Dialogue Wang Dongyue CCL Corpus)

Example 4.22 is also taken from the dialogue programme on Chinese historical thought (philosophy). The interactant (Wang Dongyue) talked about his belief in the origin of philosophical thinking. He used *shiweile* to stress the *interactional explanation* for his theory. In the meantime, the sentence pattern (underlined) “不是为了，而是为了……” (... are not for ..., but for ....) used here could be taken as the counterpart of “be/do negation, but...”, the pattern found in the CCPE-M corpus in English (Section 4.1.4 and Table 4.6). It is used to emphasise the second contrastive compound, which is the *interactional explanation* he provides.

In the next section, I make a similar text search in an open-source discourse corpus in traditional Chinese.

**Text search in an open-source traditional Chinese discourse.** Considering the wide use of traditional Chinese characters among Chinese people globally, I conducted a similar text

search of the causal connectives in open-source traditional Chinese discourse data retrieved online (<https://github.com/zake7749/Gossiping-Chinese-Corpus>). This PTT Gossiping Chinese Corpus is a training conversation corpus for the automatic System. However, it is composed of one round of question-and-answer instead of multi-turn conversations. It does not possess any particular uniform theme such as movie preference in the CCPE-M corpus.

The corpus contains the online interactions from the PTT Gossip Forum from 2015 to 2019. It is an online forum corpus similar to the Weibo data in the BCC corpus, which is taken as spoken data. It is in traditional Chinese and amounts to 774,114 rounds of question-and-answer with over 11 million characters.

The key words in the text search of causal connectives are *yinwei* (“因為”, because) (the traditional version of “因为” in simplified Chinese) and *shiweile* (“是為了”, is for) (the traditional version of “是为了” in simplified Chinese). Similarly, I firstly checked the frequency of the two connectives in the corpus and then calculated the ratio of them to make the comparison with the findings from the other Chinese corpora and the CCPE-M corpus. Table 4.12 presents the summary of the text search.

**Table 4.12**

*The ratio of the causal connectives in different Chinese corpora*

	Number of occurrences of <i>shiweile</i> (is for)	Number of occurrences of <i>yinwei</i> (because)	Ratio of <i>shiweile</i> and <i>yinwei</i>
Gossiping QA dataset	469	6,856	0.068
BCC Corpus	17,507	340,243	0.05
CCL Corpus	115	1,876	0.06
MLC Corpus	1,230	28,899	0.043
CCPE-M Corpus	28	390	0.072

The causal connective *yinwei* (“因為”, because) and *shiweile* (“是為了”, is for) appeared 6,856 times and 469 times in this traditional Chinese corpus respectively. The ratio between the two connectives is 0.068, which is most similar to the ratio of the two English causal connective counterparts in the CCPE-M corpus. Table 4.10 shows the ratio of them and a comparison of the ratio with other Chinese corpora and the CCPE-M corpus in English.

The text search in the Chinese corpora demonstrates similarity to the text search in English in terms of the use of causal connectives to indicate *interactional explanations*. As the text search could only provide a general approximation of causal connective use, I conducted a manual coding of interactional explanations in Chinese.

#### 4.2.4 Manual Coding

The question of whether *interactional explanations* in Chinese can be expressed without linguistic marking cannot be answered by the simple text search. An examination of Chinese interactional explanations is vital to answer this question and to detect other features and patterns of *interactional explanations* in Chinese. However, there is no comparable explanation elicitation discourse in Chinese as the CCPE-M corpus available for a manual coding.

As is mentioned in Chapter 3, *interactional explanations* are common in all types of discourse and accompany many speech acts. In an apology, an *explanation* provides causative information pertinent to the prior offence and facilitates the performance of the speech act. The *explanation* in apology communicates more than a declarative message and constitutes an *interactional explanation* according to the present study. Under this premise, I conduct a manual coding of the explanations given in a small corpus of Chinese public apologies in this part.

**Data of public apologies in Chinese.**<sup>8</sup> I retrieved 20 high profile public apologies in Chinese from the media sharing websites *Youtube* and its Chinese version ‘*Youku*’ (优酷). The transgressions involved in these public apologies were well known through Chinese-speaking areas. The apologisers are from Mainland China (ten cases), Hong Kong (three cases), Taiwan (five cases), Malaysia (one case) and Singapore (one case). The settings in which the apologies were made include independent press conferences (eight cases), TV programmes (three cases), public interviews (two cases), selfie videos uploaded for public viewing (three cases), and video-recorded apology made in public (four cases).

**Manual coding.** The explanation given in studies of the speech act of apology is defined as the clarification of the cause that brings about the previous offence. Explanation or account is one of the five core strategies in realising the apology (CCSARP; Blum-Kulka et al.,

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<sup>8</sup> This dataset has been retrieved from the study of public ritual apology in collaboration with Daniel Kádár and Yongping Ran in 2018, “Public ritual apology – A case study of Chinese.” *Discourse, Context & Media*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2018.01.003>

1989). I transcribe the apology videos and make the component identification of the apologies. Among the 20 apologies, twelve of them include the strategy of explanation. The rest of the apologies are mainly political and organisational apologies, in which the strategy of explanation/account is not adopted frequently according to earlier research on apologies (see Liu et al., 2016; Kádár et al., 2018; House & Kádár, 2021).

I manually coded the linguistic features of these explanations. The coding details are recorded in Table 4.13.

**Table 4.13**

*The forms and patterns marking interactional explanations in the apology dataset*

	Occurrences in the dataset
<b>a. Adverbs</b>	
<i>jiu</i> 就(so)	2
<i>qishi</i> 其实(actually)	1
<i>zhende</i> 真的(really)	1
<b>b. Sentence patterns</b>	
<i>wojuede</i> 我觉得(I feel, I think)	6
<i>woxiangxin</i> 我相信(I believe)	1
<b>c. Causal connectives</b>	
<i>yinwei</i> 因为(because)	7
<i>suoyi</i> 所以(so)	6
<b>d. Non-marker</b>	
	6
<b>e. Interactional explanation in expressing gratitude</b>	
	3

In addition to the causal connectives, the apologisers also used adverbs and sentence patterns as their English counterparts. The causal connectives *yinwei* (because) and *suoyi* (so) are the major forms of *interactional explanation* indicators in Chinese. Compared to the findings in the random sample of the CCPE-M corpus, *suoyi* (so) in Chinese occurred more frequently than the English counterpart, and similarly to the occurrence of *yinwei* (because). This is at least partially because the Chinese *suoyi* (so) is commonly used together with *yinwei*

(because) in the same sentence without grammatical constraint in English. The interpretive verbs *wojuede* (I feel or I think) and *woxiangxin* (I believe) are also used to lead into the following *interactional explanations*. The adverbs *qishi* (actually), *zhende* (really) and *jiu* (so) are found in the dataset too. These findings are similar to those in English.

More importantly, there are six *interaction explanations* in the apologies that do not bear any linguistic markers. I also found three *interactional explanations*, which were used as *grounders* in expressing gratitude as a speech act of thank, accompanying the apologies. This resembles the findings in the CCPE-M corpus in English.

The present apology corpus is small, so it does not make much sense to compare the frequency of these forms and patterns to that of the other corpora. However, I cite the following examples from the apologies to demonstrate the findings.

#### Example 4.23

李永波：……**因为**过去我参加七届奥运会，都是淘汰赛，淘汰赛时很直接，我们大家**就**全力以赴地去打好每场比赛。那这次是一个新的规则，小组是一个循环赛，**我觉得**最主要一点还是说我们对这个赛制的理解，**我觉得**还是不够透彻，不管是我，我作为总教练来讲也好，还是作为我们队员也好，对这方面因为没有理解透，……

Li Yongbo: ...**because** I participated in seven Olympic Games in the past, all of which were knockout games. **So**, playing in the knockout was to strive ahead. We all went all out to play every single game. This time the game has a new rule, a round robin for the group stage. **I think** the most important thing is our understanding of this new match system, **I think**, is not thorough enough, as a chief coach or as a player ....

(Apology data No. 1)

The apology in Example 4.23 is from the chief coach of the Chinese national badminton team, Li Yongbo, to the general public in China. The women's doubles badminton players were disqualified from the London Olympic Games because they intentionally lost the game in the first round to secure better preparation for the later quarter final. The chief coach made two major *interactional explanations* in the public apology. He also used multiple ways to indicate these *explanations*. *yinwei* (because) and *jiu* (so) are used to mark the first *interactional explanation*—the difference between the earlier Games and this one. The word *wojuede* (I think) has been used in indicating the second *interactional explanation*—the lack of thorough



understanding of the new game rule. Both the *interactional explanations* are clarifying the causes that brought about the misbehaviour at the Games that resulted in the disqualification from the Games. The first one is considered as an external, uncontrollable cause for the team's misbehaviour at the Games; the second is an internal controllable cause (see more in the attribution studies of the interactional explanation in Chapters 5 and 6).

The following two examples are *interactional explanations* without any linguistic markers.

#### Example 4.24

张花冠(嘉义县长): 我们是根据气象局的预测来做决定的, 带给县民的不便, 我们也觉得非常抱歉。

Zhang Huaguan (Head of Jiayi County): We made our decision based on the forecast from the Bureau of Meteorology. We apologised for the inconvenience brought to the people in the county.

(Apology data No. 15)

#### Example 4.25

瑞恩: 像我这样直性的急性子, 喜怒哀乐都写在脸上, …… , 我想为这件事带给大家的所有不便, 再次深表歉意。

Rui En: I am straightforward and impatient. The way I feel, the pleasure, anger, sorrow or joy, is always written on the face. ... I would like to once again express my deepest apologies for all the inconvenience.

(Apology data No. 19)

The county head in Example 4.24 was making an apology to the general public for a lack of administrative action against the rainstorm brought by the typhoon. The forecast from the Bureau of Meteorology is an external uncontrollable *interactional explanation* for the administrative misbehaviour. On the contrary, the *interactional explanation* in Example 4.25 is an internal and controllable cause for the Singapore celebrity's misbehaviour (speeding) she apologised for. The two apologisers did not use any indicators to mark their explanations, but the public readily understood these explanatory utterances.

#### Example 4.26

柯以敏: ……感谢大家对我的鞭策, 我一定马上大大的改善

Ke Yimin: …Thank you all **for urging me on**, and I would make significant improvement right away.

(Apology data No. 16)

Example 4.27

柳岩: ……这两天谢谢大家对我的关心。……

Liu Yan: …Thank you all **for your concern about me** these days....

(Apology data No. 17)

Examples 4.26 and 4.27 are two thanking notes accompanying the apologies from a Malaysian singer and an actress in Mainland China. The interactants used *interactional explanations* as grounders in the speech act of thank that accompany the speech event of apology. An interesting fact is that, in Chinese, the grounder in thanks does not need the preposition “for,” which means there is no linguistic indicator of what has been thanked for in Chinese. As required grammatically, these grounders are marked by “for” in the English translation.

#### 4.2.5 Summary

Through the text search and the manual coding of diverse corpora in Chinese, I found that Chinese-speaking interactants also used diverse types of linguistic cues to signal their *interactional explanations*, ranging from causal links, conjunctions, single adverbs, to certain sentence patterns. These *interactional explanation* markers in Chinese data function in similar ways as their English counterparts, which is to realise the pragmatic function of *interactional explanations* and draw attention from the other interactants to the diverse aspects of the topics pertinent to the information appeals.

Secondly, the *interactional explanation* markers in Chinese are not indispensable either. Similarly to the study results in the English corpus, there are considerable *interactional explanations* that do not bear any linguistic markers on the surface. The manual coding confirms that the Chinese interactants also tend to recognise the *interactional explanations* without linguistic cues.

Unlike the CCPE-M corpus, which includes a common explanatory theme in the discourse, the four general Chinese corpora do not share common information appeals. The cited *interactional explanation* examples in Chinese corpora are diverse in explanatory themes. Nevertheless, the exploration finds that different interactants could offer different *interactional*

*explanations* to the common information appeal (e.g., in Example 4.20). The *interactional explanations* in the public apologies present the causes of various offences, but they also stress very different aspects of the prior offences. For example, some people emphasise the limitations of their own personality in coping with difficulties, and some people emphasise the influence of past experience or the influence of external factors on specific behaviours, etc. This finding coincides with the results in the CCPE-M corpus in English.

### 4.3 Linguistic Features of *Interactional Explanation*

The focus of Chapter 4 is the linguistic features of *interactional explanations* in discourse. The statistics of the study show that over half of the interactions include *interactional explanations* bearing no linguistic indicators. I conclude that interactants tend to recognise information appeals and the presence of *interactional explanations* without linguistic cues. There is no necessity to have them linguistically marked. In those instances where the interactants mark the *interactional explanations*, they employ a diversity of ways in doing so. These markings include causal connectives, certain adverbs, and particular sentence structures etc. The text search and manual coding results indicate that these linguistic features of *interactional explanations* span across both English and Chinese languages.

*Interactional explanation* has never been a focus in pragmatic research. This chapter is an initial and fundamental exploration of it as a unique pragmatic behaviour. The findings in Chapter 4 indicate that it is not advisable/efficient to use linguistic cues to locate and collect data about *interactional explanations* in general discourse corpora. To further the research of *interactional explanation*, other data collection methods should be developed. As mentioned in Chapter 3, *interactional explanations* frequently accompany certain speech acts. For example, the corpora exploration in Chapter 4 found *interactional explanations* in the speech act of thank. In the following Chapter, I examine more closely *interactional explanations* in the speech acts of request and apology, as explanation constitutes one key realisation strategy of these two speech acts.

## 5. A Study of Interactional Explanation in Speech Acts of Request and Apology

Earlier studies on speech act realisation have shown that *explanation* constitutes one key realising strategy in request and apology (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). In this chapter, I focus my study on the *interactional explanations* in the speech acts of request and apology. On the one hand, these studies are based on speech act data involving *interactional explanation*. The speech act datasets facilitate the interactional explanation data collection, as the study in Chapter 4 concludes that it is challenging to locate interactional explanations in corpora. Secondly, studies on interactional explanations in speech act performance can not only illuminate the pragmatics of interactional explanation but also increase understanding of the relationship between *interactional explanation* and the interconnected speech act performance.

The speech acts of request and apology are presumably universal concepts across different cultures and societies. However, the use of explanation in their performance might vary among linguacultures. In this chapter, I first conduct a study of *interactional explanations* in academic email requests. I use online surveys to explore the evaluation of *interactional explanations* and conduct a correlation study with the evaluation of the corresponding email requests. Following the study of request, I conduct two meta-analyses on apology realisation studies with a focus on the use of explanation.

### 5.1 Interactional Explanation and the Speech Act of Request

The speech act of request has been one of the most studied speech acts. Following the coding scheme of the realisation patterns established by earlier research (Edmondson, 1981; Edmondson & House, 1981; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; House & Kádár, 2021), request is composed mainly by the Head act and Supportive moves. In the performance of request, the interactant uses *grounders* as one type of supportive move to express the reasons or justifications for their requests. According to the working definition of the present study, *interactional explanation* is the response to the perceived information appeal from the interaction. In a request, *interactional explanations* take the form of the *grounders* to facilitate the performance of the request. An *interactional explanation* in a request can precede or follow the Head act of the request.

In order to explore the *interactional explanation* in requests, I conduct a contrastive study of academic email requests in German and Chinese by focusing on the *grounders* taken

in these emails. In addition to the analysis of the email text, I conducted a follow-up online survey among both German and Chinese native speakers in order to find the evaluative interpretation towards the *interactional explanation* in requests and the assumed pragmatic function of them in the two linguacultures.

### **5.1.1 Methodology and Data Description**

Email correspondence has become one of the major forms of communication consistently and pervasively used in academia (Savić, 2017) with the development of information technology and network management in higher education and institutions. It has become the preferred and most efficient means of communication between students and instructors, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The popularity of email provides a major opportunity in the study of academic requests.

A contrastive study requires a proper context, within which the data from the two linguacultures can be sampled and compared. The present study focuses on email requests in an academic context that frame the most similar communicative scenario so that the request data collected can be juxtaposed in the analysis. The selected email communications are from students to their course professors. The specific scenario chosen is the end-of-semester final examination or course work submission. These student emails are regarded as request events, whose ultimate purpose is to request the acceptance of problematic submissions. The recognition and acceptance of the final work submission can determine the grades and credits of these students. Thus, the Chinese and German datasets in the present study hold a similar level of importance, and credibly support the conduct of a contrastive analysis.

The Chinese dataset consists of the body messages of ten email requests out of 119 student emails regarding final submission to a professor in China. The German dataset consists of the body messages of ten emails out of 67 student emails regarding final submission to a professor in Germany. Both professors agreed to the use of their students' emails for academic purposes. The two email datasets consist only of the body messages of the email text, excluding the email header (sender and recipient information), greetings and the closing signature section. The body messages were also carefully anonymised if the text contained any sender/recipient or related course information so that no email requests in the datasets could be associated with any identifiable person.

The chosen email requests are all about late or incorrect submissions of final work, asking for recognition and acceptance. I firstly made a content analysis and located the

supportive move *grounder* in these emails. These *grounders* constitute the *interactional explanation* data in the email discourse. I checked the frequency of the *grounders* in these requests and coded the attribution types of them according to Weiner's attribution model. Weiner's attribution theory argues that explanations of certain types might be better than others in order not to be mistaken as avoiding responsibility or offering an excuse. There are three dimensions of attribution in attribution theory (Weiner, 1974, 2018), the locus dimension, which presents the perception of the cause as internal or external; the stability dimension, which presents whether the cause is stable or unstable across time and situations; and controllability dimension, which presents whether the cause is under the control of the person themselves. I included the dimensions of locus and controllability in coding the interactional explanation, as Weiner et al. (1987, p. 316) found that these two attribution dimensions could trigger the most intentional ascription of people's behaviour.

In addition to checking the frequency of *interactional explanation* and its attribution types in the email requests, I also investigated the evaluation of these *interactional explanations* and discovered the pragmatics of the *interactional explanations* in the requests. In order to collect the evaluative data, I conducted two online surveys among native speakers of Chinese and German in academia, via Google Form and Wenjuanwang (a survey website in Chinese [www.wenjuan.com](http://www.wenjuan.com)) respectively (see Appendices 1 and 2).

The online survey consists of two parts: a judgemental test over five email requests taken from the data and two open questions considering the necessity and evaluative interpretations of explanations in academic email requests. The judgemental questions took the form of the Likert scale with a rating scale of five. Before sending the survey to potential participants, I contacted two professors familiar with the survey methodology in social sciences, one in China and one in Germany. I consulted with them about the content arrangement of the survey in both languages. As a result of constructive feedback, I then rearranged the question sequence, randomised the judgemental test order, and revised the description to clarify the purpose of the questions.

I recruited the survey participants via snowball sampling at universities in China and Germany. While the survey was an anonymous one, the demographic information (gender and professor/student position) of the participants was collected. Finally, each survey consisted of 11 participants, and the participants in both surveys were balanced in terms of gender and position.

The quantitative data of the survey were used in a correlation statistical analysis programmed with Python. The textual data were coded in terms of the evaluations towards the use of explanation and its function/purpose in the requests.

### 5.1.2 Results and Discussion

In this section, I present the coding results of the interactional explanations in email requests, summarise the results of online surveys, and discuss the findings.

**Interactional explanation in academic email requests.** Table 5.1 presents the coding results of *interactional explanations* in email requests in Chinese and German.

**Table 5.1**

*Interactional explanation and its attribution types in Chinese and German email requests*

Email requests in Chinese			Email requests in German		
Email		10	Email		10
Interactional explanation		9	Interactional explanation		10
Attribution type	External	3	Attribution type	External	7
	Internal	6		Internal	2
	Uncontrollable	3		Uncontrollable	8
	Controllable	6		Controllable	1

The figures in Table 5.1 show that *interactional explanation*, taking the form of *grounder*, frequently appears in the Chinese and German academic email requests. There is no significant quantitative difference in the data between Chinese and German speakers. This is different from previous contrastive studies between requests in Chinese and other European languages. For example, Zhang and Wang (1997) adopted the CCSARP approach and found that requests in Chinese involved more supportive moves than those in the CCSARP project, which includes the German language. This interesting inconsistency could be the result of the different contextual controls in the studies. The scenario setting in the present research offers one specific situation in which the requests performed in two different languages are more comparable. The findings are more convincing than the studies including multiple situations, in which the final proportion of one particular strategy could be a trade-off. On the other hand,

concentrating on one particular realisation strategy, or one specific discursive phenomenon, like the *interactional explanation*, across different communicative situations could be an alternative method to avoid trade-off and yield reliable results.

Table 5.1 also shows the attribution types of the *interactional explanations*. The attribution dimensions included are locus and controllability. I cite the examples in Chinese and German emails to illustrate the different attributions of interactional explanations.

#### Example 5.1

……由于我自己的疏忽，看错了（课程名称）的时间，错过了上交时限。恳请您能原谅我的错误，希望现在发给您还来得及。

Due to my own mistake, I misread and missed the submission deadline of (course name). Please forgive my mistake. I hope it is not too late to send it to you.

#### Example 5.2

Konnte die Klausur vorhin nicht in einem Dokument versenden weil der Server das wieder einmal nicht zugelassen hat. Tut mir sehr leid ich für die Unannehmlichkeiten und die Schwierigkeiten mit der Technik. Nun das ganze gestaffelt und übersichtlich. Die Prüfung habe ich pünktlich beendet und pünktlich abgesendet im Notfall hätte ich auch das dementsprechende Beweismaterial im Sinne von Fotos bei denen die Uhrzeit ersichtlich ist, dass es vor dem Abgabetermin fertig war.

(I) Couldn't send the exam as a document earlier because the server didn't allow it once again. I am very sorry for the inconvenience and difficulties with the technology. Now the whole thing is divided in parts and formatted clearly. I finished the exam on time and sent it on time, if necessary, I have photos with visible time as proof materials, which proves that I finished before the deadline.

The *interactional explanation* in the Chinese Example is indicated by a causal preposition phrase *youyu* (“由于”, due to). By admitting his/her own mistake, the student has made an *interactional explanation* with the internal and controllable attribution. In the German example, the student’s explanation stresses the technical difficulties and the server problem, which is the external and uncontrollable attribution. The two examples illustrate the different characteristics of the requests in Chinese and German from the perspective of attribution.



The coding results in Table 5.6 show that German students are using more external and uncontrollable *interactional explanations* than Chinese students do. The attribution of internal and controllable usually indicates personal failure, which people are not usually willing to admit. The results might have been influenced by this unique academic interactional situation specified in the study. The *interactional explanation* of the internal and controllable attributions from a Chinese student might be more acceptable than those that occur in other interactional scenarios. The identity of being a student allows mistakes and permits the interactants to be imperfect. Expressing the internal and controllable attribution explanations while admitting their mistakes or misunderstanding shows the merits of honesty and courage in this particular interactional situation. This is confirmed by the online survey, discussed in the following section, where honesty is repeatedly mentioned and regarded as an important criterion for good *interactional explanation* by the Chinese participants.

The question of authenticity has to be considered also. By using *interactional explanations*, the interactants do incur an authenticity problem. However, interactants generally choose to trust the other party (Grice, 1975) unless the utterance involves lies that could be keenly detected by the hearer. The studies of lies (Barnes, 1994; Chen et al., 2013; Weissman & Terkourafi 2019) are premised on non-authentic discourse in interaction. The study of *interactional explanation* does not have this premise. In addition, the attribution analysis is based on the psychological theory that people generally assume the causal inference of the behaviours (Weiner, 2018), but the attribution does not necessarily reflect the true cause of the behaviours. The attribution is an identified cause that serves as the base for evaluation. Thus, the present study focuses on the text of the email and does not judge the actual submission behaviour of the students.

**Findings and discussion of the online surveys.** The first part of the survey includes judgemental tests of five email requests using a Likert scale. These questions collected the participants' perception of the *interactional explanation* in the emails, perceived politeness and a global rating of the request emails. I use the word "politeness" to indicate the participants' evaluation of one aspect of the email request. The present study does not intend to conduct a study on linguistic politeness.

The correlation matrices for Chinese and German data are presented in Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2. The pairwise correlations were calculated among the three variables of rating in Python, the evaluation of *interactional explanation* (IE), level of politeness (politeness) and global rating of the emails (Global) and tabulated in the matrix form. For Chinese, the

correlation between the evaluation of *interactional explanation* (IE) and the perception of the level of politeness ( $r = 0.48$ ) and the global rating of the email requests ( $r = 0.64$ ) were both highly significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). For German, similarly, the correlation between the evaluation of *interactional explanation* (IE) and the perception of the level of politeness ( $r = 0.9$ ) and the global rating of the email requests ( $r = 0.6$ ) were also highly significant ( $p < 0.01$ ).

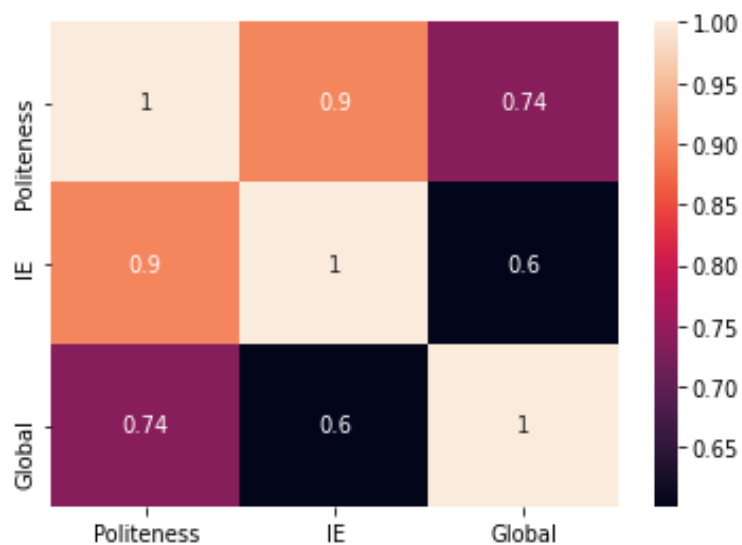
**Figure 5.1**

*Correlation between interactional explanation (IE) and politeness (CN).*



**Figure 5.2**

*Correlation between interactional explanation (IE) and politeness (GE).*



The highly significant correlations between the evaluation of *interactional explanations* with the level of politeness and the global evaluation of the email requests confirmed that the interactant's evaluation of *interactional explanation* can determine their overall assessment of the interaction and affect their perception of the interaction. Consequently, the presence or absence of the *interactional explanation*, and the evaluation of the *interactional explanation* are of vital importance in speech acts and other pragmatic research.

The second part of the survey consists of two open questions regarding the use of *interactional explanations* in requests. The first one asks participants whether it is necessary to include an explanation in the email requests and the reason for it. Only one German participant denied the necessity of using explanation in email requests; all other Chinese and German participants in the survey believed explanations are necessary in academic email requests. Among the Chinese participants, the reason behind the necessity centred around two major themes: showing respect and increasing credibility. Providing an explanation in such academic requests is considered necessary to provide detailed information about the incident and show respect to the professor so that the credibility of the explanation increased, encouraging a sympathetic response from the professor. Most German participants regarded the explanations as evidence of appropriate behaviour, based on which, the requests are justifiable. Nothing about showing respect was mentioned by the German participants. This might provide a reason for the large amount of external and uncontrollable explanations used by the students in the email request data in German. Examples 5.3 and 5.4 are extracted from the answers to this question from both Chinese and German participants.

#### Example 5.3

有必要，说明原因是对对方的尊重。

It is necessary (to include explanation). To explain is to show respect to the other.

#### Example 5.4

Ja, um die Glaubwürdigkeit zu bestärken und um sich zu rechtfertigen.

Yes, to strengthen the credibility and to defend myself.

The second question asked the participants about their criteria for a good explanation in a similar situation presented in the emails. The results showed that the Chinese and German participants held different criteria for good *interactional explanations*. The Chinese

participants valued truthfulness in explanations the most. This can further explain why there are more *interactional explanations* of internal and controllable attribution in the Chinese email requests. The truthfulness of the explanation presents the merit of honesty which overrules the concern of admitting personal failure. Among the German participants, external circumstances with supporting evidence were considered to be the best explanation. Many participants also mentioned that good explanations are short, clear and comprehensible. Compared to the Chinese participants who highly regard the truthfulness of an explanation, German participants highly valued good language organisation ability in making verbal requests. Examples 5.5, 5.6 and 5.7 provide example answers to this question from Chinese and German participants.

#### Example 5.5

实话实说。

Be honest.

#### Example 5.6

Das etwas mit der Technik nicht geklappt hat und es Beweise der Versuche gibt ...

That something didn't work with the technique and there is evidence of the attempts.

#### Example 5.7

Logisch und nachvollziehbar, bestenfalls mit Beweisen.

Logical and comprehensible, at best with evidence.

### 5.1.3 Summary

This part of the current study has examined *interactional explanation* in academic email requests in Chinese and German. The findings show that both Chinese and German frequently use *interactional explanation* in academic requests. In addition to a similar high frequency, the surveys of linguacultural insiders show that the evaluation of *interactional explanation* significantly correlates with that of the email requests in both Chinese and German.

The surveys also show that Chinese and German speakers in academia should have different criteria in making evaluations of *interactional explanations* in email requests. German speakers regard the explanation in a request more as evidence of their own credibility. Chinese speakers view explanations as a way of showing respect to others. There exists a difference in perspective in providing *interactional explanations* in the speech act of request: Germans use

*interactional explanation* more as a self-oriented practice to help realise their request; while the Chinese use *interactional explanation* as an other-oriented device to foster their benevolence.

The abovementioned findings are consistent with previous studies on the communicative characteristics of German and Chinese. For example, House (1996) proposes five dimensions, along which German and English speakers habitually display different communicative choices. One of the dimensions summarises that German speakers “tend to make more frequent and more explicit reference to self (e.g., "Can I ..." as opposed to "Would you like me to ..."). In other words, fewer moves occur in the German data in which the speaker takes explicit account of their interlocutor” (p. 346). German subjects tend to interact in ways that are more self-referenced (House, 2006); while Chinese seem to assume a responsibility of providing explanation to the other (Zhang & Wang, 1997). The overinformativeness studies Chen (2004) conducts also indicate the (Chinese) propensity in sharing additional information in exchanges. These findings could also be indicative of different interactional rituals of Chinese and German under the particular academic situation.

What’s more, the authenticity of the *interactional explanation* is a priority in judging an (good) explanation by Chinese. Chinese value the truthfulness of the *interactional explanations*. Being honest in *interactional explanation* overrules concerns of face, for example, the admission of personal failure. This could justify greater use of *interactional explanations* with internal and controllable attributions by Chinese, which is usually an acknowledgment of an inadequacy of personal ability and personal failure. Comparatively speaking, German speakers prefer using *interactional explanations* of external and uncontrollable attribution, which is also more content-oriented and self-referenced (House, 1996, 2006).

Therefore, the similarly high frequencies of *interactional explanation* in academic email requests does not mean that Chinese and German speakers use and accept *interactional explanations* similarly. The linguacultural differences of the pragmatics of *interactional explanation* are not only about presence and absence, but also about interpretation and evaluation under specific situations. Consequently, contrastive studies of *interactional explanations* should take account of comparable special situations, similar to the academic request situation in the present study. Context control is crucial for the contrastive study of IE, because an all-inclusive contrastive study combining various contextual factors cannot successfully capture the pragmatics of *interactional explanation* in a specific situation. Studies should also focus on not only how frequent interlocutors from different linguacultural

backgrounds would use *interactional explanation* in a special context, but also the content analysis of the used *interactional explanations* from different linguacultural insiders and the interactants' intercultural evaluation.

Goffman (1971) sees request and apology as two forms of remedial exchange. A request occurs before the initial phases of the offense as request, while an apology is characteristically seen as a post-event act. In the following section I move on to an exploration of *interactional explanation* in the performance of apologies in different linguacultures.

## 5.2 Interactional Explanation and Speech Act of Apology

The explanation or account has been recognised as one of the key strategies in the performance of apology. According to the working definition of my research, *interactional explanation* is the response to the perceived information appeal from the interaction. In the performance of an apology, an explanation communicates more than a declarative message— it facilitates the realisation of the apology. Thus, the use of explanation strategy in realising an apology constitutes an *interactional explanation*.

In this section, I first briefly review the definition of apology and the realisation strategies of the speech act of apology. Then I present two meta-analyses of apology realisation studies with an emphasis on the use of strategy of explanation or account as *interactional explanations* in apologies.

### 5.2.1 Apology and Its Realisation

**Apology: remedial interchange.** Following Goffman (1971, p. 115), most researchers in language philosophy and contrastive speech acts studies agree that the apology is a type of remedial interchange that aims to re-establish social harmony after a real or virtual offense. Trosborg (1987) saw responsibility-taking as an important criterium of apology. Explaining in an apology, consequently, risks being taken as an evasion from the responsibility. This criterium is similar to the differentiation between justification and excuse (Scott & Lyman, 1968). However, there has been no definitive way or set criteria with which to differentiate an explanation from responsibility evasion in the performance of an apology. Earlier studies have also reported that people apologise even when they have no responsibility at all (Okumura &

Li, 2000). Thus, *explanation* or *account* is usually included among the realisation strategies of the speech act of apology.

**Explanation as a realisation strategy of apology.** According to Goffman (1971, p. 113), the apology contains the following elements:

*... expression of embarrassment and chagrin; clarification that one knows what conduct had been expected and sympathizes with the application of negative sanction; verbal rejection, repudiation, and disavowal of the wrong way of behaving along with vilification of the self that so behaved; espousal of the right way and an avowal henceforth to pursue that course; performance of penance and the volunteering of restitution.*

It seems that Goffman did not include explanation as one of the elements of an apology. The underlying reason behind this is that Goffman classified an *account* as an independent and parallel remedial interchange to the act of *apology*. Both Austin (1957) and Goffman (1971) studied *account* or *excuse* from the court/jury debate. According to the different levels in the court debate (from defensible to non-defensible), Goffman (1971, p. 109-112) differentiated between five subtly distinct accounts.

If we view remedial interchange from the perspective of a speech act event (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Scollon & Scollon, 2001), Goffman's different levels of account frequently appear in the realisation of apologies as an element or strategy. For example, Olshtain and Cohen (1983, p. 22) identify five apology strategies in the data including a statement of account: *an Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID) such as sorry and excuse me; an expression of the speaker's responsibility for the offense; a statement or account of the cause which brought about the violation; an offer of repair, and a promise of forbearance.* The most significant research project in contrastive speech act studies: the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns project (CCSARP) (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p. 206) also classify apology realisation strategies into two types:

- a. *The most direct realization of an apology is done via an explicit illocutionary force indicating device (IFID), of regret (a performative verb) such as: (be) sorry; apologize, regret; excuse, etc.*
- b. *(1) an explanation or account of the cause which brought about the offence;*

- (2) *an expression of the S's responsibility for the offence;*
- (3) *an offer of repair;*
- (4) *a promise of forbearance.*

(Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p. 206)

CCSARP conducted contrastive studies on request and apology in multiple languages (English, French, Danish, German, Hebrew and Russian). Following the CCSARP project, there has been growing academic interest in the speech act of apology since 1990 (Kampf & Löwenheim 2012). Empirical studies on contrastive speech acts realisation, particularly on apology and request, multiply. The CCSARP apology realisation framework remains the most frequently adopted framework. Due to its significant recognition, the following meta-analyses also build their statistical analysis on the CCSARP framework.

**Factors that affect the use of apology strategies.** The actual performance of apology is determined by many different factors. Goffman (1971, p. 116) proposed that apologies are proportional to offenses. Following the CCSARP, speech act studies, especially apology studies, take into consideration many internal and external contextual factors that might influence their performance, in addition to linguacultural differences. Among these factors, social distance, power distance and the severity of the offences (Qian & Zheng, 2003; Li, 2010 etc.) that trigger remedial exchange are the most studied. In addition, gender differences, language proficiency, and age differences (Qari, 2019; Su & Chang, 2019; Chang, 2016 etc.) between apologisers are additional factors which researchers have focused on.

In the following sections, I conduct two meta-analyses in order to examine the impact of these factors on the performance of apology, especially on the use of explanation/account in the performance of apologies. The factors mentioned above in the retrieved studies are organised and coded in the meta datasets so that an aggregate effect can be determined.

### **5.2.2 Meta-analysis**

Reliable data are not readily available within the humanities. In pragmatics, there are typically manifold factors that could influence language use in real interactions. Data collection from multiple sources often highlights significant differences and may make replication of the analyses difficult.



The meta-analysis approach has a long tradition in natural sciences, for example, in medicine and psychology. It is relatively new in other research areas. Meta-analysis of existing studies on a common topic has been suggested as a potentially fruitful way of overcoming this data problem and gaining more powerful results (see Lipsey & Wilson, 2001) by extending the analysis beyond a standard literature survey.

A comprehensive meta-analysis combines a variety of statistical techniques that are useful in reviewing and evaluating the empirical literature in a specific field of research. In the two meta-analyses in this section, I use two of the principal techniques: meta-statistics and meta-regression:

- Meta-statistics provide a highly intuitive overview of the heterogeneity of published results. Meta-statistics also present development trends (for example, number of publications and their distribution in specific years) in a descriptive and easily comprehensible manner. Standard statistical tests allow first inference in order to ascertain whether results are significantly different from zero and heterogeneous according to selected criteria.
- Meta-regression analysis is the regression analysis of statistical results (Stanley & Jarrell, 2005). Meta-regression analysis allows us to identify the impact of study characteristics (data type, methodology, country, time, etc.) on the reported effect, and determines the sources of result heterogeneity (beyond mere sampling error). A standard meta-regression model is thus based on the simple regression between a summary statistic (the dependent variable) and a set of study characteristics (the independent variables), drawn from each retrieved publication.

A meta-analysis offers a quantitative methodology for summarising and aggregating published results on the phenomenon of interest. Linguacultural similarities and differences in the realisation of apology have been largely discussed in the last 30 years. The abundant number of studies on speech act realisation of apology since the late twentieth century provide a solid foundation for the conduct of a meta-analysis on these realisation strategies. A meta-analysis on these apology realisation studies can fill in the existing information gap regarding comprehensive apology patterns across languages/cultures. In addition, with the meta-dataset, the analysis of internal or external factors beyond the scope of individual research can also be observed.

The following Sections 5.2.3 and 5.2.4 report two meta-analyses I conducted on apology realisation with a focus on the strategy of explanation, which is viewed as the *interactional explanation* in the performance of this speech act.

### 5.2.3 *A Meta-analysis of Apology Realisation Across Languages*<sup>9</sup>

This meta-analysis was designed to investigate the apology literature produced over the last 30 years; it examined the frequency of essential apology strategies/components among different cultures and the influence on apology realisation from the factors beyond the scope of individual research. The explanation/account in realising an apology constitutes the *interactional explanation* in apology. In the present work, I focus on reporting the pattern of explanation/account in the realisation apology across linguacultures.

**Research questions.** In this meta-analysis, I focus on the following questions:

- Are there significant differences in apology realisation across linguacultures in the previous studies, especially regarding the use of explanation/account strategy?
- To what extent are the influences on apology realisation, especially the use of explanation, from internal and external contextual factors (social distance, power distance and the severity of the offences, gender difference, language proficiency, etc.) and the study characteristics (methods of data collection, sample size, etc.)?

**Data retrieving.** This meta-analysis includes relevant publications from the past 30 years. I retrieved English publications from the scholarly literature database Scopus. The Scopus search employed the keyword “apology” in the title, abstract and the keywords and found 295 publications. I then examined the literature and selected those studies that discussed empirical analyses of essential apology strategies/elements across languages and reported the quantification of comparable apology strategies. The final dataset included 28 papers with 1,020 observations.

I manually compiled the meta dataset of the retrieved publications. The study characteristics captured from these publications have been taken as the independent variables in the meta-analysis. These variables include the publication title, author and journal details, publication language, year, gender (of the participants) and age of the participants, data

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<sup>9</sup> This meta-analysis was originally a joint work with Daniel Kádár and Jarko Fidrmuc presented at the 12th International Conference on (Im)politeness, Cambridge, UK, 2019.

collection methods, types of apology in the study, external controls such as the social and power distances, the severity of the offence, etc. The empirical statistics of the apology strategies, including the use of *interactional explanation* (account), are taken as the dependent variables of the study. The retrieved data were then analysed by the statistical software Stata.

**Results.** In this section, I report the results of the meta-statistics and meta-regression of the study.

**Meta-statistics.** The meta-statistics of apology realisation summarises the published results on the core realisation strategies. Primarily, the indicator reviewed is the share of participants who adopt apology strategies according to all the reviewed studies. Table 5.2 reports the descriptive statistics for this indicator.

**Table 5.2**

*Shares (in percentage) of apology strategies across languages in the meta-analysis*

strategy	minimum	maximum	mean	std
IFID	8.70	100.00	68.72	29.04
account	0.00	100.00	39.88	28.93
Responsibility	0.00	95.00	26.45	30.69
reparation	0.00	100.00	25.13	32.23
forbearance	0.00	100.00	14.21	26.94

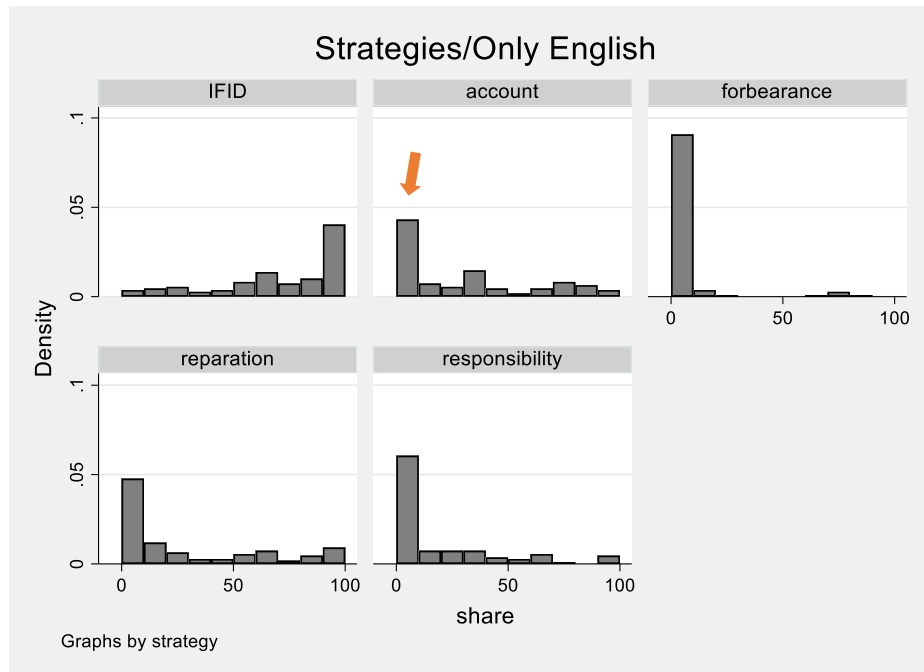
As shown in Table 5.2, the reviewed studies published highly heterogeneous results, ranging from 0% to 100% of participants using each of the five strategies respectively. This indicates that in any given circumstance, people might or might not use any of the apology realisation strategies. Among the five strategies under the CCSARP framework, the strategy of explanation/account ranks second in the performance of apology in all the languages studied, which could indicate the key role of *interactional explanation* in the apology discourse across all linguacultures.

In addition to the majority of studies on apology carried out in English-speaking countries (i.e., USA, UK), the reviewed works include studies of the apology in Spanish, Arabic, Japanese, Greek, Chinese and Iranian, etc. There are also several studies on interlanguage pragmatic skills of apology performance, including non-native (English)

speakers with different proficiency levels (i.e., beginner, intermediate or advanced). Figures 5.3 and 5.4 present the strategy shares of apology in English and in all other languages. In the histograms, each x-axis displays the share distribution of one particular strategy among different studies.

**Figure 5.3**

*Meta-statistics: apology strategy shares in English.*

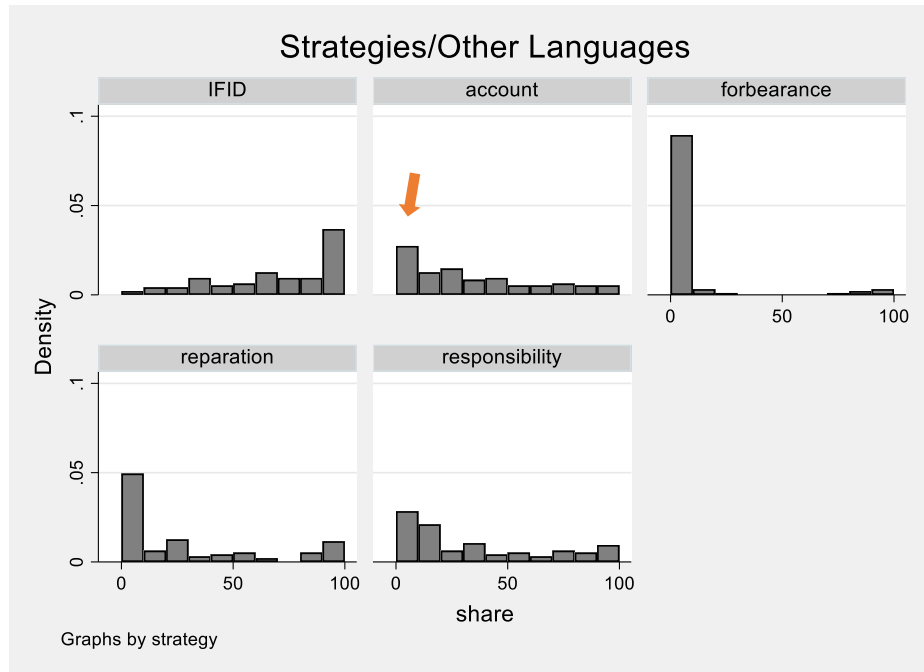


If the apologies in all languages other than English are summed up, the meta-statistics depicted in the histograms indicate that the share distributions of each apology strategy are largely similar between the apologies in English and apologies in other languages altogether. Interestingly, the most obvious differences are in the shares of explanation/account and the strategy of taking responsibility. It seems that more studies on apology in English reported that people do not use the strategy of explanation/account than the studies on apology in all the other languages (shown by the orange arrows in Figures 5.4 and 5.5). However, this does not constitute a straightforward conclusion that English speakers use *interactional explanation* less frequently than other language users in general.

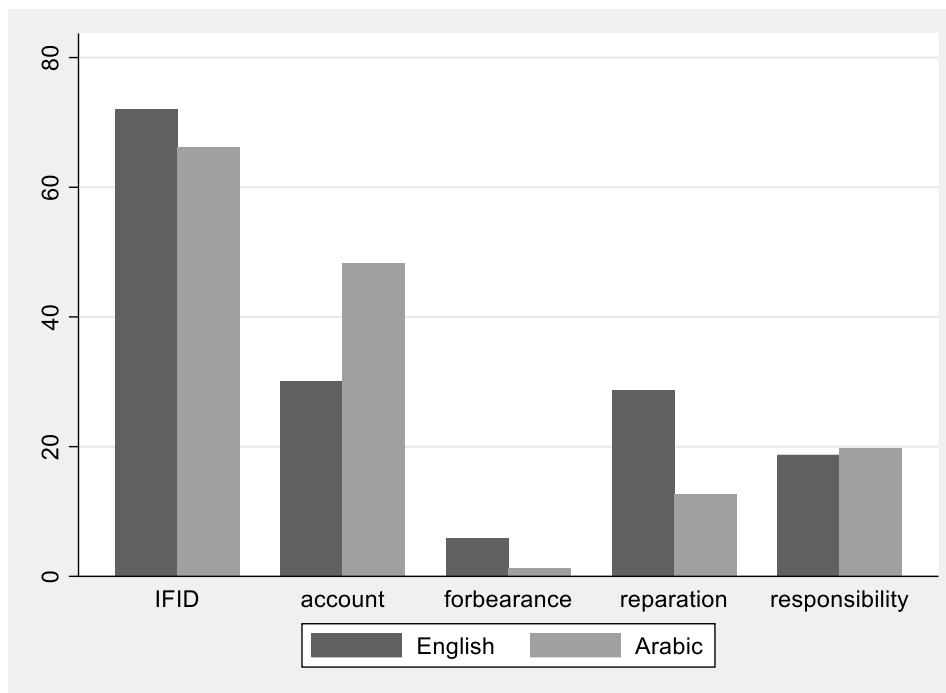
Apart from English, studies on apology in Arabic make up the second largest proportion in the meta dataset. Figure 5.5 presents the contrastive meta-statistics of the apology strategies in English and Arabic, based on the meta dataset.

**Figure 5.4**

*Meta-statistics: apology strategy shares in other languages.*

**Figure 5.5**

*Meta-statistics: the apology strategies of English and Arabic.*



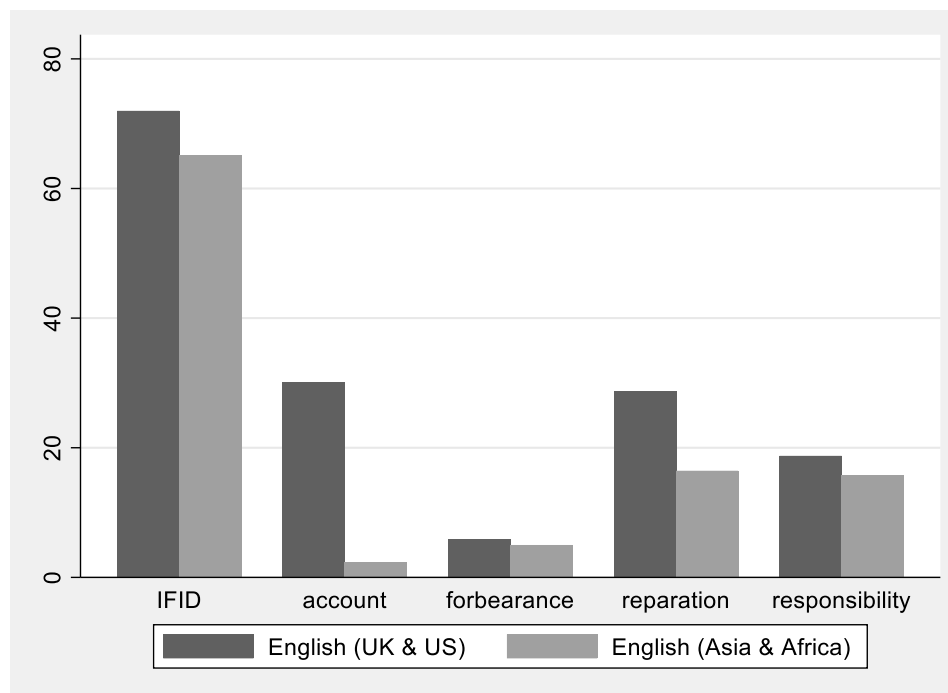
Both the English and Arabic speakers use explanation as the second most frequent realisation strategy in apology. It is noticeable that more Arabic speakers use *interactional explanation* in apology than English speakers. Similar comparisons of the strategy distributions can be conducted between English and all the other languages in the meta-analysis respectively, but due to the limited observations in other languages, I only present the comparison between the apologies in English and Arabic.

Among the studies in English, different English varieties and different proficiency levels also shape the performance of apology. The English varieties included in the meta-analysis are English spoken in the UK, English spoken in the USA, English spoken in Malaysia, and English spoken in South Africa.

Figure 5.6 presents a comparison of the apology strategies of English spoken in the UK and the US and English spoken in Asia and Africa (Malaysia and South Africa). Generally speaking, English speakers in the UK and the US use every apology strategy more than speakers of English in Asia and Africa. Interestingly, the difference is significantly larger in the use of explanation/account than other strategies. The meta-statistics indicate that British and Americans speakers adopt more *interactional explanations* in remedial discourse than the English speakers in Asia and Africa.

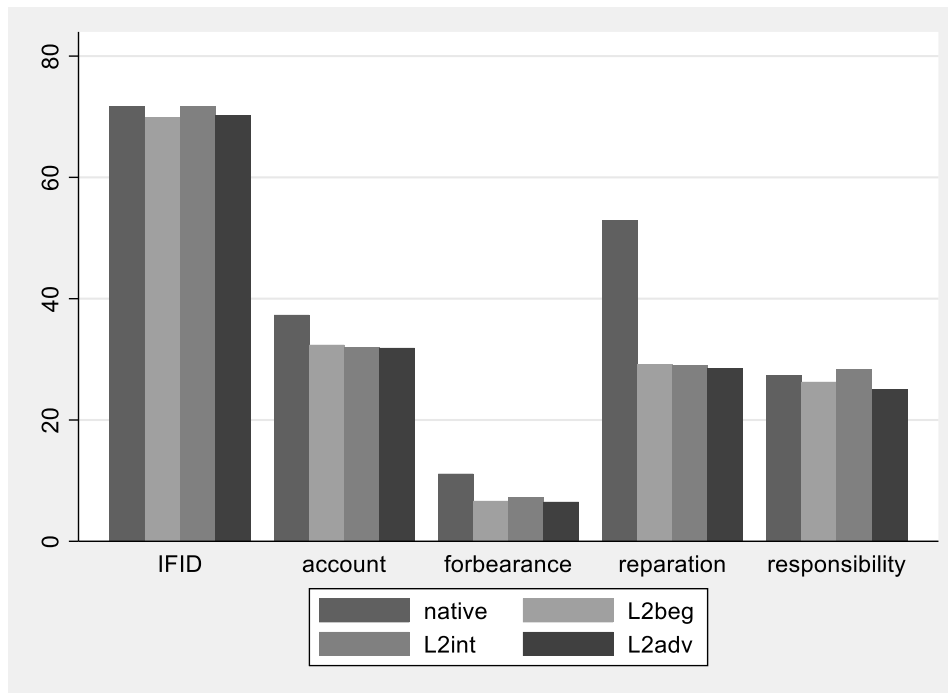
**Figure 5.6**

*Meta-statistics: apology strategies in English (UK & USA) and English (Asia & Africa).*



**Figure 5.7**

*Meta-statistics: apology strategies in different English proficiency levels.*

**Figure 5.8**

*Meta-statistics: apology strategies used by men and women.*

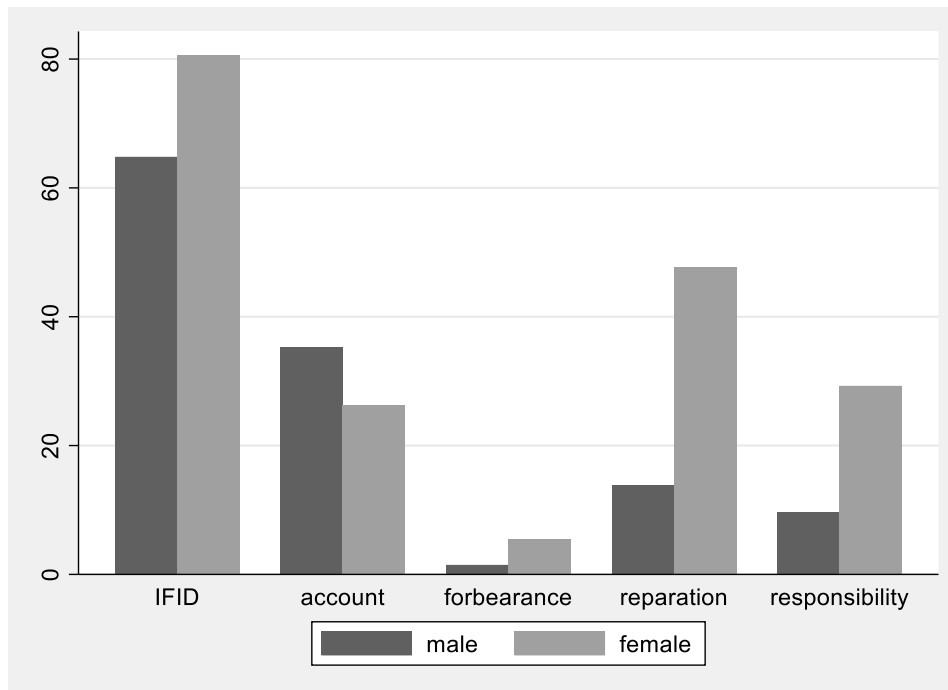


Figure 5.7 presents the strategy shares of non-native English speakers in different proficiency levels. Non-native English speakers perform apologies in English similarly despite

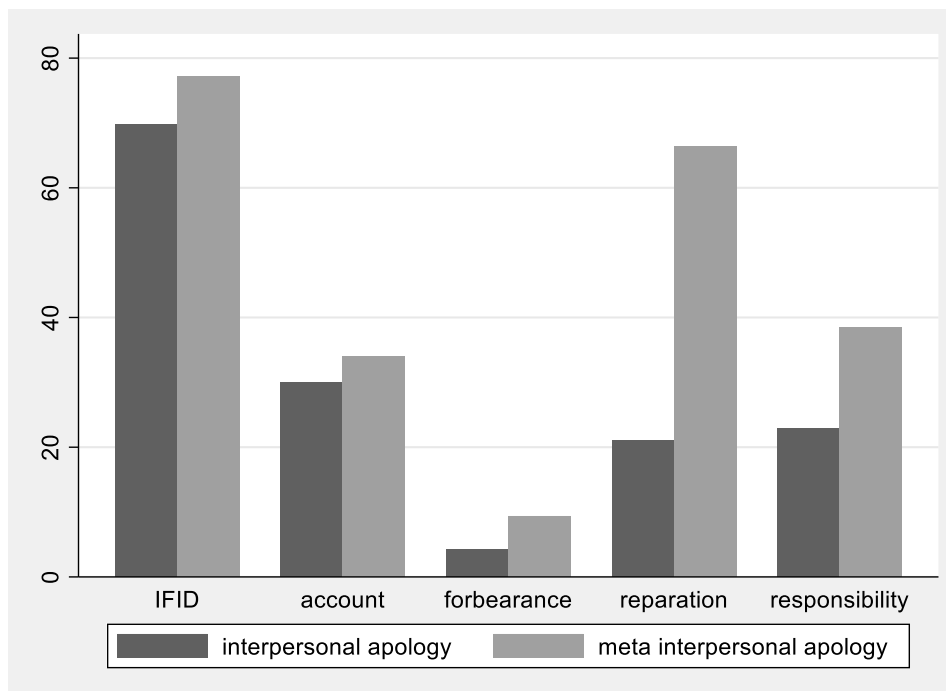
the different proficiency levels. There are only slight differences in shares of each apology strategy among the speakers at beginner (L2beg), intermediate (L2int) and advanced (L2adv) levels. In comparison to native English speakers, non-native English speakers use much less explanation/account in apology.

The majority of studies recruited mixed male and female participants, while some studies did provide specific results for male and female participants respectively. Figure 5.8 presents the meta-statistics of gender differences in the use of apology strategies. Interestingly, across all languages, men used the strategy of explanation/account more frequently, although women used all the other core strategies more often than men.

Most studies predominately examined the analysis of interpersonal apologies and only a few studies analysed public apologies. From a methodological perspective, some studies asked the participants to evaluate the importance of different strategies in the performance of an ideal apology, instead of soliciting the actual performance of apologies. These studies acquired the metapragmatic data of apology strategies from the participants. I coded these studies as meta-apology studies. According to whether such studies focused on interpersonal apology or public apology, I differentiated them under the coding of meta interpersonal apology and meta public apology. The meta-statistics show that apologisers use all the apology strategies in public apologies more frequently except for the strategy of explanation/account.

**Figure 5.9**

*A comparison between interpersonal apology and meta interpersonal apology.*





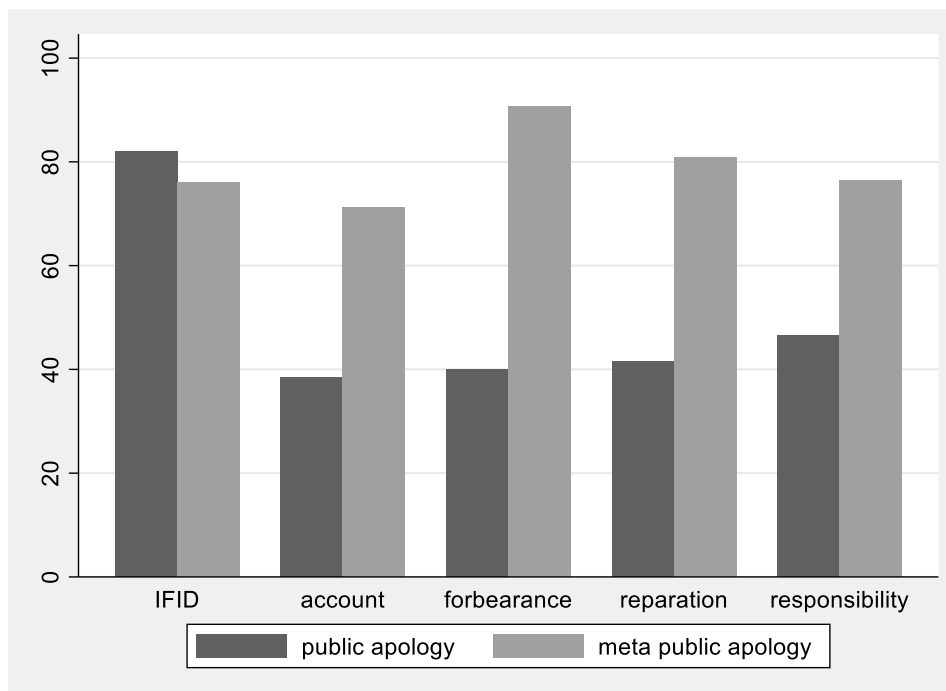
Generally speaking, the meta-statistics show that meta-apologies consist of higher number of apology strategies, regardless of whether the study investigates interpersonal apology or public apology. Figure 5.9 shows a comparison of the different apology strategies used in interpersonal apologies and meta interpersonal apologies. Likewise, Figure 5.10 compares the different apology strategies used in public apologies and meta public apologies.

Comparatively speaking, only the strategy of IFID was adopted slightly more often in the performance of public apologies than in the meta public apologies. All other strategies appear to be evaluated as more important and expected with a higher probability in the context of meta public apologies than public apologies. The strategy of explanation/account has been anticipated more than it has been used in both the interpersonal and public apologies.

All in all, the meta-statistics provide an aggregate overview of the performance of apology across languages in the retrieved studies. The strategy of explanation/account is the second most commonly employed strategy in apology across the different languages in the studies, after the use of IFID. The meta-statistic results also confirm that some of the study characteristics may influence the use of explanation in apology, for example, the language proficiency levels, gender difference, and the different types of apologies involved in the studies, etc.

### Figure 5.10

*Meta-statistics: a comparison between public apology and meta public apology.*



The meta-statistics results depict a general portrayal of the apology performance and the use of *interactional explanation* across languages. Due to the linguacultural focus of the first meta-analysis and the limited reports of the influence from social distance, power distance and the severity of the offences, the meta-statistics do not include these variables. Following the meta-statistics, the question whether these presented factors have decisive influence on the apology performance, specifically on the use of *interactional explanation*, remains undetermined. More insights can be obtained from the meta-regressions.

**Meta-regression.** Meta-regression is a meta-analysis that compares and synthesizes the research findings to identify the impact of various study characteristics (i.e., data type, methodology, language in study, time, etc.) on the reported effects.

The meta-regression of the present study is computed between the summary statistics of the apology strategies (the dependent variable) and a set of study characteristics (the independent variables) drawn from each retrieved publication. The meta-regression results (regression coefficients for different variables and their significance levels) are reported in Table 5.3.

The dependent variables in the following meta-regression are the five apology strategies under the CCSARP framework, shown in columns (1) to (5). In this section, I mainly discuss the meta-regression concerning the strategy of explanation/account, which is viewed as the *interactional explanation* in apology. The variable of explanation/account is under the name `amrs_acnt`. The blue frame highlights the column of the strategy of explanation/account as one dependent variable in Table 5.3.

The independent variables are listed in different rows in Table 5.3. The variables included in the meta-regression are data-collection method (discourse completion task, survey, fiction), gender of the participants (male and female), the apology types (interpersonal apology, public apology, meta-discourse type of apologies), and the language of the apology (English, Arabic, Japanese, Spanish, Persian etc.). As mentioned earlier, I have not included the factors of social and power distances, or the severity of the offence in the meta-regression, due to the limited number of observations recorded in different linguacultures.

The meta-regression of the linguacultural difference has been calculated using apologies in English as a foreign language (EFL) as the base category. I have chosen EFL speakers as the base category due to the clearer illustration of the regression results. As contrastive studies are usually conducted between English and the Other, it seems appropriate to use native English speakers as the base category in terms of language contrast in the present

study. However, if native English speakers are taken as a base category in the regression, I should not exclude the native English speakers from the countries in Asia and Africa where English is one of the official languages. The meta-statistics have shown that these English speakers and English speakers in the UK and the USA behave very differently in the performance of apology, especially in terms of explanation/account (see Figure 5.6). The meta-statistics show that non-native English speakers of different proficiency levels perform similarly in the speech act of apology. Thus, rather than putting different types of native speakers together as a base category, I use the EFL speakers as a moderate base category.

**Table 5.3***Meta-regression of influences on the apology strategies*

	(1) amrs ifd	(2) amrs acct	(3) amrs forb	(4) amrs rep	(5) amrs resp
c_dct	0.888 (26.799)	5.979 (13.614)	9.851 (8.834)	11.883** (5.632)	-13.837 (9.887)
c_srv	31.180 (27.720)	17.064 (18.972)	31.320** (15.348)	66.364*** (13.302)	37.269** (16.010)
c_fct	11.790 (27.347)	7.181 (21.821)	2.141 (10.144)	0.661 (7.056)	-11.554 (12.136)
g_m	-5.628 (5.755)	8.772 (6.168)	-2.737*** (1.047)	-1.533 (4.195)	-11.371*** (4.259)
g_w	3.633 (5.145)	-2.860 (6.543)	-9.021** (4.221)	4.844 (4.896)	-13.175** (5.342)
t_mip	-23.696*** (7.105)	14.626 (10.455)	-8.474 (11.289)	-1.488 (13.127)	-22.783* (13.013)
t_pb	34.319 (24.628)	9.895 (19.614)	38.004** (16.181)	32.309*** (9.830)	19.259 (14.357)
t_mpb	1.004 (29.767)	27.664 (17.715)	65.004*** (14.394)	11.035 (11.100)	7.983 (23.365)
Arabic	3.296 (6.152)	21.935*** (7.522)	-3.044 (2.155)	-5.957 (5.567)	5.843 (6.189)
spanish	9.916 (6.035)	15.836 (11.014)	15.941 (11.039)	56.405*** (12.481)	51.956*** (7.116)
japanese	12.267 (8.815)	-37.542*** (6.543)	-5.669 (6.461)	-23.010** (10.376)	11.318 (11.600)
persian	12.047 (8.243)	-5.841 (6.995)	-2.382 (2.512)	-1.513 (6.380)	13.981** (5.882)
othlang	-28.054*** (9.120)	11.072 (7.118)	1.578 (5.657)	-7.772* (4.232)	8.122 (5.881)
native	-10.663** (5.237)	3.190 (6.252)	1.947 (2.597)	4.999 (5.367)	-1.564 (5.008)
Constant	71.927*** (27.144)	16.890 (14.077)	-5.666 (8.841)	2.112 (6.186)	31.662*** (10.202)
Observations	204	204	204	204	204
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.116	0.173	0.401	0.478	0.329

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1.

The meta-regression shows that the linguacultures of Arabic and Japanese strongly influence the use of explanation/account in different directions (highlighted in Table 5.3). The Arabic speakers use the strategy of explanation/account more than the base category of English speakers (21.94%). The influence from Arabic linguaculture on the use of explanation/account in apology is highly significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). On the contrary, Japanese speakers use the strategy of explanation/account in apology much less than English speakers in the base category (37.54%). The influence from the Japanese language is also highly significant ( $p < 0.01$ ).

The meta-regression also shows that the different data collection methods, the gender of the participants and the apology types do not have a significant influence over the use of explanation/account in the performance of apology in general. However these factors influence the use of other strategies of apology.

**Discussion.** Among the five strategies under the CCSARP framework, the aggregated statistics (Table 5.2) indicate that the strategy of explanation/account ranks second in the performance of apologies in all the languages studied. As the strategy of explanation/account is taken as the *interactional explanation* in the speech act of apology, this meta-analysis result confirms the significant role *interactional explanations* played in the speech act of apology.

The linguacultural influence on each different realisation strategy is confirmed to some extent by the aggregated meta-statistics. In particular, different linguacultures (especially Arabic and Japanese) have significant influence over the usage of *interactional explanations* in the apology discourse. This confirmative result answers the first research question. However, due to the limited number of observations among different linguacultures, except Arabic and Japanese, there is not yet substantial evidence of the influence from other linguacultures on *interactional explanation*, though Spanish and Persian present significant influence on the strategy of reparation and responsibility respectively (Table 5.3).

The second research question concerns the influence from the contextual factors and study characteristics on the use of *interactional explanation* and other apology strategy. The meta-statistics show that apologisers use all the apology strategies in public apologies more frequently than interpersonal apologies, except the strategy of explanation/account. This result is consistent with earlier study on war apologies (House & Kádár, 2021) that explanation or account are missing from such public apologies since the presence of it could be interpreted as an attempt to rationalise the offence.

Another interesting finding in meta-statistics about the different types of apology is that *interactional explanations* seem to be expected more than they are performed in both interpersonal and public apologies (Figures 5.9 and 5.10). But the meta-regression does not identify this influence, which means that there should be other factors facilitating this type of influence.

Considering the limitations encountered in this meta-analysis, I carried out a second meta-analysis focusing on the realisation of apologies in Chinese. By narrowing the investigation down to apology studies in one particular linguaculture, I increased the range of the publication search from English alone to publications in both English and Chinese. Secondly, by combining the apology data in English in the first meta dataset, there could be a possibility to compare the aggregated statistics from the two meta-analyses focusing on English and Chinese. Such an aggregated contrastive study could be more illustrative and reliable than individual studies.

#### ***5.2.4. A Meta-analysis of Apology Realisation in Chinese***<sup>10</sup>

It is interesting to study apology in Chinese because Chinese has been stereotypically regarded as a non-apology culture (Pan, 2000). A strong concept of ‘face’ exists in Chinese culture, and apology is a self-face damaging act (Brown & Levinson 1987, p. 76). Consequently, apologies in Chinese intrigue researchers and make it appealing to compare Chinese linguistic behaviour to that of other linguacultures. This could be one reason why, among the abundant contrastive works on speech act realisation, research involving Chinese stands out. The research publications on apology in Chinese make the second meta-analysis feasible.

There has been, so far, no unanimously agreed framework of apology strategies in Chinese. The second meta-analysis was designed to discover the essential linguistic performance of apologies in Chinese with a focus on the strategy of explanation/account. Based on the meta dataset, I also try to analyse whether different data sources, empirical methodologies, situation controls, gender and age differences could exert significant influence over the use of explanation/account in Chinese apology realisation.

**Research questions.** In the second meta-analysis, I focus on the following research questions:

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<sup>10</sup> This meta-analysis was originally a joint work with Jarko Fidrmuc presented at the 17th International Pragmatics Conference (IPrA), Winterthur, Switzerland, 2021.

- What is the general profile of apology realisation in Chinese?
- What are the influences of power distance, social distance, and severity of the offence on the use of explanation/account in the realisation of apology in Chinese?
- Are there influences on the use of explanation/account from other factors like data collection, sample size, gender difference, etc.?
- Compared to apologies in English, is there any substantial difference in the use of explanation/account in apologies in Chinese?

**Data retrieving.** The second meta-analysis included the apology realisation studies of Chinese linguaculture published in English and Chinese over the past 30 years. I retrieved publications from the academic literature database Scopus ([www.scopus.com](http://www.scopus.com)) and the Chinese academic database CNKI ([www.cnki.net](http://www.cnki.net)). I found 222 apology studies involving Chinese linguaculture published in both English and Chinese over the past 30 years. I read through these publications and selected the papers reporting descriptive statistics of the empirical studies on the apology realisation strategies. The final dataset includes 37 publications, 33 published in Chinese and 4 published in English.

These studies cover the apology research in Chinese, and comparative studies between Chinese and other linguacultures, such as English, Japanese, Korean. I compiled the statistical data from the retrieved studies and created the meta-statistics and meta-regression in Python.

**Results.** In the second meta-analysis, I first compiled the meta-statistics to overview the application of the apology realisation strategies in Chinese based on the studies retrieved. Subsequently, I made the meta-regression to determine the influence of different study characteristics on the realisation of apologies, especially on *interactional explanation* in Chinese. Based on the first meta-analysis, I also compiled a contrastive study of the meta-regressions between apology realisation in Chinese and in English.

**Meta-statistics.** In the second meta-analysis, I included a variety of publications both in English and Chinese. Before reporting detailed meta-statistics, I created a publication bias test and the funnel graph is presented in Figure 5.11.

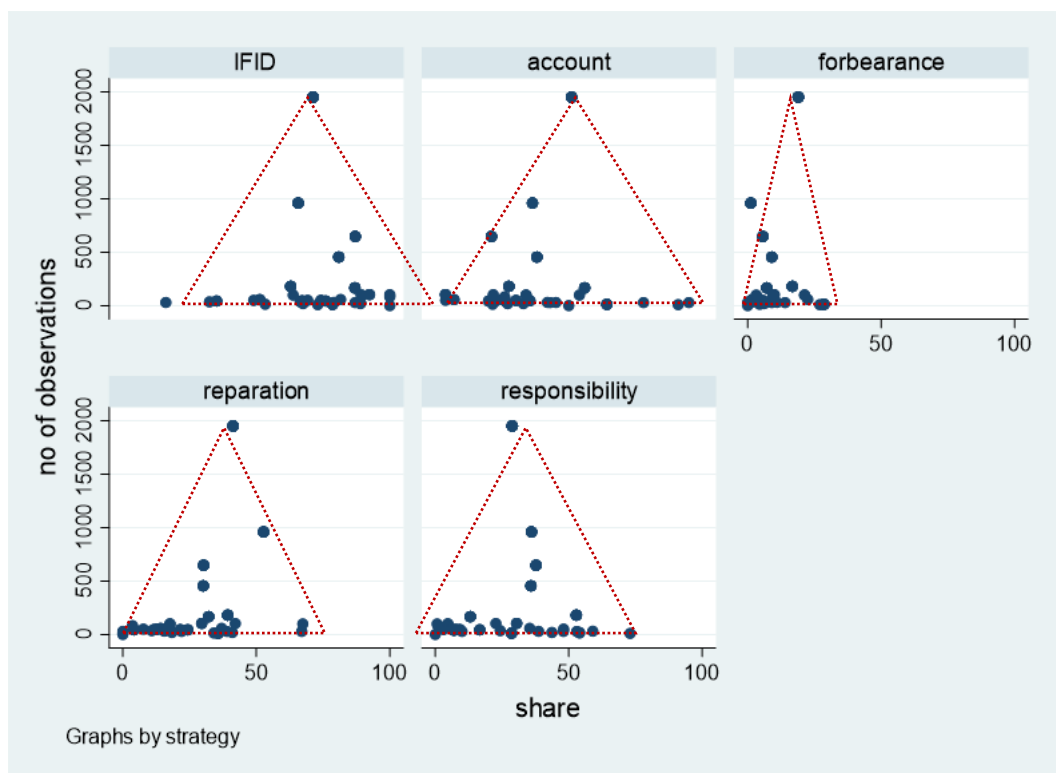
Publication bias is one of the most tested meta-statistics in meta-analysis. The funnel asymmetry test can detect and visualise publication bias in meta-analysis (Egger et al., 1997; Schmidt & Hunter, 2004). A funnel graph (Sutton et al., 2000a,b) is a scatter diagram that plots the quality of the reported effect (on the vertical axis) against the measured effect size (on the

horizontal axis). An indicator for quality is the number of observations used in the reviewed studies.

If there is no evidence for publication bias, the estimates should be randomly and symmetrically distributed around the ‘best’ effect and hence the plot would resemble an inverted funnel. This specific shape emerges from the assumption that unbiased samples do not favour one direction, with the more precise estimates being located close to the ‘best effect.’ In contrast, publication bias may be significant if the funnel plot appears asymmetric in the case of directional selection or hollow and wide in the case of preferences for statistical significance (Stanley, 2005).

**Figure 5.11**

*Distribution of the apology strategy statistics (funnel graph).\**



\*This funnel graph has been created using the statistical software Stata.

There are five funnel graphs in Figure 5.11 showing the distribution of observations in terms of each apology realisation strategy under the CCSARP framework. The funnel graphs show no clear evidence for publication bias in the retrieved studies. The dotted red triangles help to identify the fairly symmetrical distributions in each strategy diagram.

Table 5.4 presents the descriptive statistics of the apology strategies in Chinese. Similar to the apologies in English, the retrieved studies show highly heterogeneous results, ranging from 0% to 100%. The most frequently used strategy is IFID, taking responsibility ranks second and explanation/account ranks third. The strategy of explanation/account plays a key role in the apology in Chinese.

**Table 5.4**

*Apology strategy shares in Chinese*

Apology realisation	Min (%)	Max (%)	Mean (%)	STD
IFID	4.00	100.00	78.93	23.06
account	0.00	100.00	26.88	25.34
responsibility	0.00	100.00	34.68	26.53
reparation	0.00	90.00	25.58	27.15
forbearance	0.00	62.50	10.40	12.61

**Figure 5.12**

*Apology strategy shares by different publication languages (Chinese and English).*

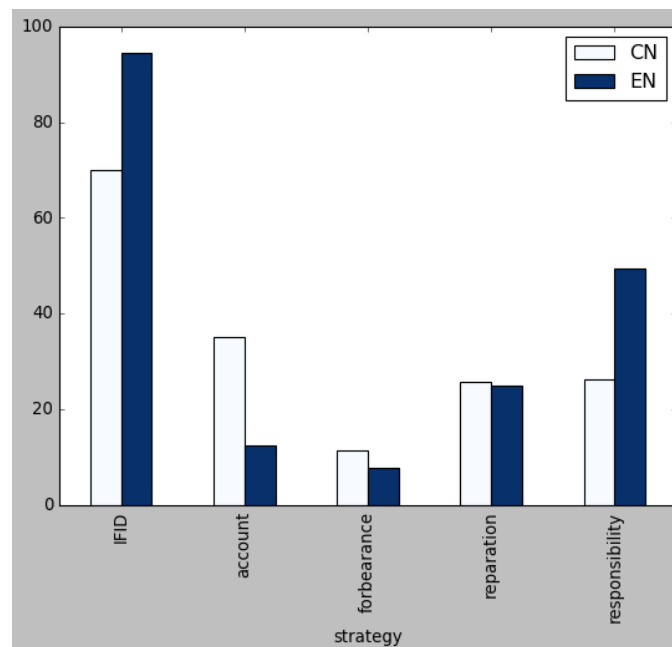


Figure 5.12 presents the apology strategies reported in the retrieved studies published in Chinese and English respectively. According to the meta-statistics, publications in Chinese report significantly more use of explanation/account than publications in English. However,

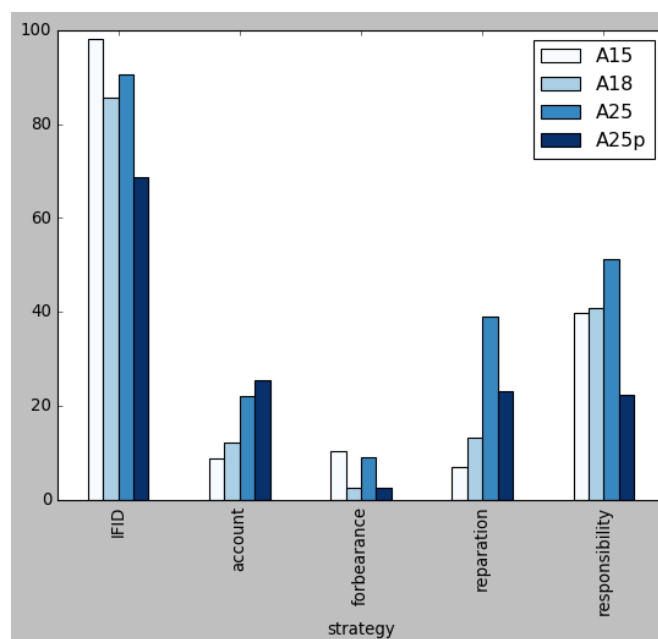


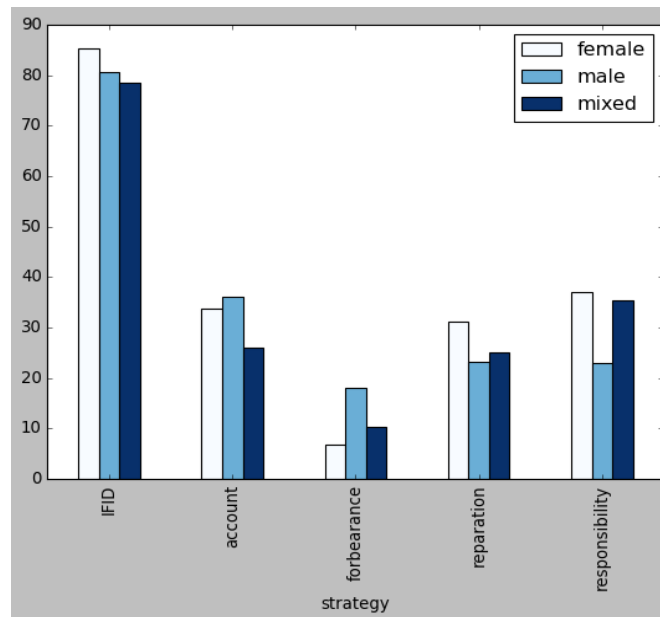
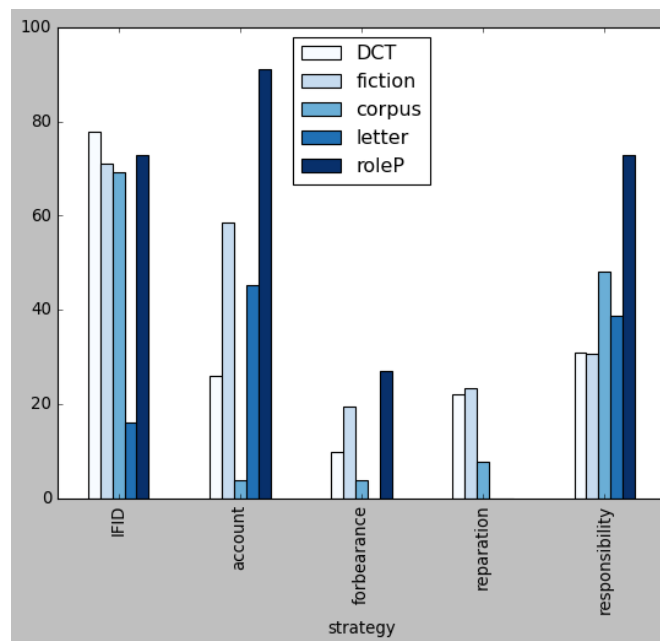
we have not found publication bias. In addition, there are fewer publications in English compared to publications in Chinese. This difference might stem from other study characteristics.

While most studies worked with the data collected from university participants, some studies do include participants in different age groups. The performance of speech acts demonstrates a type of acquired pragmatic skill in language (Wellman et al., 2011). Thus, the use of apology strategies across different age groups might represent this type of acquisition. Figure 5.13 presents the apology strategies used by different age groups. A reversed order of the use of explanation/account in apology and the age is shown in Figure 5.13. The A15 group includes participants under 15 years old, and the meta-statistics show that participants in this group use the least explanation/account in apology. It could be argued that the offence that young people (under 15 years old) could cause might not need explaining, so they used the least explanation/account. But when the statistics of group A18, A25 and A25p are included, the trend of increasing explanation used in apologies as the ages of the participants increase becomes obvious. It is reasonable to assume that the pragmatic skill of using *interactional explanation* in Chinese is acquired.

**Figure 5.13**

*Meta-statistics: apology strategy shares in different age groups.*



**Figure 5.14***Meta-statistics: gender difference.***Figure 5.15***Meta-statistics: apology strategy shares by different data collection methods.*

Gender difference is another frequently studied factor in the realisation of speech acts. Figure 5.14 shows that there are differences in the use of apology strategies, including

explanation/account, in Chinese reported in different genders, but the differences are not remarkable.

The retrieved studies adopted a variety of data-collection methods, including the classical Discourse Completion Test (DCT), fiction data, corpus, archived letters and role play. Figure 5.15 presents apology strategy shares from each data-collection method. The studies based on the data from archived letters and role play reported the highest occurrence of explanation/account in apologies. Moreover, the reported shares of explanation/account from these two types of data are even higher than the shares of IFID, which ranks first among all the apology strategies in the general meta-statistics (see Table 5.4). In addition, corpus data demonstrates the lowest share of explanation/account in apology realisation. The shares of explanation/account strategy also present the largest differences among different data sources. These diversifications make it difficult to draw a conclusion on the credible impact of the data collection methods on the use of *interactional explanation*.

The meta-statistics help depict a general profile of the apology performance in Chinese and answer the first research question of the second meta-analysis. The internal and external factors described in the meta-statistics influence the apology performance simultaneously. The individual effect of each factor could not be determined by meta-statistics alone. The influence from the study characteristics had to be identified and determined by meta-regressions.

**Meta-regression.** The meta-regression of the second meta-analysis also defines the five apology strategies as the dependent variables. The meta-regressions calculated the influence from the study factors on all the apology strategies in the study. Since the present work focuses on the explanations in interactions, I only report the meta-regression of the strategy of explanation/account in Table 5.5 with regression coefficients and standard errors in brackets from each independent variable. The significance levels are marked by asterisks.

The independent variables included in the meta-regression are age differences, data sources (discourse completion test, fiction, corpus, role play, etc.), gender differences (male and female), external controls (social distance, power distances, and the severity of the offence), as well as the language of the publication (Chinese and English). The dependent variable is the use of explanation/account strategy in apology in Chinese.

The coefficients and standard errors of each independent variable are reported from column I to column VII. Column VIII reports the full specification of meta-regression. In the

last column (column IX), the parsimonious or preferred meta-regression is reported, in which only the significant variables are taken into the regression for different variables.

**Table 5.5**  
*Meta-regression of explanation/account in Chinese*

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
<b>Intercept</b>	25.896*** (2.334)	24.355*** (2.742)	23.657*** (2.367)	20.799*** (2.027)	35.074*** (3.035)	25.037*** (2.187)	35.076*** (3.504)	22.505*** (4.448)	25.794*** (2.987)
<b>agekat[T.A15]</b>							- 26.139*** (4.157)	7.855 (11.521)	
<b>agekat[T.A18]</b>							- 22.826*** (5.724)	11.167 (12.243)	
<b>agekat[T.A25]</b>							-13.069** (5.017)	15.053 (10.384)	10.912** (4.615)
<b>agekat[T.A25p]</b>							-9.690 (6.094)	2.753 (6.302)	
<b>channel[T.corpus]</b>						-0.514 (14.957)		0.642 (14.965)	
<b>channel[T.fiction]</b>						33.518** (12.814)		16.136 (10.675)	
<b>gender[T.F]</b>	7.718 (11.447)							6.234 (7.993)	
<b>gender[T.M]</b>	10.067 (11.464)							7.996 (8.938)	
<b>langpub[T.E]</b>					- 22.633*** (3.505)			- 32.805*** (10.128)	- 29.502*** (5.010)
<b>powhgh[T.True]</b>		0.623 (6.014)						9.330 (6.773)	10.619* (6.205)
<b>powlow[T.True]</b>		7.043 (5.168)						13.435** (6.545)	13.941*** (5.203)
<b>revhgh[T.True]</b>			5.635 (8.170)					-2.144 (7.140)	
<b>revlow[T.True]</b>			17.964** (7.284)					7.421 (7.785)	
<b>sochgh[T.True]</b>				30.993*** (9.288)				14.062 (8.977)	18.033** (8.576)
<b>soclow[T.True]</b>				15.351** (6.423)				0.244 (8.053)	
<b>R-squared Adj.</b>	-0.004	0.001	0.049	0.165	0.179	0.077	0.122	0.283	0.305

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Note: \*p<0.1 \*\*p< 0.05 \*\*\*p<0.01

The meta-regression firstly answers the second research question, which is about the impact on the use of explanation/account strategy in Chinese from the factors of power distance, social distance, and severity of the offence. The last six rows in Table 5.5 show the impact from the variables of power distance (powhgh, powlow), seriousness of the aggression (revhgh,

revlow), and social distance (sochgh, soclow) on the employment of explanation/account. Among the three contextual factors, power distance (highlighted in Table 5.5) exerts the most significant influence on the use of explanation/account in apology in Chinese. When the apologiser is lower (powlow) in the power ranking than the offended side, the impact is highly significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). The coefficient is positive, which means that the apologisers tend to use significantly more explanation/account in realising their apologies when they rank lower than the offended side.

Social distance also exhibits a fairly significant impact on the use of explanation/account in apology making in Chinese. The closer the social distance between the interactants (sohigh), the more apologisers choose to use the strategy of explanation ( $p < 0.05$ ) in apologies. This result is consistent with the result of excuse use among Austrian German speakers (Meier, 1997).

To the contrary of Goffman's hypothesis that apologies are proportional to the offenses, the influence from the severity of the offence (revhgh, revlow) does not seem to be significant on the use of explanation/account in apology in Chinese.

The meta-regression also sheds light on the third research question. Table 5.5 shows the effects of many other study characteristics on the use of explanation strategy in apologies. First, the publication language seems to play an important role; it appears that publications in English report more participants using the strategy of explanation than publications in Chinese. However, compared to the number of Chinese publications, the number of English publications in the meta dataset is rather small. Moreover, the publication bias test shows no obvious bias in this meta dataset. Thus, the influence from the publication language requires further investigation.

The meta-regression does not identify significant influence from the age of apologisers, although there does seem to be a developmental pattern in the meta-statistics of the age differences and the use of explanation/account in apology in Chinese. The meta-regression only shows a significant influence from the A25 group (18- to 25-years-old). The positive coefficient means that people in this age group use more explanation/account in constructing their apologies than the base category, which is the studies that did not report age differences in the apology strategy shares. On the other hand, this age group (A25) has the largest proportion of participants in the retrieved studies, as most studies recruit university students. Thus, the impact from this particular age group also requires further investigation.

A contrastive view of the meta-regression can reveal more details of the apology performances in the two linguacultures of Chinese and English. I calculate the meta-regression

using a meta dataset taken from the first meta-analysis with studies of apology in English only. The meta-regression of the explanation/account strategy in English is presented in Table 5.6.

Similar to Table 5.5, the coefficients and standard errors of each independent variable are reported in columns I to VI. Column VII reports the full specification of meta-regression. In column VIII, the parsimonious or preferred meta-regression is reported, in which only significant variables have been incorporated into the regression.

**Table 5.6**  
*Meta-regression of explanation/account in English*

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
<b>Intercept</b>	21.206*** (4.744)	48.747*** (4.517)	27.703*** (3.035)	29.625*** (3.669)	24.722*** (3.361)	75.917*** (6.070)	85.386*** (10.123)	80.762*** (4.663)
<b>agekat[T.A15]</b>						-74.205*** (6.089)	-74.315*** (3.836)	-79.051*** (4.689)
<b>agekat[T.A18]</b>						-74.042*** (6.118)	-74.065*** (4.105)	-78.887*** (4.730)
<b>agekat[T.A25]</b>						-39.970*** (7.347)	-60.565*** (5.437)	-65.387*** (6.075)
<b>agekat[T.A25p]</b>						-52.173*** (7.000)	-75.636*** (10.274)	-71.012*** (4.967)
<b>§channel[T.email]</b>					52.453*** (3.427)		-8.211 (10.148)	
<b>channel[T.questionnaire]</b>					6.846 (6.261)		59.748*** (7.158)	56.970*** (5.828)
<b>channel[T.verbal]</b>					27.921 (21.071)		-7.971 (10.825)	
<b>gender[T.F]</b>	9.466 (6.061)						15.693 (13.310)	25.139*** (7.645)
<b>gender[T.M]</b>	19.622** (8.062)						20.976 (13.304)	30.422*** (7.635)
<b>powhgh[T.True]</b>		-36.710*** (5.205)					-11.856 (10.945)	
<b>powlow[T.True]</b>		-36.142*** (5.635)					-7.036 (10.956)	
<b>revhgh[T.True]</b>			-4.227 (10.819)				33.150*** (9.019)	40.750*** (7.009)
<b>revlow[T.True]</b>			58.297*** (3.035)				44.817*** (9.019)	52.417*** (7.009)
<b>sochgh[T.True]</b>				-2.737 (5.333)			-45.774** (19.053)	-63.099*** (8.850)
<b>soclow[T.True]</b>				-21.465*** (5.125)			-61.621*** (18.863)	-80.518*** (7.977)
<b>R-squared Adj.</b>	0.047	0.395	0.025	0.008	0.071	0.486	0.644	0.656

Apology types are included in the estimation but not reported in the table.

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Note: \*p<0.1 \*\*p<0.05 \*\*\*p<0.01

The most interesting contrastive results of the meta-regressions of explanation strategy in Chinese and English are the contextual factors, especially the factor of power distance. The blue border frames in Table 5.5 and Table 5.6 both highlight the impact of power distance on the use of the explanation/account in apologies in Chinese and English. As previously mentioned, power distance exerts the most significant influence on the use of explanation/account apology strategy in Chinese. When the apologiser is lower in the power ranking than the offended side, the Chinese use more explanations in their apologies. However, power distance, no matter whether the apologiser is lower or higher in power ranking compared to the offended, has no significant influence on the use of explanation/account strategy in English. Furthermore, the coefficients of the power distance variables (powhgh, powlow) are both negative, which means that the power distance factor could only influence the use of explanation/account negatively. This is in drastic contrast to the influence of power distance on the use of explanation/account in Chinese. This aggregate contrastive study indicates that the power distance between the interactants determines the use of interactional explanation in apology in Chinese, but not in English.

Moreover, contrary to the meta-regression in Chinese, the severity of the offence (sevhgh, sevlow) significantly influences the use of explanation/account in apologies in English, as does social distance (sochgh, soclow). Only great social distance (sochgh) influences the use of explanation/account in apologies in Chinese.

The meta-regression also shows the significant influence of age on the use of explanation/account in apologies in English. The influence from different age groups on the use of explanation roughly resembles the results of the meta-statistics of the apologies in Chinese. The older the participants, the more explanations are used with the exception of age group A25 (18- to 25-years-old). The age group A25 use the most explanation/account in apologies in English among all age groups. As this particular age group (A25) is mainly composed of university students and represents the largest proportion of participants in the retrieved studies, the impact from this particular age group requires further investigation. This is consistent with the results of the meta-regression in Chinese.

The apology types influence the use of explanation strategy in English, but since this variable is not available in the meta-analysis of the apology studies in Chinese, I do not report it.

**Discussion.** The second meta-analysis presents the general profile of apology performance in Chinese. In addition, there are many findings that merit further investigation. For example, the developmental model indicated by the meta-statistics of the influence of

different age groups on the use of explanation deserves further investigation, although the influence of age on *interactional explanation* is not fully identified in the meta-regression. The meta-statistics show that among the different age groups of Chinese speakers, the use of explanation in apology is positively and significantly correlated with the age of participants. The older the participants, the more explanations are used in the performance of apology. The developmental model indicates that the appropriate use of *interactional explanation* could be acquired and taught, which is of great significance to foreign/second language education.

The meta-regression illustrates a significant influence of power distance on the use of explanation in apologies in Chinese (Table 5.5). The lower the power ranking of the apologisee, the more likely the Chinese apologisee uses the strategy of explanation in the performance of the speech act. In contrast, power distance does not play any role in the use of explanation in apologies in English. These contrasting results illustrate a conclusive disparity in the influence of power distance on the use of explanation in apologies between the two linguacultures. The power distance between the Chinese interactants determines the use of explanations in apology discourse. Instead, English-speaking interactants are not influenced by the power distance between them. This is one important finding for the study of *interactional explanation* among different linguacultures.

Most studies included in the meta-analysis intended to include numerous external and internal factors. Consequently, the influence of certain factors on the use of explanation could offset the influences from other factors. This could explain the general similarity in the shares of apology strategies in Chinese and English (Table 5.2, Table 5.4). However, the meta-regression reports striking differences between the use of explanation in apologies in the two linguacultures. Consequently, a contrastive study of the speech act should take into consideration specific circumstances, rather than the generalist approach which can be found in most of the retrieved studies. For example, Goffman's hypothesis is untenable from the present meta-regression in Chinese (i.e., Table 5.4), but the apologies might indeed be proportionate to the aggression if the studies were to focus on this particular variable and controls over other variables were involved.

Another example which demonstrates the importance of specific circumstances is the type of apology in the studies. I did not include the apology type as an independent variable in this meta-regression in Chinese due to insufficient observations in the meta dataset. However, the typology of apology in the studies only differentiates public apologies from interpersonal ones. In reality, public apologies from business, institutions, and governments, for example, could have substantial differences in their performance, especially in the employment of



explanation/account. These differences might be attributed to the diverse targeted audience, the platform or channels of the apology release, etc. Furthermore, whether an *interactional explanation* alone or *interactional explanation* plus an IFID could be considered as an apology from a public entity is yet to be determined. All in all, it would be more reliable to conduct the contrastive study of apology and the *interactional explanation* within specific situation controls.

### 5.3 Conclusion

The present chapter presents the investigations of *interactional explanation* within the speech acts of request and apology. The findings confirm that *interactional explanations* play an important role in the two speech acts. Meanwhile, interesting similarities and differences are found and affirmed in the pragmatics of *interactional explanations* among different linguacultures. Study on *interactional explanations* in email requests in academic setting presented different pragmatics of *interactional explanation* though they occur with a similar frequency in Chinese and German. The design of meta-analysis for *interactional explanation* study in apology overcomes the limitation of reliability of single study in the area. Two Meta-analyses, based on the previous 30 years of research, provide aggregate overviews of *interactional explanation* in apology and allow an extensive analysis of the factors that may influence this discursive phenomenon.

Interactants in both Chinese and German tend to use explanation in the realisation of academic requests. According to the surveys with linguacultural insiders, there is a highly significant correlation between the evaluation of *interactional explanation* and the perception of request, which indicates that the immediate evaluation of *interactional explanation* in request can determine the interlocuters' overall interpretation of the request. This finding confirms the critical pragmatic role of the *interactional explanation* in making requests in both languages. However, the pragmatic purposes of *interactional explanation* in requests are different. German interactants regard *interactional explanations* as evidence of their own credibility, whereas Chinese interactants use *interactional explanation* to show respect to others. Thus, linguacultural differences in the use of *interactional explanation* are found in the assumed pragmatic functions in the speech act performance.

The meta-analyses of the apology studies confirm the significant linguacultural difference in making *interactional explanation* in apology. Overall differences in apology realisation strategies across languages are smaller than expected, though there exist remarkable

differences in the use of explanation. The contrast of meta-regressions reveals the substantial disparity in the use of *interactional explanation* between in English and Chinese. The external factor of power distance plays distinct roles on the use of *interactional explanation* in Chinese and English. Meanwhile, the severity of the offence only seems to influence proportionally the use of interactional explanation among anglophones (Goffman, 1971). The meta-analysis of Apology confirms not only the different weight attached to IE in apology from different linguacultures, but also illustrate the theories of external factors that influence the performance of IE could be culturally different.

Among the retrieved studies on apology for the two meta-analyses, very few involve the participants' (first order) evaluations of apologies. Thus, the meta-analyses do not include any correlation between the perception and evaluation of the *interactional explanations* and the corresponding apology strategies. The perception and evaluation of apology could be further studied in correlation with the use of *interactional explanation*.

In addition, as Trosborg (1987) argued, using an explanation in an apology is risky as it could be taken as responsibility evasion. Weiner's attribution theory (1974) also argued that referring to an internal but unstable cause might be better than an external one in order to prevent it being mistaken as offering an excuse. These ideas highlight the importance of the evaluation and the attribution types of *interactional explanations*. In Chapter 6, I take these points into consideration in the study on the interactants' evaluation of *interactional explanation*.

The present chapter confirms the significant impact of *interactional explanation* on the performance of the speech acts of request and apology. The critical role of the pragmatic phenomenon is not limited to the realisation of speech acts. *Interactional explanations* occur in all kinds of discourse beyond the established speech acts. The corpora investigation in Chapter 4 demonstrates that to locate the phenomenon is rather difficult, as the phenomenon randomly carries diverse linguistic features or bears no linguistic markers at all. Thus, an innovative data collection method is needed to make an effective study of the *interactional explanation* beyond speech acts. In the following Chapter 6, I attempt to study the evaluation of *interactional explanations* based on the metadiscourse data collected by post facto interview.

## 6. Evaluation of Interactional Explanation

The studies in Chapter 5 present the linguacultural similarities and differences in the use of *interactional explanation* within the speech acts of request and apology. Moreover, the evaluation of *interactional explanations* in academic email requests positively correlate with the evaluation of the interaction (see Section 5.2.4). The findings indicate that the instant evaluations of the *interactional explanations* determine the effectiveness of the interaction in general. Consequently, it is crucial to determine what factors could influence the interactants' evaluation of *interactional explanation*. The objective of this chapter is to explore the influence of the interactional ritual (Kádár, 2013, 2017) and the types of attribution (Weiner 1974, 2018) on the evaluation of the *interactional explanation* in interactions,<sup>11</sup> based on the metadiscourse data collected by ex post facto interview. It is also worth mentioning that the metadiscourse data include both *interactional explanations* made within and beyond speech acts, though more than half of the *interactional explanation* instances take place in the speech acts of request, apology, complaint, and justification (House & Kádár, 2021).

### 6.1 Introduction

The efficacy of *interactional explanation* depends on whether it fulfils the information appeal in the interaction. The instant interpretation and evaluation of *interactional explanation* means most moments pass by without being noticed. However, when the information appeal in interaction is not smoothly fulfilled, the interaction usually becomes salient to the interactants. Interactants spontaneously adhere to the discursive rules from these normative systems (Ren, 2019, p. 291) in the interactions. The normative systems that regulate the interactants' pragmatic behaviours are closely related to conventions and rituals (Kádár, 2013, Kádár & House 2020b), which have social and linguacultural attributes. When an interaction becomes salient to the interactants, the interaction can be perceived and interpreted as a contradiction of one or more particular interactional norms, as evaluation is the culmination of people's perception and interpretation. Therefore, the interactional conventions and rituals working behind the interactions could influence the interpretation and evaluation of the *interactional explanation*.

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<sup>11</sup> The evaluation of *interactional explanation* is based on Ning et al. (2020), which has been updated in 2021.

Ritual in interaction is defined as " ... a formalized and recurrent action, which is relationship forcing; that is, by operating, it reinforces/transforms interpersonal relationships" (Kádár, 2013, p. 12). The interpersonal relationship is implemented in the rights and obligations from interactions. Language use is a conventionalised and recurrent practice, while convention and ritual are two ends of one scale. Convention is invoked in comparatively simpler interactional situations than ritual (Kádár & House, 2020b, pp. 87–88), but both ritual and convention evoke expectations from vested rights and obligations. The present study is based on the intercultural metadiscourse data. In the process of data analysis, I compare the conventional versus ritual scopes of the particular interactions in terms of the interpersonal scenarios, degree of salience and the performative nature (ibid.). I find that the distinguishing features between convention and ritual are not easily observable and differentiable in the data. The two concepts are not easy to clearly separate in real interactional cases, especially in intercultural interactional scenarios. Consequently, I apply this approach of interactional ritual and convention to the coding and categorisation without differentiating between these two concepts in the present study.

Moreover, the occurrence of an *interactional explanation* triggers the interactants' instant evaluation of its rationality and effectiveness (Bauman, 2000, p. 1). This evaluation process is also related to the interactants' psychological process. The evaluation study in this chapter adopts the attribution theory (Weiner, 1974, 2018) from the social psychology study and makes an attempt at interdisciplinary analysis (Cummings, 2005; Ran, 2012). Social psychologists believe that people generally use causal inference to explain their own and others' behaviours (Weiner, 2018). This kind of attribution analysis does not necessarily identify the true cause of the behaviour, but a reflected identified cause serves as the base for evaluation of the behaviour. Attribution theory is commonly used in the discourse analysis of crisis communication (see Coombs, 2007). Recently it has been introduced into the discourse analysis of interpersonal trust restoration (Yao & Qin, 2019). I have applied the attribution theory in Chapter 5 to analyse the explanation in requests (see Section 5.2.2). Similarly, in this chapter, I include the locus of causality and controllability dimensions in the analysis of the patterns of *interactional explanations* and the correlation with the interactants' evaluation.

## 6.2 Methodology and Data

The collection of real-time interactional data has always been a predicament in interactional analysis. In addition, real-time interaction data does not directly reveal the perception and evaluation of the interactions. The present study finds the solution in the post facto interview (Haugh & Kádár, 2017, p. 608; House, 2008, 2018). The ex post facto interview is an empirically based method that investigates the effect of a naturally occurring phenomenon after it has occurred and intends to discover the pre-existing causal conditions. This interview method helps to collect and examine the first-order perception and interpretation of a pragmatic phenomenon (Schneider, 2018).

I applied this method to the present evaluation study. I used ex post facto interviews to collect the participants' metadiscourse of their interaction experiences, by which I was able to identify the interactions involving *interactional explanations* and find out the perceptions and the evaluations of the participants.

As a pragmatic phenomenon in interaction, an *interactional explanation* is never a free-standing utterance. It needs an explanatory relation as a premise (Antaki, 1994, p. 2) in the context, which is jointly constructed by interactants. Thus, in my research, importance is attached to the understanding of the interactants themselves, which entails the first order and emic analysis. The metadiscourse data is often applied to analyse the speaker's attitude and positioning (Huang & Xiong, 2012; Ran, 2013; Yang & Ran, 2017), even though such data might not directly express the speaker's attitudes. Metadiscourse has the evaluative function (Xin & Huang, 2010) which can be applied in the discourse analysis to determine the interpretation and evaluation of *interactional explanations* as well as the interactions.

### **6.2.1 Ex post facto Interview**

In this study, I interviewed Chinese migrants in Hungary about their interactional experiences with Hungarians. Semi-structured interviews have been conducted with the participants. The interview started with a structured section of basic demographic information; the following open section consists of five lead-in topics based on the participants' different professions and backgrounds. These topics include how they encounter and acquaint themselves with Hungarians, their experience of joint activities, and the occasions of negotiation or argument. For example, if the participant is a small business owner, the questions start with the service encounter experience with Hungarians, the employment relationship with Hungarians etc.; if the participant is a university student, the questions start with communication with Hungarian students in class and teamwork experience with Hungarian peers, etc.

Before conducting an interview, I usually initiated a warm-up session to allow mutual acquaintance with the participants and gain participants' consent for data collection. In the warm-up session I would also introduce the research topic, which helped participants to recall earlier interaction experiences. The interviews were conducted in mandarin Chinese, which is the common native language of all the participants and the researcher. The interview process allowed full conversational freedom. The average interview length was about 65 minutes. During the interview, I would follow-up on the participant's unique experience, interests and concerns, offering them maximum freedom and opportunity for them to describe their life stories. I also respected their personal boundaries regarding conversation topics and regarded the participants as lay experts on the subjects which emerged during their conversation (Haugh & Kádár, 2017). The interviews did not explicitly ask for any explanation-related experience or include specific "why" issues for the participants to explain. Nevertheless, *interactional explanations* and evaluative perceptions are fairly common in the metadiscourse data. These *interactional explanations* occurred both within and beyond certain speech acts.

### 6.2.2 Interview Participants

Hungary has the largest Chinese community among the Central and Eastern European nations (Ma, 2019). Since the 1980s, a large number of Chinese migrants have been working and living in Budapest (Nyiri, 2003, Wong & Primecz, 2011). This unique history has formed an internally diverse social group of Chinese people in Budapest and provides an excellent opportunity for data collection. Between 2017 and 2021, I carried out 45 ex post facto interviews with 39 Chinese migrants in Hungary about their local interactional experience (See Table 6.1).

**Table 6.1**

*Participants of the ex post facto interview*

Participants	Gender		Age			Length of stay in Hungary (years)	
	Male	Female	Min.	Max.	Ave.	Min.	Max.
	16	23	13	67	39	2	30+

Before the start of the study, I gained a small Chinese contact group in Hungary. These contacts consisted of family friends, real estate agents, temporary neighbours as well as

Chinese I encountered randomly during my initial settlement in Budapest. These people constitute the contact base for my interview participants' recruitment. I started the recruitment with a snowball sampling method combined with stratified sampling in order to avoid demographic bias. The interview participants are of diverse professional backgrounds. Some of them are self-employed business people; some are second-generation young migrants in universities; some are new migrants<sup>12</sup> searching for business opportunities; some are retired seniors, while some are young students at school. The eldest participant was 67 years old and has been in Hungary for more than 30 years. The youngest participant was 13 years old. The average age of the Chinese immigrants was 39 years. There were 23 female and 16 male participants. All participants have been living in Hungary for more than two years. The metadiscourse data collected involves the participants' understanding and evaluative interpretations of their own interaction experience as lay-observers (Haugh & Kádár, 2017, p. 608).

### **6.2.3 Data Coding**

As a Chinese linguaculture insider, I examined the ritual/conventional aspect of the interview data from a Chinese perspective. I coded the *interactional explanations* into two categories, depending on whether the Chinese applications of interactional rituals were presumably consistent or in conflict with the Hungarians. I then coded the attribution types of the *interactional explanations* from the attribution dimension of locus and controllability. The attribution coding has also been made exclusively from the perspective of the Chinese participants. I found that the participants usually adopted appraisal devices (Martin & White 2005) to express evaluative postures. Thus, the coding of the evaluation draws on the appraisal systems proposed by Martin and White (2005), in particular, the attitude and engagement subsystems. The interviewee's evaluations of the *interactional explanations* were coded into three categories: positive, negative and neutral (recognition of difference). After the first coding in 2019, I completed further codings in May 2020 and November 2021 in order to ensure consistency.

### **6.3 Findings**

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<sup>12</sup> Hungary announced a residence bond programme in 2013, which provides a permanent residency permit in exchange for a deposit as a residency bond, which is later returned to the new Hungarian resident. The programme ended in 2016 (<https://hungarytoday.hu/39983/>).

I found 61 instances of Chinese metadiscourse over the *interactional explanations* provided by the Hungarian interactants, and 42 instances of metadiscourse on the *interactional explanations* provided by their Chinese counterparts, usually the interview participants themselves. After coding, I calculated the frequency distribution of different evaluation categories (positive/negative/neutral), the interactional ritual consistency (consistent/conflict), and the attribution types (locus and controllability) of the *interactional explanations*. The following sections report on the specific findings and examples.

### 6.3.1 Consistency of Ritual/Convention in Interaction

Statistics show that the interactants' evaluations of the *interactional explanations* were highly correlated with the consistency of the interactional ritual/convention practised by the two parties in interactions. When both parties practise consistent interactional rituals, the *interactional explanations* and the corresponding interactions receive the highest positive evaluations from the Chinese participants. Table 6.2 shows the details of the coding results.

**Table 6.2**

*Statistics from the analysis of interactional evaluation*

Evaluation	Agreement in ritual/convention	Conflict in ritual/convention
Positive	54.55%	5.77%
Negative	18.18%	65.38%
Difference recognition	27.27%	28.85%

The coding found that 82.54% of the instances of Hungarian *interactional explanations* involved some type of inconsistency in the practice of interactional ritual/convention by the interactants. In such cases, the Chinese participants usually reported a breakdown of some formalised discursive norm. Among these inconsistent instances, 65.38% of them were negatively evaluated. Only 5.77% were positively evaluated. In the remaining 28.85% of these cases, the Chinese interactants' evaluations were neutral, in which they recognised the different practices by the other interactants.

Only 17.46% of the reported Hungarian *interactional explanation* instances occurred in the interactions following the interactional ritual/conventions by both parties. These instances received 54.55% positive evaluations and 18.18% negative evaluations from the



Chinese participants. The remaining 27.27% of instances were neutrally judged, in which the differences which had emerged during the interactions had been recognised by the Chinese participants. Table 6.2 presents the evaluation statistics.

Among the cases of inconsistent instances of interactional ritual/convention, there were instances in which an *interactional explanation* had been sought in vain or an undesirable *interactional explanation* had been provided. The evaluation of such cases was exclusively negative. Examples 6.1 and 6.2 present the metadiscourse of such instances. The *interactional explanations* are underlined in the examples. The timing of the data collection is marked in brackets at the end of each example.

#### Example 6.1

这边(匈牙利)家长会为孩子找借口, 很护短的。……你跟他(她)说孩子学习上的问题, 他(她)会说他(她)孩子每天都做作业啊。我说孩子的作业我看到都几天没写, 每天我都记录的, ……我拿给家长看。他(她)就说, “……他(她)每天都看书的。”就是各种说孩子多么努力地在学习。

Here (in Hungary) parents make excuses for their children, covering their mistakes a lot. ... You tell him/her about the child's problem in the study, and he/she would say that his/her child does homework every day. I said that I had records of homework and the child didn't finish homework already for several days. ... I even showed it to the parent. He/she then said, "...he/she (the child) reads every day." (They) just (keep) telling all the way how hard the child has been studying.

(March 2019)

Example 6.1 illustrates a case of undesirable *interactional explanation* in a teacher–parent communication. The participant in the interview is a teacher from China who teaches Chinese at a Hungarian elementary school. The interactional ritual adopted by the Chinese participant in the teacher–parent conversation differs from that of Hungarian parent practices. By raising a student's study problem, the Chinese teacher is practising interactional ritual/convention, which is making an indirect request for the parent to increase their supervision over the child after school. Due to the different interactional ritual/convention, the two parties have different presuppositions about their respective rights and obligations in the interaction. The Chinese participant does not expect or desire any explanation from the parent. Therefore, in the metadiscourse, the participant uses the attitude resources (Martin & White,

2005) of “making excuses” and “covering their mistakes” to indicate the negative evaluation about the *interactional explanation* and the interaction in general.

#### Example 6.2

不是每个员工都这样的，另一个员工迟到了，八点上班，她有时候八点半才过来，然后就“不好意思啊，迟到了。”就进来了。

Not every employee behaves like that (nice). Another employee should start working at 8 o'clock, she, sometimes, doesn't show up until 8:30. And when she is late, she simply comes in and tells "I'm sorry, I'm late" (as if nothing happens).

(April 2018)

Example 6.2 presents the case of a missing explanation in interaction. During this interview, the participant has just finished talking about a Hungarian employee who apologised honestly for being late. Then the participant mentioned one opposite case of another Hungarian employee who showed up late more often, but never said anything more than a “sorry.” The interactional ritual practised by the Chinese participant in the employment relationship requires a justifiable reason for being late. However, in Example 6.2, the Hungarian does not provide any *interactional explanation*. By showing the contrast in “Not every employee is like that (nice),” the Chinese participant indicated a negative evaluation of the Hungarian employee’s apology.

Missing *interactional explanations* and undesirable *interactional explanations* are very important pragmatic phenomenon recognised by the Chinese interview participants. These cases further confirm the necessity and significance of research into the explanations without *product* (Achinstein, 1983) in human interactions.

The employment relationship mentioned in Example 6.2 could evolve. For example, when the employer and the employee are satisfied with each other and establish more trust in each other, the employment relationship is likely to transform into an interpersonal relationship similar to friends. While the interpersonal relationship transforms, the interactional ritual practised by the interactants evolves as well. This type of transformation in interaction has been mentioned by more than one of the Chinese employers, which indicates the influence of the evaluation of the *interactional explanations* from the interactional ritual/conventions.

In the following Example 6.3, the interaction is between a Chinese teacher and Hungarian students. The interactants apply different interactional rituals, but the participant did not evaluate the *interactional explanation* and the interaction negatively.

### Example 6.3

有一次我感冒，孩子们都在教室里面，我一进去，他们就说，“老师，你生病了？”我说，“是，我生病了，但是我还得给你们上课呀！”他们汉语说得还不太灵光。他们说，“老师，你回家，你不要来。”我开始觉得很感动，很暖心。……后来他们说，“老师，你不好，我们不好。”就是说我生病了可能会传染给他们，我明白这个意思了。他们的观点就是你生病了你就在家休息，也没有其他不好的意思。

Once I caught a cold. When I entered the classroom where the school children were all in, they said, "Teacher, are you sick?" I replied, "Yes, I'm sick, but I still have to teach the class for you!" They could not yet speak Chinese very well, but they were able to express what they wanted to say, "Teacher, you go home. You don't come." At the beginning I felt moved and heart-warming (because I felt they cared for me)... Later they continued, "Teacher, you are not good. We are not good." I realised that they were saying that I might infect them. I come to understand it. Their idea was that if you are sick, you should rest at home. They were not really being impolite.

(March 2019)

In Example 6.3 the Chinese teacher applied the interactional ritual in education circumstances in which the normal teaching order should be more important than any individual circumstances, including being sick. It is not uncommon for a Chinese teacher to stay in class with a cold. When the students asked the participant to “go home,” the participant initially believed that the students cared for her health and did not want her to work with illness. The emotional resource “I felt moved and heart-warming” is employed in the metadiscourse (Martin & White, 2005) to present a positive evaluation. When the participant finally understood that the students were asking her to go home in order to prevent infections, the participant applied the judgment resources from the attitude system (ibid.), “They were not being impolite,” to indicate her evaluation. Such an evaluation also shows that the participant recognises different ritual/conventional practices under the same educational circumstance in the classroom with Hungarian students. The metadiscourse "*at the beginning*" and "*I come to*

understand it" also mark the participant's psychological process and reflect the change of evaluation of the *interactional explanation*.

### 6.3.2 Attribution Types of Interactional Explanations

Before presenting the statistics of the attribution types of the *interactional explanations* in the metadiscourse data, I want to mention the authenticity of the *interactional explanations*. The authenticity of an *interactional explanation* constitutes the basis of its validity. An attribution is the perceived and identified cause of a (linguistic) behaviour, which bears a default authenticity by the interactants (Grice, 1975). However, in real interactions, the information beyond the interaction, including common sense, accumulated knowledge, acquired experience, etc., could disclose or signal the inauthenticity of an *interactional explanation*. When such information exists, the *interactional explanation* is deemed to lack in authenticity and is evaluated negatively without going through the attribution process. Example 6.4 presents such a case:

#### Example 6.4

受访者: ……他们有很多理由的, 像我们店里的工人也这样, 上个月他爷爷又去世了, 不知道, 就是他有很多理由找出来又要请假啊之类的。

研究者: 而且你无法判断真假。

受访者: 我们知道是假的。你一个爷爷不可能死两次吧? 他可能自己都忘了自己撒过什么样的谎。

Participant: ...They have many excuses, like one employee in our shop, his grandfather passed away again last month, ... I don't know, but he has many excuses to ask days off.

Researcher: And you can't tell whether it is true.

Participant: We know it is a fake excuse. Your grandfather can't die twice, right? He himself may have forgotten what kind of lie he has told earlier.

(April 2018)

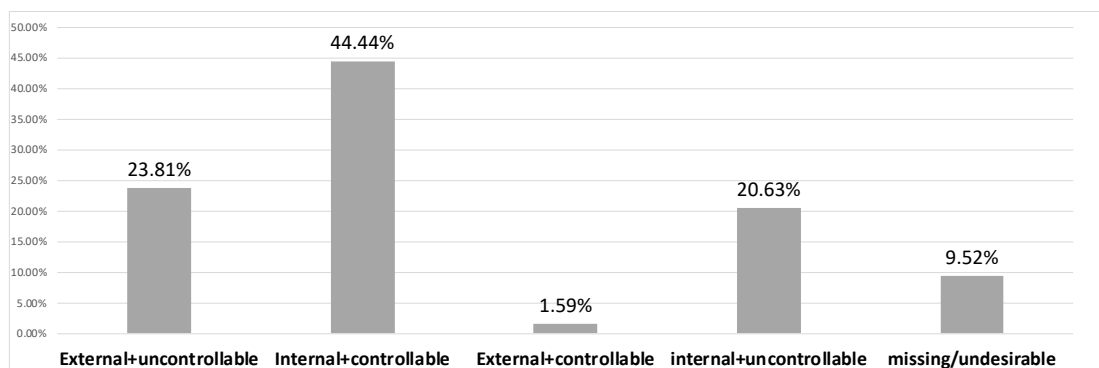
Example 6.4 presents the authentic issue of *interactional explanation*. The participant's communication experience with the problematic employee makes the employee's fake *interactional explanation* salient. The participant adopted the attitude systems (Martin & White, 2005) in "They have many excuses" and "We know it is a fake excuse" to express a negative

attitude towards the *interactional explanation* provided by the Hungarian employee. Through the rhetorical question "Your grandfather can't die twice, right?", people can also indirectly express negative comments (Ran & Fang, 2008; Ran, 2010; Ran & Yang, 2017). The Chinese metadiscourse “可能” (“may” in the last utterance) (Li, 2006, p. 52) suggests criticism of the following discourse, which is “He himself may have forgotten what lie he has told earlier.”

The judgment of authenticity in interaction is made in real time. Unless an authenticity issue occurs, most *interactional explanations* have default authenticity. *Interactional explanations* with default authenticity constitute the target of attribution analysis by the interactants. Figure 6.1 presents the statistics of the attribution types of the *interactional explanations* by the Hungarians in interactions with the Chinese participants.

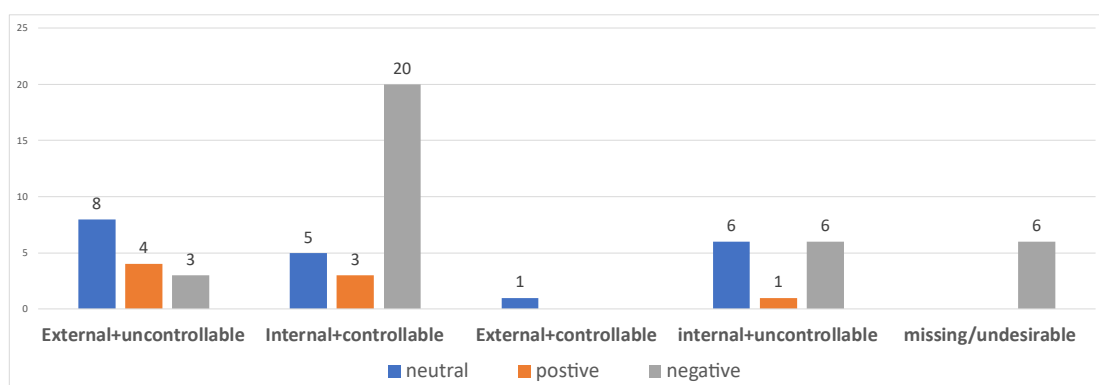
**Figure 6.1**

*Attribution types of the Hungarian interactional explanations.*



**Figure 6.2**

*Evaluation of the Hungarian interactional explanations of different attribution types.*



The most frequent attribution type is the internal+controllable attribution (44.44%) and the external+uncontrollable attribution (23.81%), followed by the internal+uncontrollable type (20.63%). The statistics of the Chinese participants' evaluations of the different types of *interactional explanation* are presented in Figure 6.2.

Most *interactional explanations* receive negative evaluations from the Chinese participants. However, the negatively evaluated *interactional explanations* and the related interactions are salient to the interactants, so the participants are more likely to remember these interactions during the interview. Thus, it is illuminating to examine the ratio of the evaluations in different attribution types (Table 6.3).

Despite the fact that most evaluations of the *interactional explanations* were negative, the external+uncontrollable attribution received the most positive evaluations in contrast to the *interactional explanation* of other attribution types. Negative evaluations fell mostly on the attribution type of internal+controllable *interactional explanations*. The *interactional explanations* of the internal+uncontrollable attribution received a considerable number of neutral evaluations.

**Table 6.3**

*Attribution types of the interactional explanations offered by Hungarians.*

Attribution	Positive	Negative	Neutral
External+uncontrollable	26.67%	20.00%	53.33%
Internal+controllable	10.71%	71.43%	17.86%
External+controllable	-	-	100.00%
Internal+uncontrollable	7.70%	46.15%	46.15%
Missing/undesirable	-	100%	-

#### Example 6.5

..... 这个律师看了我想买的房子之后跟我说, “我建议你不要买这个, 因为房子本身有一些问题。”好像是产权还是抵押什么的, 这个就很容易让人接受, 而且他们律师是按房子价钱的比例拿佣金的, 他还是很有职业道德的。

... The lawyer checked the files of the apartment I intended to buy and said to me, “I don’t recommend you buy this (apartment), because the apartment itself has some problems.” It was probably the property rights or mortgages issues. This is very easy to

accept. As a lawyer, he would receive a commission in proportion to the transaction amount of the apartment if I bought the apartment. He is very professional.

(November 2017)

Example 6.5 presents an example of an *interactional explanation* of external and uncontrollable attribution. The real estate lawyer uses the explanation to talk the participant out of the investment of a potentially problematic property. The participant contrasts this *interactional explanation* with the personal (internal to the lawyer) loss of commission. The participant adopts the appreciation and judgment resources in the attitude system (Martin & White, 2005) by “This is very easy to accept” and “He is very professional” to indicate a positive evaluation of the *interactional explanation* of the lawyer.

#### Example 6.6

受访者： .....比如一件非常小的事情， .....比如咱们中国人会问，“你怎么迟到了啊？”（外国人会说“）哎呦，对不起，我忘了。”这感觉特别伤人的一件事儿。

研究者：也就是说当他跟你说“对不起，我忘了”的时候，你是有点诧异的，因为你会觉得……

受访者：你怎么会忘掉呢，这个事情？

Participant: ..... For example, a very small thing, ..... For example, we Chinese would ask, “Why are you late?” (the Hungarian would say) “Oops, I’m sorry, I forgot it.” This feels very hurtful.

Researcher: That is to say, when you heard he told, “sorry, I forgot it,” you were a little surprised, because you would think...

Participant: How could you forget it, this meeting?

(April 2018)

Example 6.6 presents a case of the *interactional explanation* of internal and controllable attribution. By explicitly showing “hurtful” feelings, the participant adopted the affect resources from the attitude system of the appraisal system (Martin & White, 2005) to indicate a negative evaluation of the *interactional explanation*.

Furthermore, Example 6.6 also touches on the interface of *interactional explanation* with interactional ritual/convention. Ritual performance is bound to relational history (Kádár,

2017 p. 12), and certain rituals are expected within a type of interpersonal relationship, as the formalised and recurrent action can reinforce or transform the relationship. The Chinese participant anticipates a certain ritual behaviour of lateness in the meeting from the Hungarian counterpart in their interaction. The behaviour from the Hungarian interactant does not fit the ritual expectation the Chinese participant anticipates in their interaction.

Example 6.6 also poses an issue about attribution categorisation. The Chinese participant here sees the *interactional explanation* of “I forgot it” in the example as a controllable attribution, which is seen in the last rhetorical question, “How could you forget it, this meeting?”. For a non-Chinese interactant “to forget a meeting” might not be uncommon, which might indicate that the attribution of the same piece of *interactional explanation* is of the uncontrollable attribution. This poses a general coding issue for the researcher too. As an insider of Chinese culture, I code, as much as possible, consistently from the perspective of a Chinese participant.

#### Example 6.7

当时刚转入匈牙利学校，一整个学校就只有我一个华人，出于对我的好奇，问我很多问题的情况还是有的，比如说他们会好奇关于中国人吃狗肉的问题，他们就会来问我，“那你们吃狗肉，那你们吃兔肉嘛？吃猫肉嘛？”但是身边就会有人开导我嘛，我的老师，他说其实包括我都对你有好奇心的，这是正常的，他们并没有坏心眼。情况也确实是这样的……我后来一起升高中的同学们对我特别包容。

I was the only Chinese in the whole school when I just transferred to the Hungarian school. Out of curiosity about me, some classmates asked me many questions. They were curious about Chinese people eating dog meat, because Hungarians don't. They would come to me and ask, “So, you Chinese eat dog meat, do you eat rabbit meat? Do you eat cat meat?” But there were also people around me who tried to comfort me. For example, my teacher, She (He) told, “I am actually curious about you as well. It is normal (that some students asked some weird questions), and they did not have any evil thoughts (but curiosity).” The situation was indeed like this ... The classmates I had in those school years have been very accommodating to me.

(November 2017)



Example 6.7 presents a case of *interactional explanation* that receives a neutral evaluation. This type of evaluation usually indicates that the participant recognises the differences (of behaviour) that emerge from their interactions with a Hungarian. The *interactional explanation* in Example 6.7 is coded as an internal and uncontrollable attribution. While coding the text, I considered that taking control of one’s curiosity is not an easy task for the young students at school. However, for an adult, like the teacher in the example, curiosity belongs to a category of controllable factors. The neutral evaluation by the participant could be detected by the agreement the participant makes with the teacher’s words, “情况也确实是这样” (“The situation was indeed like this”). By showing this agreement, the participant accepts the statement by the teacher: these young classmates are only curious about her, the only Chinese child at school, and so they ask her questions about China. They are not really being judgmental.

Judging from the statistics in Table 6.1, Chinese participants will most likely generate negative evaluations towards the internal+controllable *interactional explanations*. An external+uncontrollable interactional explanation will be more likely to receive a positive or neutral evaluation. According to the attribution theorists, people make attributions to find the cause for behaviours for themselves as well as others. The statistics from the evaluation of Hungarian *interactional explanations* offer a premise to compare the attribution statistics of the Chinese *interactional explanations*.

During the ex post facto interviews, Chinese participants also mentioned their own *interactional explanations* in their interactions with Hungarians. The attribution types of the Chinese *interactional explanations* were coded and are included in Figure 6.3.

**Figure 6.3**

*Attribution types of the Chinese interactional explanations.*

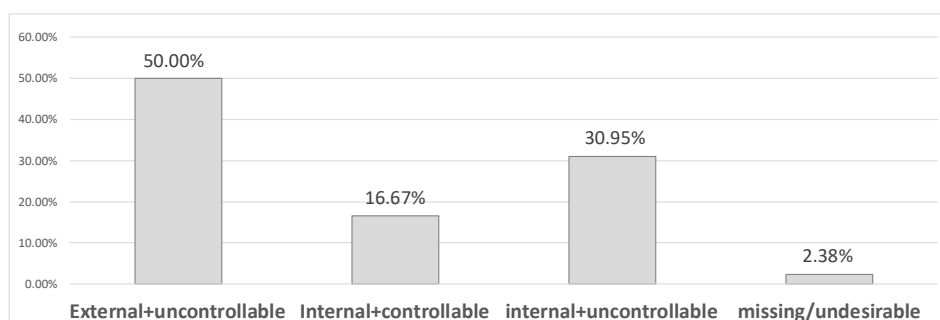
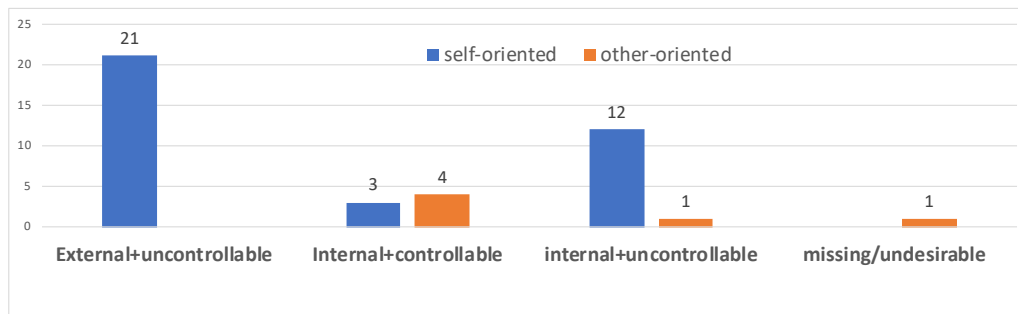


Figure 6.3 shows that the most frequent attribution types of Chinese *interactional explanations* are external+uncontrollable (50.00%), followed by internal+uncontrollable (30.95%). The order of frequency is different from that recorded for Hungarian *interactional explanations*. The Chinese participants demonstrated the most positive evaluations of the Hungarian *interactional explanations* as those with external+uncontrollable attributions. They consistently provided most *interactional explanations* with this type of attribution. The Hungarian internal+controllable attribution received the most negative evaluations from the Chinese participants, and the Chinese participants also provided the smallest number of such attribution types of *interactional explanations* as well.

Among these Chinese *interactional explanations* from the data, most are self-explanations. Few cases are *interactional explanations* for other people. Figure 6.4 shows the orientational statistic of the Chinese *interactional explanations*. The external+uncontrollable attributions are all self-oriented *interactional explanations*, but among the *interactional explanations* of the internal+controllable attribution, most are other-oriented ones.

**Figure 6.4**

*The orientation of Chinese interactional explanations.*



Examples 6.8 and 6.9 are illustrations of Chinese *interactional explanations* of the two most frequent attribution types, the external+uncontrollable and internal+uncontrollable attributions.

#### Example 6.8

我报出来的价格（买房子砍价）我会跟他们说我为什么报这个价，比如这个房子看不到外面的景，比如说这个房子的角（方向）非常不好，比如说房子需要（重新）装修，需要花很多的钱，我会给他讲道理的。我每次跟老外砍价时，都会列举出来一二三。

I always tell them why I quote the price (while bargaining for real estate property). For example, the apartment does not have the window with view; for example, the corner (direction) of the apartment is not good; for example, the apartment needs (re)renovation and that costs a lot of money. I will reason with him/her. Every time I bargain with a foreigner, I would list things out as item one, item two, item three, etc.

(April 2018)

Example 6.8 presents the Chinese *interactional explanations* of external+uncontrollable attribution. The excerpt of the interview deals with the interactions which happened during the purchase of a property. The *interactional explanations* provided here are three grounders for bargaining. All three grounders present the intrinsic quality of the apartment. In addition, to the Chinese participants, these *interactional explanations* are all external+uncontrollable. The participant refers to them as bargaining with “reasons,” as such premises make the request for a lower price more of an objective necessity.

There is no denying that some of these external attributions do contain internal judgments by the interactants. For example, the direction of the apartment mainly refers to the Chinese perception of a good orientation for an apartment, which is usually directed from north to south. As I mentioned earlier, I coded this data from the perspective of Chinese participants consistently. According to the data, the Chinese participants’ evaluations of the Hungarian *interactional explanations* coincide with their own *interactional explanation*. Thus, the coding is consistent.

#### Example 6.9

大家都是邻居，我觉得需要去道歉。任何人，只要我道歉应该都不会那么生气了。我就很小心地敲了两下门.....他一开门我就先说，“对不起，我不是故意的，我刚才没注意(门声)，打扰到您了，非常抱歉，以后会多注意。”他(的态度)就变得非常好。

We are neighbours. I think I need to apologise. People should not be so angry as long as I apologise. I knocked on the door very carefully ... As soon as he opened the door, I told, “I'm sorry, I didn't make it on purpose. I didn't pay attention just now (about the sound of the door) and disturbed you. I'm very sorry. I will pay more attention in the future.” He (his attitude) became very nice.

(May 2018)

Example 6.9 is the case of an *interactional explanation* which accompanies the speech act of apology. The Chinese participant accidentally made some loud noises on Sunday morning, which bothered the neighbour. The neighbour was angrily yelling out and left a note at the door of the Chinese neighbour. The Chinese participant saw the note and understood what happened. She then decided to go to the neighbour to apologise in person. While making the apology, the Chinese participant said "I didn't pay attention," which is an *interactional explanation* of internal+controllable attribution. While coding from the Chinese perspective, I saw the ability of being attentive to others as a controllable attribute in adults. In the meantime, she also stresses "I didn't mean it" to lower the controllability of the attribution. This coincides with the argument of Weiner et al. (1987) that the interactant would lower their intention to diminish their dominant role in the explained event/behaviour for an internal attribution.

The Hungarian *interactional explanation* of internal+controllable attribution received the most negative evaluations. There are several cases of Chinese *interactional explanations* of such attribution as well. A close examination tells us that these cases are either similar to Example 6.9, or they involve somewhat negative evaluation as well. Example 6.10 is a case in point.

#### Example 6.10

每年复活节的假期匈牙利要休周五周六还有周一，理论上周日不是法定假期，但很多公司都会把周日放掉，这样五六日一连着四天假期。我们的华商就是周五周六法定假期必须关店，他们就来说能不能不关。他们的想法就反过来，能不能只休周一一天，五六日连着开店。别人想怎么连着休假，华商想着我怎么连着开。……我也去跟他们聊过这个话题，我也好奇。他们没有太多娱乐生活，真让他们停下来，他们都不知道干嘛。……他们觉得每天去自己的商店看店已经成为自己的生活了。……这两年有的人也在反省，更多的人在呼吁能不能（有政策）休一天（每周）。

Every year, Hungarian Easter holiday is on Friday, Saturday and Monday. In theory, Sunday is not an official holiday, but many companies make it a holiday, so that there will be four consecutive days off from Friday to Monday. Our Chinese shop owners must close their stores on Friday and Saturday for the holidays as well. But some of them have the opposite idea of whether they can close the stores on Monday only and keep them open on the prior Friday to Sunday. While others try to have a vacation, the

Chinese business people try to work during the holiday. ... I went to talk to them as I was curious about the reason. (It turns out that) They don't have real entertainment in life. If they close the store, they really do not know what else they could do. ... They feel that going to their stores every day has become their life. ... In the past two years, some people start reflecting, and more people are asking whether they should have a regular day off (weekly).

(September 2018)

The Chinese participant in Example 6.10 is a commercial real estate agent and thus has much interactional experience with Chinese store owners. Example 6.10 presents a case of an *interactional explanation* of internal+controllable attribution from the Chinese shopkeeper, who would like to open the store on the Easter holiday. This is only one example of how Chinese shopkeepers try to work on public holidays. These shopkeepers would like to work on holidays for their own benefit. The participant's comment "While other people try to make a vacation, the Chinese business people try to work during the holiday" presents a "counter expectation" in engagement system (Martin & White, 2005, p. 97). The counter expectation usually shows that the current discourse raises objections against the existing position. In the present case, it shows at least a puzzled state of mind from the participant. It leads to his inquiry for the explanation of the Chinese business people's request to work on holidays. The participant also mentioned the recent change in views concerning holidays among Chinese, which touches on the generational differences in behaviour among Chinese business people.

#### 6.4 Discussion

The evaluation study found that both interactional rituals and attribution analysis can highly influence participants' evaluations of *interactional explanations* and the corresponding interaction/interactant. However, the absolute prescriptive power of interactional ritual does not exist; interactions with missing *interactional explanations* or *undesirable explanations* are not very common in intercultural interactions. The interactional ritual has to be observed as a continuum, whose binding forces of the interactants' rights and obligations vary from situation to situation. For example, in intercultural interactions (see the cases in House, 2008; Kaur, 2011 etc.), where the participants are assumed to encounter inconsistent interactional rituals

more often, participants often consciously tolerate or simply ignore the problem for the purpose of a smooth completion of the interaction. The present study can approximate that *interactional explanations* usually have a better chance to be viewed positively if the different parties in the interactions apply interactional rituals consistently.

Once *interactional explanations* are in the process of attribution analysis, they trigger the interactants' instant evaluation of their rationality and effectiveness. Among the attribution types coded, the external+uncontrollable type received the most positive evaluation from Chinese participants. The internal+controllable type was the most frequently negatively viewed attribution type. Accordingly, in the metadiscourse data on *interactional explanations* of the Chinese interactants, the attribution combination of external+uncontrollable is the most frequent one. This might suggest seemingly different results from the findings of the email request study in Chapter 5. Section 5.2.3 shows that most Chinese students are using *interactional explanations* of internal+controllable attribution in their email requests. However, contrary to the self-oriented *interactional explanations* in Chapter 5, most of the instances in the present study are other-oriented *interactional explanations* (Figure 6.4). Secondly, the self-oriented internal+controllable *interactional explanations* in the metadiscourse data also occur in the performance of apology (see Example 6.9). Such a type of *interactional explanation* is used to indicate personal failure (Weiner, 1974) and is made in a similar manner to those in academic email requests—accepting personal failure is considered as a presentation of honesty and courage under such circumstance. Honesty and courage override other considerations in the situation according to the Chinese participants. Consequently, the metadiscourse data shows that Chinese participants practise consistently in providing and evaluating *interactional explanations*.

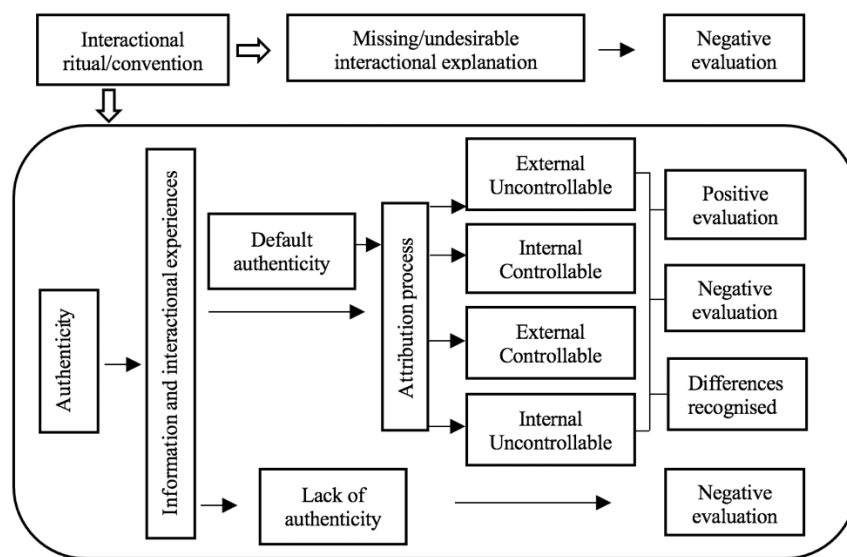
The findings of the evaluation study are summarised in Figure 6.5, where the hollow arrows indicate the influence of the interactional rituals on the evaluation of *interactional explanations*. The solid linear arrows indicate the real time evaluation process of the interactants. Outside the evaluation of the attribution of *interactional explanations*, interactional rituals play an important part in the evaluation of missing/undesirable *interactional explanations*. The evaluation of the attribution starts when the *interactional explanation* maintains default authenticity. Chinese interactants speak highly of the *interactional explanations* of external+uncontrollable attribution; such *interactional explanations* receive the most positive evaluations; the *interactional explanations* of internal+controllable attributions receive the most negative evaluations; the *interactional*

*explanations* of the internal+uncontrollable attribution receives considerable neutral evaluations.

Furthermore, these evaluations of the *interactional explanations* are consistent with participants' evaluation of the interactions in general. The result coincides with the academic email request study in Chapter 5, which shows that the evaluation of *interactional explanations* in the requests is highly positively correlated with the evaluation of the emails. According to the data, more than half of *interactional explanations* instances take place in the speech acts of request, apology, complaint, and justification (House & Kádár, 2021). Both the evaluation analyses show that the evaluation of the *interactional explanations*, within and beyond the speech acts, could also determine the evaluation of the corresponding interactions.

### Figure 6.5

*Influence of interactional ritual and attribution on the evaluation process of interactional explanations.*



In addition, the evaluation of the *interactional explanations* can also occasion (im)politeness in interactions. The interface of facework and the *interactional explanation* might yield interesting research findings. In addition, all four attribution types of *interactional explanations* from the metadiscourse data trigger neutral evaluations (see Figure 6.2). Among such interactions, the Chinese participants usually recognise the differences in (pragmatic) behaviours from their Hungarian counterparts. This result sheds light on the cultural adaptation process in intercultural communication (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009; Beaven & Spencer-Oatey, 2016).

## 6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have conducted an evaluation study of *interactional explanation* based on the metadiscourse data collected by ex post facto interview. The study reveals the critical influences of interactional rituals over the evaluation process. Once the interactants disagree on the perceived rights and obligations endowed by the interactional rituals they apply, the chances are that the interaction becomes salient to the interactants, and negative evaluations are likely to be made. The study on the attribution types of *interactional explanation* reveals that there exists a pattern of evaluation correlates with the attribution types of *interactional explanation*. The external+uncontrollable attribution receives the most positive evaluations from Chinese participants, whereas the internal+controllable attribution receives the most negative evaluations.

The present study is based on the metadiscourse data collected from the Chinese participants. The analysis is from a Chinese linguacultural perspective and inevitably evokes Chinese social and cultural characteristics. In the next chapter, I draw on the linguacultural characteristics of the data and make an attempt at modelling the *interactional explanation*.



## 7. A Theory of Interactional Explanations

*Interactional explanations* frequently occur for various communicative purposes in interactions, for example, as a clarification of causes or consequences or as the incidental but essential conditions. However, the evaluation study in the previous chapter reveals noteworthy and recurrent patterns assumed by the interactants (Chinese participants), though *interactional explanations* tend to vary from interaction to interaction.

In this chapter, based on the same metadiscourse data collected by the meta pragmatic interview, I focus on the normative system that the Chinese interactants spontaneously follow in interactions and examine what discursive norms are specified in interactions (Kádár & Ning, 2019). While *interactional explanations* encompass diverse information, the recurrent discursive norms behind problematic interactional explanations allow a pragmatic modelling of this dynamic interactional phenomenon.

The modelling attempt has been compiled in two steps. Firstly, I draw on the metadiscourse data and propose an *interactional explanation* model of Chinese (hereafter IE Model of Chinese). Secondly, I work on a general research model of *interactional explanation* (hereafter IE Model).

### 7.1 Grounded Theory

In this section, I use grounded theory in the data analysis. Grounded theory (Creswell, 2007) is widely applied in qualitative research (Kolb, 2012; Reményi, 2017). While making the analysis of the ex post facto interviews, I found that Chinese participants usually explicitly or implicitly used contrasting Chinese interactional norms while elaborating the linguistic behaviour of the Hungarian interactant. I maintained notes of these norms evoked by the metadiscourse on interactional explanation. I began coding and categorising these discursive norms once I had enough data and these interviews still continue.

In the first step of coding, I made a brief note of each incident involved in the IE narratives in the data. I attached related norm(s) incurred from each scenario and at the end I had a group of norms together with the incidents involved in interaction. I then studied the procedure for the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 105) in order to organise all of the coding. For example, my notes on different business and institutional

operational rules/procedures (specific practices in education, real estate, hospital, public transport, etc.) were summarised as the theme of *Business/institutional conventions* in the second step.

During the coding process, I noticed that each narrative could incur more than one discursive norm. As I mentioned previously, some norms are explicitly expressed by the interview participants, while some are shared implicitly in the narration. I annotated the striking code in each narrative, and I find that contextual differences could indicate the eminent discursive norm in the data. I then identified two major contexts where the *interactional explanations* take place: the public/business/institutional context, and the private context. Following that, I organised the norms under two major contexts.

Another issue developed from the coding process about the language in use. The metadiscourse data were collected in the Chinese language and my coding and the normative themes are originally organised in Chinese as well. I translated the themes into English; however, this translation is limited, since many of the English terms take on universal values. One of the aims of the present study is to capture the Chinese linguacultural characteristics of the pragmatic *interactional explanation*. Hence, the discussion of the following cases of normative themes are based on Chinese linguacultural characteristics only.

As I was the only coder, I completed the data coding and categorisation analysis three times over timed intervals, in May 2020, May 2021 and November 2021 respectively.

## 7.2 An IE Model of Chinese

I formulated the categorisation themes of the *interactional explanations* by drawing on the recurrent discursive norms invoked by the Chinese participants. This modelling of *interactional explanation* is Chinese-linguacultural specific. Thus, this *interactional explanation* model reveals the recurrent Chinese discursive norms in interaction, which could be efficiently applied to analyse the interactions involving Chinese participants. Table 7.1 presents the themes with typical examples from the data within the two contexts.

In the public/business/institutional context, I identified six normative themes of *interactional explanations*, including *business/institutional conventions*, *fairness*, *faith*, *honesty*, *professional ethics*, and *taking responsibility*; in the private context, I identified five

themes, including *compromise to the overall situation, conflict resolution, other-attentiveness, life priorities, and life styles*.

**Table 7.1**

*Normative themes invoked by interactional explanation (Chinese perspective)*

Public/ business/ institutional context	Theme	Examples in the dataset
Public/ business/ institutional context	Business/institutional conventions	Teacher–parent meeting
	Fairness	Education opportunity
	Faith	Verbal agreement
	Honesty	Requests for days off
	Professional ethics	Professional handling in transactions
	Taking responsibility	Cooperation in joint tasks
Private context	Compromise in the overall situation	Schedule negotiation
	Conflict resolution	Neighbourhood communication
	Other-attentiveness	Birthday celebration
	Life priorities	Making a living versus being together with family
	Lifestyles	Time for a lunch break, food preferences, etc.

In the following I present the *interactional explanation* themes from a Chinese perspective together with case analyses. To avoid unnecessary repetition in case analysis, I first review and discuss the themes in the previously cited ten examples (Examples 6.1 to 6.10) in Chapter 6. Then I cite examples of those themes that have not yet been cited and discussed. It is worth noting that, more often than not, two or more normative themes, within or across the two contexts, could emerge from one particular incident. The *interactional explanation* themes themselves are also interconnected to some extent. In the following section, I stress only one or two salient themes from each example in the discussion.

Most of these normative themes have been mentioned in the earlier case analysis in Chapter 6. The theme of the *business/institutional conventions* is given in Examples 6.1, 6.3, and 6.8. Examples 6.1 and 6.3 are interactions at an elementary school. Both interactions illustrate problematic *interactional explanations* between teacher and parent, and teacher and students, derived from different educational institutional conventions. Example 6.8 involves an *interactional explanation* from a Chinese participant. The interaction falls into the business

conventions of the real estate market. Examples 6.2 and 6.5 show the theme of professional *ethics*. Example 6.2 portrays the lack of professional ethics of an employee who comes to work late without an explanation; Example 6.5 presents the real estate lawyer's professional ethics in making reliable recommendations. Example 6.4 is a case of the theme *honesty*. The Hungarian *interactional explanation* in this interaction does not hold default authenticity, which ends up as a negative evaluation from the Chinese participant. Example 6.6 is a case of the normative theme *faith*. Default *faith* is strongly held between Chinese friends, which makes it hard to tolerate if one inattentively forgets a meeting. Example 6.7 presents the theme of *lifestyles*. Food choice is the topic of the interaction in Example 6.7. Differences in food preferences and eating habits are common topics of many intercultural interactions. Interestingly, such lifestyle preference usually calls for curiosity in interactions and is evaluated neutrally. Example 6.9 is again an *interactional explanation* from a Chinese participant, which accompanies the speech act of apology and presents the theme of *conflict resolution*. Finally, Example 6.10, another Chinese *interactional explanation*, presents a typical case of the theme of *life priorities* (making money versus being with family). Compared with working to make life (usually financially) better for family members, the Chinese position their personal needs lower down in terms of importance.

In the following section, I present examples of normative themes that have not been covered by the discussion above. These themes are: *fairness*, *taking responsibilities* under a public/business/institutional context, *compromise to the overall situation*, and *other-attentiveness* in a private context.

#### Example 7.1 (*fairness*)

跟老师说了体育课的事儿……，老师认为在哪里这种事儿都会出现，很正常，你到哪里都会面对这个问题。基本就是这种回答。我以为能争取点什么（说法），结果什么都没有。

I told the teacher about what happened (to my daughter) in the physical education class... The teacher believes that this kind of stuff happens everywhere. It's normal, and you would face this problem wherever you go. This is basically the answer. I thought I could fight for something, but it turned out to be nothing.

(February 2018)

In Example 7.1, the Chinese participant is talking about an interaction with a school teacher. The participant's daughter is a student in the teacher's class. The student encountered

a classmate who was unwilling to work in her team during a physical education class, supposedly because she is not local. The Chinese participant would like to talk about the incident with the teacher, believing that fairness among students should be upheld. The teacher provides an *interactional explanation* emphasising a social reality anybody could face, but the participant feels that education could do better in promoting general *fairness* among students.

Example 7.2 (*taking responsibility*)

我觉得匈牙利人挺爱推卸责任的。那个问题就是他造成的，但他就会找各种理由搪塞，就是很多理由。比如我去帮忙客户买车子，就是已经付了定金了，合同都签了，说要订那个车子，后来又说那辆车怎么怎么了，又毁约了。后来客户想让他赔偿一点什么东西，他就说那又不是他的问题，就是我发现他们很爱找理由，就是这都不是他的问题，就好好多好多理由来跟你讲。

I think some Hungarians like to shirk responsibility. The problem was apparently caused by them, but they would keep finding all kinds of excuses. They have so many excuses. For example, I brought a customer (Chinese migrant) to a dealer to buy a car. The customer had already paid a deposit and signed the contract for the order of a car. Then something went wrong with the car and the dealer broke the contract. The customer wanted him (the dealer) to compensate for it. The dealer simply told them that it was not his fault. I found that they really kept looking for excuses, saying that this is not caused by them. They could find so many excuses.

(April 2018)

The interaction recalled in Example 7.2 is about making excuses, while I categorise the normative theme of the example as (avoiding) taking responsibility, which is the purpose of making these excuses. The Chinese participant shares more than one such interactional experience with Hungarians about the responsibility issue. The *interactional explanation* by the Hungarian automobile dealer has been interpreted by the Chinese participant as responsibility evasion. The *interactional explanations* are of external uncontrollable attribution. Nevertheless, it does not receive positive evaluation as the evaluation pattern is predicted by the attribution type. This is because taking responsibility, for the Chinese, is one critical normative theme in a business context that overrules the ordinary evaluation pattern. The car dealer's breach of contract (or verbal agreement) and refusal to compensate presents the problem of responsibility taking. As there is typically more than one normative theme in the

metadiscourse, for example, this interaction also involves the theme of *faith* and *business convention*.

Example 7.3 (*compromise in the overall situation*)

他们老是说自己今天有这个事，明天有那个事，昨天我就说了一句“都聊了两个月了，还没聊出个时间来……如果想来，就自然能安排”。……我不明白一个同学聚会可以说两个月，我觉得有点烦了。

There is always someone who says that they have things to do on this (proposed) date, and they have something else to do on the next (proposed) day. Yesterday I said (in the group), “We have been talking (about this get-together) for two months, and there has been no agreement on the date ... If you really want to come together, I think things can be arranged anyway.” ...I just don't understand that it could take two months to agree on one date for the class reunion. I feel it is a little annoying.

(April 2018)

Example 7.3 also involves more than one normative theme. In the case of teamwork or cooperation, being able to compromise in the overall situation becomes an important merit valued by Chinese. The bigger picture of a situation usually overrules individual preference; as the comments of the Chinese participant go “If you really want to come, I think things can be arranged anyway.” Everyone should be able to make compromises to reach some joint decision. The normative theme of other-attentiveness can be seen from Example 7.3 too, but this is discussed in more detail in the next example.

Example 7.4 (*other-attentiveness*)

他们就按照工作时间来。如果是中国人开的商店，如果客人在你要关门之前甚至在你关门之后来，他都可以说（接待你）。匈牙利人是不干的，如果他快关门了，他(她)就说“我要关门了”（笑），说你明天再来。中国人开的商店肯定不会这样的。

They work strictly according to working hours. If it is at a Chinese shop, if some customers come right before the store closes, or even right after it closed, the shop assistant would receive them. Hungarians are not like this. If they are about to close the shop soon, they would say "I am closing" (laughing). And they ask you to come tomorrow. Chinese shops are definitely not like this.

(September 2019)

In Example 7.4, the participant compares the behaviours of Chinese and Hungarian shops in the way they deal with customers who enter the store at closing time. Entering into a shop, no matter whether the customer is making a verbal enquiry or not, is considered as a request for service. The Hungarian shop assistant uses an *interactional explanation* “I am closing” to refuse service. The Chinese participant highlights the difference in this behaviour twice, by saying “Hungarians are not like this” and “Chinese shops are definitely not like this.” These utterances belong to the sub-types of contrastive meanings (deny and counter) in the appraisal system (Martin & White, 2005), which indicate negative evaluations. This negative evaluation demonstrates the normative theme of other-attentiveness. Asians, especially Chinese, are other-oriented in interactions (Fukushima, 2020; Chen, 2004, 2006), which means that the interactant should attend to the other and prioritise the other’s needs. The Hungarian *interactional explanation* in Example 7.4 is obviously self-oriented. This example also involves the business convention.

By identifying the *interactional explanations* in the metadiscourse data, I not only restore the exact snippet of the interactions that hold meaning for the Chinese interview participants, but I also infer the evaluations from the narratives and draw out the normative themes that are behind the *interactional explanations*. I have exhausted the metadiscourse data covering the occasions of interactional experiences in service encounter, business/institutional meeting, and casual socialisation amongst people with different interpersonal relationships. These recurrent discursive norms of *interactional explanation* constitute the IE Model of Chinese. The possibility remains that more themes of *interactional explanation* might emerge beyond the present data, but, similarly to universal value studies (Schwartz, 2007), these recurrent normative themes are finite. Ultimately, the current intercultural IE Model of Chinese could be developed and modified over time so that it can continue to function efficiently in interaction analysis involving Chinese interactants.

In the following section, I would like to attempt a general model of *interactional explanation*, the IE Model, based on the studies I have conducted so far.

### 7.3 A Theory of Interactional Explanation

A theory of *interactional explanation* should assist the interaction analysis and reveal the discursively constructed normative systems. In the present section, I attempt to formulate an IE Model that can be applied to analyse and demonstrate how pragmatic norms are specified in the discursive process.

### 7.3.1 *Essential Attributes of IE and General IE Models*

I briefly introduced the essential attributes of interactional explanations in Chapter 3 while talking about the rationale of the studies reported in this work. These essential attributes, together with the findings and study results from the works reported in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, establish the foundation for my proposal of a general research model for pragmatic interactional explanations.

- High occurrence

*Interactional explanation* is a highly frequent pragmatic behaviour in interactions. Most instances in the earlier cited examples are prominent in the interactants' experience, as problematic interactional experiences are usually salient to interactants. It is, therefore, comparatively easy for the interactants to recall. However, there are a lot more inconspicuous *interactional explanations* in conversations (e.g., Example 7.5 in Chapter 7), which successfully fulfil information appeals. The interaction, therefore, moves on smoothly without much saliency.

- Being a reaction with illocutionary force

The information appeals in interactions, to which *interactional explanations* are supposed to respond, might take different explicit or implicit forms. However, these information appeals in different forms can always be paraphrased into some inquisitive discourse. In other words, an *interactional explanation* manifests itself in an interactional response with the type of illocutionary force similar to that of an answer to a question.

- Context dependence

As a response to an information appeal, an *interactional explanation* is never a free-standing utterance but a co-constructed pragmatic behaviour by the interlocutors. Conventional or ritual interactions might be detached from some particular contextual factors, but on the other hand, it is the macro context that firstly brings about the particular convention or ritual. The meaning communicated by an *interactional explanation* is mediated within the interaction and the context.

- Undetermined linguistic markers



*Interactional explanations* do not necessarily bear special linguistic markers. With or without linguistic markers, an *interactional explanation* characterises itself by the fact that it fulfils an information appeal in an ongoing interaction and communicates more than a simple informative message. Despite the lack of linguistic markers, interactants can keenly discern interactional explanations in interactions.

- Diverse information and functions

From highly formal exchanges to casual social encounters, *interactional explanations* arise from various interactional aims, which determine that *interactional explanations* enclose diverse types/aspects of information for the realisation of different interactional functions. The interactants make decisions on what constitutes *interactional explanations* during the interchange. This decision is subject to many factors, for example, interpersonal relationships, interactional conventions or rituals associated with the interactions, etc.

- Instant evaluation

Interactants generally have sharp intuition regarding explanatory utterances. Interactants distinguish an *interactional explanation* from the other part of the conversation and make instant evaluation of it as either satisfactory or insufficient during an interaction. The interactants' interpretation of an *interactional explanation* might diverge from the expectation of the explanation provider. In this case, the *interactional explanation* usually does not satisfy the information appeal in the interaction and receives a negative evaluation.

The abovementioned bases of the general IE Model affect the dynamics of interactional explanations. The IE Model works in the following two processes:

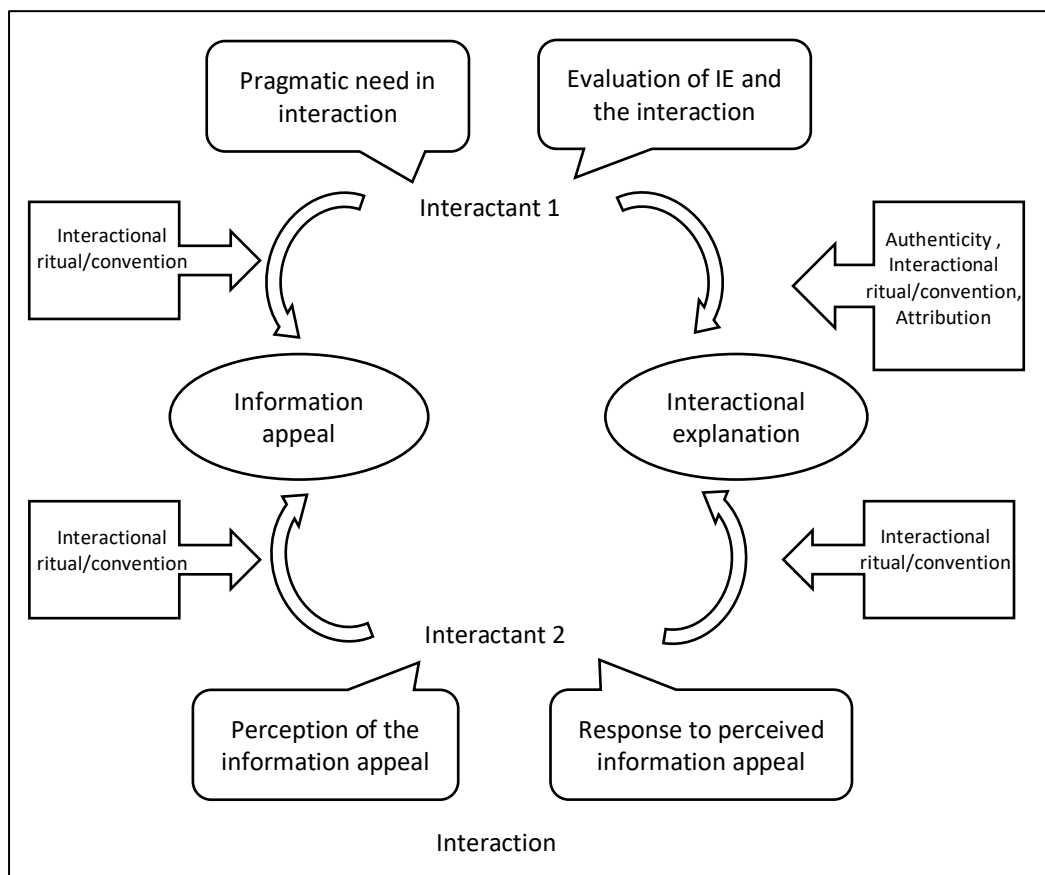
- (a) As a highly contextualised pragmatic phenomenon co-constructed by the interactants, an IE can address diverse aspects of information pertinent to the information appeal developed in the interaction; the aspect of the information addressed in an IE is influenced by the interpersonal relationships of the interactants.
- (b) IE addressees make instant interpretations and evaluations of the IE provided; this process becomes salient when an IE contradicts the assumed discursive norm(s).

Figure 7.1 presents the IE Model in interaction. The frame of the figure represents the interaction between interactant 1 and interactant 2. Interactant 1 feels a pragmatic need from the ongoing interaction and indicates an information appeal. Interactant 2 perceives the

information appeal and makes a response in the form of IE to it. However, the pragmatic need from interactant 1 could be a zero need. Interactant 1 might have no pragmatic need for information according to the interactional ritual/convention applied in the interaction. Then there is no intended explicit or implicit information appeal. The perception of the information appeal from interactant 2 could also be a zero need. When interactant 2 does not perceive any information appeal or perceives an unintended information appeal, interactant 2 would make no appropriate response in the interaction.

**Figure 7.1**

*The IE Model.*



When the pragmatic need of interactant 1 and the perception of interactant 2 are not consistent, instances of missing or undesirable IE in the interaction occur (i.e., Figure 6.1 and Table 6.3 in Chapter 6 detail these statistics). Namely, when interactant 2 does not perceive any information appeal and thus offers no IE, the interaction ends up with some missing IE. The opposite situation ends up with some undesirable IE. If interactant 2 perceives the intended information appeal from the interaction, interactant 2 makes a response to it in the form of an

IE. The perception of interactant 2 is key to the IE phenomenon. The top right textbox of Figure 7.1 shows that interactant 1 instantly perceives and evaluates the given IE from the interaction. The evaluation is influenced by the authenticity of the IE, interactional rituals/conventions, and the attribution process made by interactant 1.

### ***7.3.2 Interaction Analysis Using the IE Model***

First of all, I would like to quote one short conversation of my own with a colleague to illustrate the pragmatics of *interactional explanation*. This conversation took place one morning when K came in to the office earlier than he usually would. When I arrived there and saw K, I initiated the following dialogue:

#### Example 7.5

P: Hi, you are early.

K: Oh, I came for the radio interview.

While a single basic example could elicit various interpretations from various theoretical perspectives, I am choosing Example 7.5 to demonstrate the theoretical consideration of the IE model. First of all, this piece of short conversation could happen frequently with colleagues, families and friends, or even strangers in daily life. *Interactional explanations* are ubiquitous in life, with or without linguistic flagging, as the exploration in Chapter 4 has already confirmed that the occurrence of *interactional explanation* does not necessarily bear linguistic markers. Interactants tend to recognise both the information appeal and the corresponding *interactional explanation*, but sometimes (or most of the time) an *interactional explanation* easily escapes our notice as the information provided seamlessly fits into the information gap and the conversation smoothly diverges into other topics.

In Example 7.5, by “I came for the radio interview,” K is making an *interactional explanation* to clarify their unusual early arrival at the office on that day. K perceives the information appeal from the remark of P, “you are early.” The remark of P is of no interrogative

cue in the linguistic presentation, but it seems the question of “why are you earlier than usual?” is perceived by K.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, the information enclosed in K’s *interactional explanation* is, to a great extent, determined by the interpersonal relations of the interlocuters. K and P are colleagues working closely together. Thus, they are familiar with each other’s work routines. They co-define the concept of ‘being early’ in the conversation as “being earlier than usual.” It could very well be imagined that the explanatory answer in the example could be withheld in different ways if the conversation was initiated by some colleague K seldom meets. One possible answer from K could be “Yeah, busy!”, which stresses not the exact reason for being early at the office, but the whole situation of having a long working day and starting early. Another bold assumption is that K would say “Don’t ask!” to some old friend who runs into him. Literally, “Don’t ask!” does not offer any “product” of explanation in the context, but meanwhile, much is communicated for that situation. These speculations show the fact that an *interactional explanation* is conducted based on the interpersonal relationship and carries more than its literal meaning. Consequently, an *interactional explanation* can do many things in interactions. I will shortly come back to this example again.

In this study, I define *interactional explanation* as the response to a perceived information appeal from the interaction. Based on the studies I have conducted and for the purpose of making investigations into the discursive dynamics brought by *interactional explanations*, I propose the following working IE model:

- (a) As a highly contextualised pragmatic phenomenon co-constructed by the interactants, an IE can address diverse aspects of the information pertinent to the information appeal developed in the interaction; the aspect of the information addressed in an IE is influenced by the interpersonal relationships of the interactants.
- (b) An IE addressee makes instant interpretation and evaluation of the IE provided; this process becomes salient when an IE contradicts the assumed discursive norm(s).

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<sup>13</sup> Admittedly, Example 7.5 could be interpreted by Gricean and Neo-Gricean theories of conversational implicature. The principles of communication efficiency and maximum relevance could also describe this short conversation in terms of relevance theory. The above interpretation from the IE perspective does not contradict these general pragmatic principles but emphasises one particular determinacy that the IE model and the corresponding intercultural IE model could provide in the determination and prediction of implicatures in interaction. Meanwhile, Example 7.5 presents one delightful IE occasion, which is usually unnoticed by interlocuters. In the case of problematic scenarios, the IE model and the corresponding intercultural IE models assume more explanatory capacity in interpreting the potential clashes in conversational implicatures and troublesome interactions.

I will now discuss Example 7.5 again, bearing in mind the working IE Model above. First, the interactants P and K co-construct the concept of “being early” as “being earlier than usual.” K, consequently, perceives P’s remark of “being early” as an information appeal. In order to fulfil the information appeal, K presents the IE “I came for the radio interview” to explain the behavioural discrepancy between his usual working hours and unusual presence.

Secondly, the interactants P and K are colleagues working closely together, so P shares the background knowledge of the “radio interview” and knows exactly what K is talking about. But a colleague who does not work closely with K might naturally have the question of “what radio interview” is K talking about? Apparently, this particular piece of IE does not fill the gap of knowledge for those with different interpersonal relationships. In addition, as I have speculated and discussed earlier, a colleague whom K seldom meets might feel overwhelmed by the “radio interview” IE, but satisfied with the hypothesised IE “Yeah, busy!” Details of what K does might not be the communicative purpose of the colleague at all. Similarly, “Don’t ask!” or other potential reactions of K might fit the interactions with colleagues with different interpersonal relationships. These reactions illustrate the diverse aspects of the information of “being early” at the office. The interpersonal relations between the colleagues could influence the content of an IE.

Finally, the interpretation and evaluation of the IE happen in the real time of the interaction. The IE in Example 7.5 smoothly fits into the information gap of the interaction. Their conversation smoothly diverges into other topics immediately. Thus, there is no pragmatic failure that can mark the IE and the interaction salient to the interactants. Indeed, Example 7.5 presents an interaction which is the least salient to the interactants as it does not bluntly violate any discursive norms taken by the interactants. This particular example has been recorded not because of its saliency but due to the sensitivity the researcher has to this particular discursive phenomenon. The post facto interview is likely to elicit more of the salient interactions with the evaluation registered in the memory of the participants. This is largely the reason why most of the IE metadiscourse data involve problematic and negatively evaluated interactions between the Chinese and the Hungarian interactants.

Similar incidents to Example 7.5 are, to a great extent, taken for granted in life. Nonetheless, the analysis does allow a snapshot into largely ignored interactional moments and show how the IE Model works in the interaction analysis.

Note that P and K also hold different linguacultural backgrounds, Chinese and Hungarian. The IE Model of Chinese proposed in the previous section can be applied in an analysis of the small interaction in Example 7.5. When P prompts “you are early,” the utterance

presents itself as a confirmative statement, which does not really hold the same illocutionary force as the “why” question inferred by K. This reflects the Chinese hierarchy office norm (institutional convention in the IE Model of Chinese) in P that one is not supposed to challenge people with higher rankings. Since K is the head of the office, P is not supposed to ask a question like “why are you early?” to her superior. On the other hand, as interactants usually have acute perception of an information appeal from the interaction, K derives the information appeal for the reason of his unusually early arrival at the office. Since both of them are colleagues working closely together in the same office, K feels it is natural to be curious about one’s unusual schedule change. Interactants make instant interpretation and evaluation of an IE. K offers an IE, which slightly overwhelms P, as P does not intend to make the appeal for this piece of information. However, their interpersonal relationship, as colleagues working closely together, accommodates this divergence of information appeal and the IE. The conversation moves on swiftly and smoothly through the excitement of the radio interview.

### 7.3.3 Typology of IE

Considering that diverse types of information can be encompassed in interactional explanations, a typology of interactional explanation would be constructive for systematic research on the topic.

**Definite IE versus indefinite IE.** As referred to in the foundation of the general theory of IE, *interactional explanations* might or might not bear linguistic cues. Accordingly, the occurrence of the linguistic markers can differentiate *interactional explanations* into definite IEs and indefinite IEs.

**Definite IE.** The definite IE refers to the *interactional explanation* with some type of linguistic marker indicating the explanatory function in an interaction. The study in Chapter 4 summarises these linguistic markers, which include various causal connectives ( i.e., *because, for, so, etc.*), adverbs ( i.e., *actually, just, really, etc.*), discourse particles (i.e., *you know*), and several particular sentence patterns with the dispositional use of interpretive verbs, such as *believe, think, guess, etc.*

**Indefinite IE.** Contrary to the definite IE, an indefinite IE does not carry linguistic markers in interactions. Such a type of IE frequently appears in the corpora and datasets studied

in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. The interactants are aware of the existence of IEs in interactions and swiftly make evaluations. However, without the apparent linguistic marker, these IEs cannot be efficiently located and collected by text search.

There are plenty of examples presented in Chapter 4 which illustrate *definite IEs* and *indefinite IEs*. Closely related to this categorisation is the style of the information appeals in the interactions. The linguistic features of the information appeal (in English) are studied and summarised in Chapter 4. These presentations include Wh-questions, Yes/no questions and confirmative questions. If we classify IEs by the illocutionary force in the corresponding prepositioned information appeals, we can identify, at least, two different types of IEs accordingly: *directly sought IE* and *indirectly sought IE*.

***Directly sought IE.*** Directly sought IE refers to those IEs which occur when explicit information appeals are expressed in interactions—the IEs following the informative appeals with explicit illocutionary inquisitions. Example 4.15 and 4.16 in Chapter 4 present many examples of such *directly sought IEs*.

***Indirectly sought IE.*** Indirectly sought IE refers to the IE that occurs when the interactant perceives the pragmatic need for an IE from the context of an interaction, though no information appeal is expressed in the interaction. In other words, the interactant infers the information appeal for an IE in the interaction. For example, in the speech event of request or apology, the interactant usually makes *an IE* to facilitate the realisation of the speech event by indicating the reason for the request or the reason of the prior offenses for the apology. These IEs are usually provided without the other interlocutor's explicit information appeal.

Example 7.6 is a short excerpt from a TV drama in Chinese. The interaction does not have a pre-positioned information appeal, but the *indirectly sought IE* is provided together with an apology.

#### Example 7.6

After hearing how her husband has been rescued by Chunhua from prison, Cuiqing finds that she has misunderstood the situation earlier and has made some inappropriate remarks about her husband and Chunhua the other day. Without any explicit appeal from the interaction, she starts the following interaction.

Cuiqing:            Though our family business is making pickle, we are a decent wealthy family. The other day when I entered that courtyard, I thought,

Zhensheng, you are the master of our Yan Family, you should care about your reputation and the family decency. That's why I said those things I shouldn't have. I actually wronged you and Chunhua.

Zhensheng: Those who don't know are not to blame!

(Memories of Peking 2019, Episode 26, 00:34'45")

In this brief conversation, Cuiqing has made an apology without using IFID. She explicitly indicates the explanation for her prior inappropriate remarks by "That's why...". Zhensheng's following forgiving reply "Those who don't know are not to blame" also confirms the remediation made by this apology. Comparatively speaking, *indirectly sought IE* depends more on the interactant's perception and might bring pragmatic difficulty in interaction.

The classifications presented above focus on the linguistic presentation of the IE-related utterances. These types of IEs may appear to be more for technical handling than for research purposes. Nevertheless, if contextual variables (such as the speech events involved in the interaction, the interpersonal relationship between the interactants, and the public or private discourse contexts, etc.) could be managed in IE data collection, the classifications of such IEs should have potential to yield interesting research results.

**Informative IE versus dispositional IE.** Another way to categorise IEs is by the different functions served in interactions. This pragmatic phenomenon can be differentiated into informative IE and dispositional IE. An informative IE aims to offer and clarify specific issues in interactions. Many examples in earlier chapters present this type of IE. Example 3.1 in Chapter 3 presents an interaction experience of a Chinese doctor with a Hungarian patient, in which the information appeal is explicitly expressed. The IE-related problem in interaction is derived from the differences in the information expected and offered by the two interactants. From the perspective of the intercultural IE Model of Chinese, it involves specific institutional conventions under the public/business/institutional context.

On the other hand, a dispositional IE attempts to express the appealed information by indicating one's position in a particular condition or activity associated with the interaction. Example 3.2 in Chapter 3 presents such an IE. The utterance "It's only for business" from one martial arts fighter presents the case that the pragmatic function of an IE could be perceived differently by different parties.

The counterpart of explanation in Chinese, "解释" (*jieshi*), perfectly reflects this particular typology of IE. The Chinese word *jieshi* consists of two characters. The first one



“解”(jie) means to separate, to disintegrate, or to solve, which corresponds with the function of informative IE. The second one “释”(shi) means to explain, or to interpret, which conforms to the function of dispositional IE. Generally speaking, an interactional explanation accompanying the speech acts, for example, an apology or a request, is a typical dispositional one, but this typology of an IE should be viewed as a continuum, since the pragmatic function could be mediated and possibly transformed in an interaction.

**Informative IE.** The informative IE refers to those IEs that fulfil the explicit informative need of the interaction. Such IEs usually present as declarative messages in an interaction. The informative IE functions beyond a declarative message, though the function is comparatively straightforward. The type of messages encompassed in such IEs are of key importance in the fulfilment of their functions.

An eminent feature of the informative IEs is that it is difficult to determine the attribution types of the IE contents. The attribution process is made by the interactants to determine the multidimensional cause of the explained topic, which includes the locus and the controllability dimensions, etc. The contents of the informative IEs usually do not hold causal nature. Thus, the interactants are not able to attribute these IEs. These IEs are not in the attribution process, hence they could be called *non-attributional IEs* too. However, it does not mean the informative IEs are not evaluated. The evaluation of the informative IEs centres around whether the IEs can fulfil the information appeals in interactions. Example 3.1 in Chapter 3 presents a case of an unsatisfied evaluation of such IEs.

**Dispositional IE.** The dispositional IE aims at conveying the appealed information by indicating a particular position in a condition or action associated with the interaction. In the abovementioned Example 3.2, the IE “It’s only for business” is provided to declare a particular position of the interactant in the pre-game event. The dispositional IE very often accompanies some speech acts as a means of realising the speech acts. For example, the *explanation or account* in the speech act of apology and the *grounder* in the speech act of request. One feature of dispositional IEs is that these IEs usually go into the interactants’ attribution process for evaluation. Thus, they could be called *attributional IEs* as well, even though the attribution is not always straightforward. “It’s only for business” in Example 3.2 presents as an IE with external and uncontrollable attribution, from which the IE provider does not intend to take any

personal responsibility for his earlier offence—a particular position in the action associated with the interaction.

The attribution of the dispositional IE in the following Example 7.7 is not as straightforward as the IE in Example 3.2.

Example 7.7

Dr Lightman knew that he would have to talk with the publishing house which had been expecting his manuscript to be finished. Since he had not yet started writing the book, he went to Tores, his employee, and asked her to call into his office, and inform him of an emergency as an excuse for him to get away.

Lightman: Tores, in 2 minutes, right, I want you to come into my office and tell me I am needed urgently.

...

Tores: Oh, yeah. No problem. Uh...*why*?

(Lightman was already on his way out, so he turned back)

Lightman: Is it the Tores group already, or is it still the Lightman group?

(Lie to me, 2011, Season 3 Episode 1, 00:02'29")

Example 7.7 is taken from a TV drama in English. Following the explicit information appeal “why?”, there is a rhetorical question by Lightman served as an IE in response to Tores’s inquisition. The attribution of the rhetorical question is not as straightforward as “It’s only for business.”

First, some background is needed for this exploration, Lightman is the owner of the group in which Tores is working. As the owner of the business, he wields power over the business actions and decisions. By the rhetorical question “Is it the Tores group already, or is it still the Lightman group,” a point is made by Lightman that he can decide on what Tores should do without answering “why” questions in the real sense. Thus, the attribution becomes clear that the rhetorical question expresses an internal+controllable attribution. Interestingly, the rhetorical question presents an IE without “product,” which is analysed under the pragmatic concept of *interactional explanation*.

The typology of *informative* and *dispositional IE* is very important in the study of this pragmatic phenomenon. In the present studies, there is a limited number of *informative IEs*. For example, the metadiscourse dataset collected by the ex post facto interview does not

contain *informative IEs*. It does not mean that the *informative IEs* are usually non-problematic. The problematic *informative IEs* like that in Example 3.1 are usually collected through field notes and observations. Information as a form of clarification does not usually hold causal relation in it but provides a piece of pure information. Thus, the evaluation process of the informative IEs is different from the *dispositional* process. The evaluation relies solely on the fulfilment of the information appeal. In addition, similarly to what happened in Example 3.1, if the information appeal is not fulfilled, the information inquisition could occur again in the interaction, which could cause confusion and frustration within interactions.

**Ritual IE.** The studies in Chapter 5 affirm that the application of IEs in speech acts can be influenced by many factors. The studies in Chapter 6 confirm that interactional ritual is one important factor for the use of IE since it specifies on what occasions IEs are indispensable, though this influence is a continuum. Following the analysis of the metadiscourse data in Chapter 6, there should exist certain ritual explanations under particular contexts. It is highly likely that such ritual IEs vary across different linguacultures. Example 6.6 in Chapter 6 presents the internal+controllable IE the Hungarian provided for being late at the meeting with the Chinese participant. The interaction in Example 7.8 is a continuation of the interaction cited in Example 6.6. to illustrate the ritual explanation expected by the Chinese participant.

#### Example 7.8

- 受访者： 咱们会说“哎呀对不起堵车了。”
- 研究者： 对，随便什么…
- 受访者： 是啊，交警把我拦下了，我突然碰见一个什么事儿，家里有个急事儿。一般都会说这样的理由。
- Participant: We would probably say, “Ah...there was a traffic jam.”
- Researcher: Right. Anything...
- Participant: For example, ...the traffic police stopped me. I ran into something, or I had some emergency at home. We usually make some excuses like these.

When being late for a meeting with a friend, a Chinese person would feel obliged to offer some type of explanation. The occasion of being late at a meeting with a friend requires a ritual of justifiable explanation towards the friend. It is necessary to make up the damage you

have caused by letting your friend wait. Furthermore, compared to the Hungarian IE (“I forgot it”, see Example 6.6 in Chapter 6 for further information) the IEs for lateness are not expected to be anything which could imply carelessness, which Chinese friends rate as most undesirable. In Example 7.8, the possible ritual IEs (underlined) proposed by the participant in the instance of being late for meetings are “traffic jam” and “emergency”, etc.

In ritual IE, there is again a problem of authenticity. The proposed IEs in Example 7.8 are all made-up IEs. But in real interactions, the interactants do not probe into the authenticity of such ritual IEs, if, of course, there is no obvious external resources exposing that the IE is fake. This is the same as the authenticity screening described in the general IE Model in the previous section. Ritual IEs work in interactions with a default of authenticity by the Gricean maxims.

As illustrated in Example 7.8, people sometimes make specific IEs under particular circumstances. Such IEs are so routinely made that they become ritual/conventional IEs in corresponding situations. The typology of ritual IEs provides another interesting research prospect in pragmatics and contrastive pragmatics.

The typologies of IE can be integrated with the IE Model in interaction analysis, which can further the analysis of this pragmatic phenomenon in discourse and is constructive to a systematic theory of IE.

## 7.4 Conclusion

In contrast to the causal focus of scientific explanation and psychological attribution, I define *interactional explanation* as the response to a perceived information appeal from an interaction. The concept of *interactional explanation* embraces diverse information exchanges in interactions based on an information appeal. This chapter firstly formalises a working IE Model of Chinese based on the metadiscourse data. This Model, which highlights discursive norms with Chinese characteristics, is intended to facilitate interaction analysis in order to identify interaction problems with Chinese characteristics. Furthermore, based on the studies on this topic, especially the evaluation study of *interactional explanation* in speech acts and in general discourse, I summarise the essential attributes of IE and propose a general working IE Model for interaction analysis. The application of this IE Model facilitates interaction analysis to identify and determine the underlying causes of a variety of interactional challenges.

Considering the diverse information encompassed in *interactional explanations*, a typology would be constructive to a systematic understanding of this pragmatic phenomenon. An IE typology would also be practical and helpful in the undertaking of focused interaction analysis.

In the following chapter, I first summarise the studies that have been conducted on the topic by answering the research questions presented in Chapter 1. Additionally, I outline my thoughts regarding future IE-focused research.

## 8. Conclusion

The present study considers an *interactional explanation* as a reactive pragmatic phenomenon co-constructed by the interactants. I define *interactional explanation* as the response to a perceived information appeal in interaction. The information appeal is usually pertinent to certain behaviour either taking place or being alluded to by the interactants and can be explicitly or implicitly formed.

In this chapter, I first summarise the studies conducted on *interactional explanation* by answering the research questions presented in Chapter 1. Following the summary, I present future research orientations.

### 8.1 Summary of the Study

In this section, I summarise the studies presented in the previous chapters and answer the research questions one by one. I also discuss the proposed IE models.

#### 8.1.1 Linguistic Features of Interactional Explanation

Research question one: Do *interactional explanations* bear any linguistic features and patterns?

I explored multiple corpora in English and Chinese to answer the first research question. The study results from the two linguacultures do not present significant differences. The findings of this investigation show that causal connectives, such as *because* and *for* and their counterparts *yinwei* and *shiweile* in Chinese, can indicate *interactional explanations* in discourse, but the interactants do not usually use causal connectives to mark their *interactional explanations*. In addition to causal connectives, a variety of linguistic devices are found to be used in both linguacultures. These features include certain adverbs, discourse particles and sentence patterns (see Table 4.7 and Table 4.13 in Chapter 4). For example, “just” and “really” in English, *qishi* (actually), *zhende* (really) in Chinese are among the most common devices (adverbs) used to signify *interactional explanations*.

However, only a very small proportion of *interactional explanations* are marked by these causal connectives in real interactions. Despite the variety of linguistic features discovered by the corpus analysis, studies in Chapter 4 illustrate that abundant *interactional explanations* do not bear linguistic cues. Thus, a significant majority of *interactional*

*explanations* are not identifiable by any linguistic cues. Linguistic cues are not an advisable and efficient way to locate *interactional explanations* in discourse.

*Interactional explanations* occur in interactions in response to information appeals. Consequently, the expression of information appeals can also be indicative for the study of *interactional explanations*. The explicit information appeals are mainly indicated by wh-questions and yes-no questions (see Table 4.8 in Chapter 4), but considerable *interactional explanations* are provided without prepositioned information appeals.

In sum, interactants do not rely heavily on causal connectives or other linguistic markers to detect explanatory messages in interactions. They do not even need an explicit information appeal to perceive the information appeal in interaction. The interactants tend to recognise information appeal and the corresponding *interactional explanation*. The use of causal connectives or other patterns can definitely emphasise the existence of certain *interactional explanations* in interactions. Further systematic investigation is needed, with the support of appropriate datasets, to determine whether the use of linguistic markers or other indicative patterns could convey different interactional nuances in the phenomenon of *interactional explanation*.

### **8.1.2 Interactional Explanation in Speech Acts**

Research question two: What is the relationship between *interactional explanation* and the performance of the speech acts of request and apology?

The second research question concerns the *interactional explanations* used in the speech acts. I conducted several studies on request and apology in Chapter 5 to answer the second research question.

The study on the academic email request data in Chinese and German demonstrated that *interactional explanations* are frequently used in the performance of email requests by both Chinese and Germans. The follow-up online surveys with the linguacultural insiders of Chinese and German presented a highly positive correlation between the evaluation of *interactional explanation* in the request and the evaluation of the request email in both linguacultures. However, the survey results also present different aims behind the use of *interactional explanations* in requests. German speakers use *interactional explanations* in a request as a piece of evidence showing their credibility. An *interactional explanation* is a self-oriented practice for Germans. Chinese speakers use *interactional explanations* mainly as a way of showing respect and being polite to others. Chinese people seem to regard the use of an

*interactional explanation* as an other-oriented device to incur benevolence. The difference behind the use of *interactional explanation* indicates that Chinese and German speakers might hold different criteria in judging good *interactional explanations* in requests.

Moreover, I conducted two meta-analyses of the speech act of apology with a focus on the *interactional explanation* in the performance. The first meta-analysis is based on the studies of apology across all the linguacultures the retrieved works encompass. The second is based on studies of apology in Chinese. Both meta-analyses found *interactional explanation*—a key realisation strategy of apology—is one strategy often used in apology performance. The first meta-analysis affirmed the fact that the use of *interactional explanation* in apology is indeed linguacultural specific. For example, Arabic speakers adopt significantly more *interactional explanations* in apology than other language speakers, while Japanese speakers use significantly fewer interactional explanations than other language speakers, to the extent of the studies retrieved in the meta-analysis (see Table 5.2 in Chapter 5).

In addition to the linguacultural influence, power distance, social distance between the interactants, and the severity of the offence also play different roles in the use of interactional explanation in apology. I compared the meta-regressions of interactional explanation in Chinese and English. The most interesting finding was the influence of power distance between interactants. When a Chinese apologiser is lower in the power ranking than the offended side, the apologiser is significantly more likely to use *interactional explanations* in the apology performance. However, power distance has no significant influence on the use of *interactional explanation* in apologies in English, no matter whether the apologiser is lower or higher in power ranking compared to the offended. The coefficients between power distance and the use of *interactional explanation* in apologies in English are negative, which indicates that the existence of power distance could only lower the possibility of the use of *interactional explanation* in the apology performance.

Furthermore, when the interactants are socially close, a lot more Chinese apologisers choose to use *interactional explanations* in apologies. The severity of the aggression involved in the apology does not significantly influence the use of *interactional explanation* among Chinese apologisers. On the other hand, the severity of the offence plays a more significant influence on English-speaking apologisers.

There are many other study characteristics from retrieved apology studies which demonstrate interesting patterns in the use of *interactional explanation*. For example, the meta-statistics show that among different age groups of Chinese speakers, the use of explanation in apology is positively and significantly correlated with the age of participants. The older the



participants, the more explanations are used in the performance of apology. A developmental model could indicate that the appropriate use of *interactional explanation* can be acquired. Although the influence from age on the use of *interactional explanation* is not fully identified in the meta-regression, further investigation is expected to examine the relationship between age difference and the use of *interactional explanation*.

Among the retrieved works on apology of the two meta-analyses, very few studies involved the participants' (first order) evaluations of apologies. Thus, the meta-analyses do not include any correlation between the perception and evaluation of the *interactional explanations* and the corresponding apology performance. Thus, the perception and evaluation of apology could be further studied in correlation with the use of interactional explanation.

### ***8.1.3 Factors Influencing the Evaluation of Interactional Explanation***

Research question three: What factors can influence the interactants' evaluation of *interactional explanations*?

In Chapter 6, I studied the interactants' evaluation of interactional explanation based on the metadiscourse data collected from the ex post facto interviews. I focused on the influence of interactional ritual/convention and the attribution of explanation in interactions.

The data analysis showed that interactants' evaluations of *interactional explanations* are highly affected by the interactional ritual/convention practised by the interlocutors in interactions. When both parties apply consistent interactional rituals or conventions in the interaction, the *interactional explanations* and the corresponding interactions receive the highest positive evaluations in the data, though most interactions collected by the meta pragmatic interviews are problematic, since these instances are more salient to the participants. There are also a few instances in which *interactional explanations* have been sought in vain or undesirable *interactional explanations* have been provided.

The study also finds that the Chinese participants' evaluation of *interactional explanations* shows a pattern in attribution types. Most of the Hungarian *interactional explanations* mentioned in the metadiscourse data received negative evaluations from the Chinese participants. This was mainly because problematic *interactional explanations* are salient to the interactants and are more likely to be recalled during the interview than peaceful ones. Despite this, most negative evaluations occurred on the attribution type of internal+controllable *interactional explanations*. The external+uncontrollable attribution received the most positive evaluations compared to the *interactional explanation* of other

attribution types. The *interactional explanations* of the internal+uncontrollable attribution received considerable neutral evaluations. The linguacultural differences invoked in such interactions are usually recognised by the Chinese. The data analysis also affirms that the Chinese participants provided and evaluated the attribution types of *interactional explanations* consistently.

#### **8.1.4 Modelling Interactional Explanation**

The overarching research question of the present work is to establish a replicable research model of *interactional explanations*. I completed the modelling attempts in two steps (reported in Chapter 7). I firstly propose an intercultural IE Model of Chinese based on the metadiscourse data collected by the study reported in Chapter 6. Then I propose a general model of *interactional explanation* (IE Model).

**Intercultural IE Model: IE Model of Chinese.** The linguacultural influence on *interactional explanations* has been confirmed in the studies reported in Chapters 5 and 6. The linguacultural influence of a certain social, cultural group, a business, an institution, or diverse communities, etc. might formulate different normative systems reflecting diverse fundamental values in that culture. These normative systems shape the cultural members' perception and assessment of the interactional contexts, interpersonal relationships, and the pragmatic engagement of interactional rituals/conventions. In addition, interactional rituals/conventions trigger awareness of certain rights and obligations entailed by the perceived interpersonal relationship within a social network. The linguaculture-derived discursive differences in language use have a confirmed impact on the use and evaluation of appropriate *interactional explanation* behaviours.

As a result, establishing intercultural IE models could aid in identifying the pragmatic challenges in interactions with particular linguacultural members. An intercultural IE model could be established with appropriate datasets involving the interacting members of specific (lingua)cultural communities. Against this background, I started with the modelling of an IE model from the Chinese linguacultural perspective. Based on the metadiscourse data collected in the evaluation study, I concluded with 11 Chinese IE themes under two types of interactional contexts: the public/business/institution context and the private context. These normative themes (Table 8.1) are recurrent in the data about intercultural interactions involving Chinese interactants. These IE themes include *business/institutional conventions*, *fairness*, *faith*,

*honesty, professional ethics, taking responsibility, compromise to the overall situation, conflict resolution, other-attentiveness, life priorities, and lifestyles.*

The underlying values of many Chinese normative IE themes seem to be of universality, for example, *honesty, fairness, taking responsibility*, etc. However, in the interactions with different cultural members, these values might be assigned different weights in the interactional explanation behaviours. The different weighted values in the IE themes, together with the different interactional conventions/rituals, play an important part in the pragmatics of an interactional explanation.

**Table 8.1**

*Intercultural IE Model of Chinese*

Public/business/institution context	Private context
Business/institutional conventions	Compromise to the overall situation
Fairness	Conflict resolution
Faith	Other-attentiveness
Taking responsibility	Life priorities
Honesty	Lifestyles
Professional ethics	

**IE Model.** I briefly introduced the essential attributes of *IE* in Chapter 3. *IE* is a pervasive pragmatic phenomenon in spoken and written discourse. IEs in discourse do not necessarily bear linguistic markers, but they are context-dependent and proposed with illocutionary force. IEs are able to convey diverse types of information and achieve multiple functions in interactions. Furthermore, IEs trigger instant evaluations in interactions. These essential IE attributes, together with the findings and study results from the works on IE reported in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, establish the foundation for my proposal of a general research model of *IEs*:

- (a) As a highly contextualised pragmatic phenomenon co-constructed by the interactants, an IE can address diverse aspects of the information pertinent to the information appeal developed in the interaction; the aspect of the information addressed in an IE is influenced by the interpersonal relationships of the interactants.

- (b) An IE addressee makes instant interpretation and evaluation of the IE provided; this process becomes salient when an IE contradicts the assumed discursive norm(s).

The general IE model consists of two aspects in interactions: part (a) focuses on how IE providers determine what IEs can fulfil the information appeal in interactions with their interactants; part (b) presents the foundation of the IE addressees' evaluative viewpoints. Defining and modelling *interactional explanation* propose a pragmatic concept of explanation grounded in the dynamics of interaction, which is different from the traditional explanation study in philosophy, or attribution study in social psychology and the previous speech act realisation research. It is also different from the concept of accountability and account study in sociology.

Retrospectively in pragmatic research, the phenomenon of explanation has been customarily held as a postulate in the examination of speech act performance. In the research of apology realisation, for example, an *explanation or account of the cause that brought about the offence* is classified as one of the realisation strategies (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p. 207) without further discussion. The evaluation studies of *interactional explanation* (see Chapters 5 and 6), within and beyond speech acts, conclude the correlation between the interactant's evaluation of the *interactional explanation* and their evaluation of the relevant speech act performance. Consequently, this discursive phenomenon does not only facilitate the realisation of relevant speech acts, but also generally plays a crucial part in interactions.

## 8.2 Future Research

The studies conducted on *interactional explanation* reported in this dissertation are far from exhaustive. I intend to propose an analytical perspective of interaction analysis from the phenomenon of *interactional explanation*. There are not only ways to further the studies conducted in the present work, but there are also many other potential possibilities open to study this interesting pragmatic phenomenon in interaction.

Firstly, in the present study, I used mainly general discourse corpora in the study of the linguistic feature of IE. It would be possible to explore more interesting linguistic patterns of *interactional explanations* according to different typologies with more focused discourse data. Similarly to the realisation study of speech act, the study of interactional explanations also

needs contextual control, so that the features of this interactional phenomenon are noticeable without being masked by influence from too many factors in interaction.. The specific IE pattern study could be conducted by controlling the contextual situation and the interpersonal relationship between the interactants. Further systematic investigation with the support of appropriate datasets could determine whether the use of linguistic markers or other indicative patterns convey different interactional nuances in the phenomenon of *interactional explanation*. For example, the linguistic styles according to different levels of social intimacy proposed by Scott and Lyman (1968) could be empirically studied together with other contextual controls.

In Chapter 5, I utilised online surveys with linguacultural insiders to examine the use of interactional explanations in academic email requests. It would be illuminating to switch the email request datasets in the online surveys so that the linguacultural insiders could evaluate the IE provided by interactants from other linguacultures. A cross-linguacultural evaluation could be determined in such a research design. The intercultural IE model of Chinese could be further verified.

The interconnection between *interactional explanations* and speech acts deserves further investigation. First, the present work involves the speech acts of request and apology. Explanatory expressions could accompany more speech acts, for example, the speech act of thank, found in the text search in Chapter 4, consistently involves *interactional explanations* in English and Chinese. The relation between IE and such speech acts could be further examined. Moreover, the meta-analyses found very few studies involve the participants' (first order) evaluations of the speech act of apology. More studies and contrastive studies could be conducted on the perception and evaluation of speech acts in correlation with the use of *interactional explanation*.

The investigation of the relationship between particular interactional ritual/convention and *interactional explanations* is another interesting research prospect. On the one hand, interactional rituals enable the interactants to understand their rights and obligations held for that particular interaction, and thus partially determines the application and evaluation of *interactional explanations* in interactions. Meanwhile, studies based on appropriate metadiscourse data from other linguacultures could result in different *intercultural IE Models*. On the other hand, the use of ritual IEs enables the interactants to practise certain ritualistic rights or obligations under a particular situation. With appropriate discourse corpora, a bottom-up approach in ritual IE research can be conducted in different linguacultures.

Moreover, *interactional explanations* can provide a wide range of information, which potentially exposes different prominent aspects of the information stressed in certain types of

interaction from different linguacultures. This constitutes one potential focus of IE contrastive studies.

The occurrence of *interactional explanations* can also occasion (im)politeness. Most of the interactional explanations in interactants are self-oriented. The motivation of using interactional explanations can be studied under facework, which is closely related to (im)politeness theory. For example, the self-oriented IEs might be seen as a positive facework in self-politeness (R. Chen, 2001, 2019). Another interesting research prospect is the IE provided in interactions for others. IE for others is a type of other-justified discourse. For example, Zhao and Mao (2022) created the pioneer discourse analysis of how objectivity and trustworthiness are enhanced by other-justified discourses based on online crowd-funding projects. While IE could include diverse types of information and perform multiple functions in interaction, the pragmatics of IE for others in interaction could be beyond the trustworthiness building but remain crucial in fulfilling the interaction.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Survey in Chinese and English translation

#### 中文线上调查

#### I. 请根据不同标准对一下电子邮件的内容进行评价

- a. 不好意思老师，我宿舍里没网，现在才交，请原谅。谢谢老师！祝您身体健康，工作顺利，天天开心！（请填 1-5 数字打分）
1. 1分为非常不满意, 5分为非常满意, 您的评分是 \_\_\_\_分
  2. 1分为非常不可信, 5分为非常可信, 您的评分是 \_\_\_\_分
  3. 1分为非常不礼貌, 5分为非常礼貌, 您的评分是 \_\_\_\_分
- b. 允许我说一声十分抱歉！由于我自己的疏忽，看错了交考核作业的时间，错过了上交时限。恳请您能原谅我的错误，希望现在发给您还来得及。（请填 1-5 数字打分）
1. 1分为非常不满意, 5分为非常满意, 您的评分是 \_\_\_\_分
  2. 1分为非常不可信, 5分为非常可信, 您的评分是 \_\_\_\_分
  3. 1分为非常不礼貌, 5分为非常礼貌, 您的评分是 \_\_\_\_分
- c. 我之前弄错了，发到我们（某其他课程）老师的邮箱里面去了。现在补上哈，thank you~~！（请填 1-5 数字打分）
1. 1分为非常不满意, 5分为非常满意, 您的评分是 \_\_\_\_分
  2. 1分为非常不可信, 5分为非常可信, 您的评分是 \_\_\_\_分
  3. 1分为非常不礼貌, 5分为非常礼貌, 您的评分是 \_\_\_\_分
- d. 我忘记了，不好意思。（请填 1-5 数字打分）
1. 1分为非常不满意, 5分为非常满意, 您的评分是 \_\_\_\_分
  2. 1分为非常不可信, 5分为非常可信, 您的评分是 \_\_\_\_分
  3. 1分为非常不礼貌, 5分为非常礼貌, 您的评分是 \_\_\_\_分
- e. 实在是抱歉老师，之前那个邮件不知道怎么了没发送成功，最近才发现。再给您发一遍，希望您谅解哇。（请填 1-5 数字打分）
1. 1分为非常不满意, 5分为非常满意, 您的评分是 \_\_\_\_分
  2. 1分为非常不可信, 5分为非常可信, 您的评分是 \_\_\_\_分
  3. 1分为非常不礼貌, 5分为非常礼貌, 您的评分是 \_\_\_\_分

#### II. 简答题

以上电子邮件中包含解释性话语的内容，你认为有必要吗？请简单说一下你的理由。

如果有必要解释，请问什么样的解释比较好？

---

## Chinese Online Survey (English translation)

I. Please give a rating of the email contents according to the following criteria:

- a. Sorry teacher. There is no Internet in my dormitory. I only hand in it now. Please forgive me and thank you teacher! I wish you good health, good luck and happiness every day! (Please rate each of the following items on a rating scale of 1 to 5)
1. 1 is very dissatisfied, 5 is very satisfied, your rating is \_\_\_\_\_
  2. 1 is very unconvincing, 5 is very convincing, your score is \_\_\_\_\_
  3. 1 is very impolite, 5 is very polite, your score is \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Allow me to say I am very sorry! Due to my own negligence, I misread the time for handing in the final assignment and missed the submission deadline. I beg you to forgive my mistake, and I hope it is not too late to send it to you. (Please rate each of the following items on a rating scale of 1 to 5)
1. 1 is very dissatisfied, 5 is very satisfied, your rating is \_\_\_\_\_
  2. 1 is very unconvincing, 5 is very convincing, your score is \_\_\_\_\_
  3. 1 is very impolite, 5 is very polite, your score is \_\_\_\_\_
- c. I made a mistake. I sent it (the final assignment) to another (course) teacher's mailbox. I am sending it to you now. Thank you~~! (Please rate each of the following items on a rating scale of 1 to 5)
1. 1 is very dissatisfied, 5 is very satisfied, your rating is \_\_\_\_\_
  2. 1 is very unconvincing, 5 is very convincing, your score is \_\_\_\_\_
  3. 1 is very impolite, 5 is very polite, your score is \_\_\_\_\_
- d. I forgot. I am sorry. (Please rate each of the following items on a rating scale of 1 to 5)
1. 1 is very dissatisfied, 5 is very satisfied, your rating is \_\_\_\_\_
  2. 1 is very unconvincing, 5 is very convincing, your score is \_\_\_\_\_
  3. 1 is very impolite, 5 is very polite, your score is \_\_\_\_\_
- e. I'm really sorry, teacher. I didn't know what happened to the previous email, but it wasn't sent successfully. I just found out. I send it to you again, I hope you understand. (Please rate each of the following items on a rating scale of 1 to 5)
1. 1 is very dissatisfied, 5 is very satisfied, your rating is \_\_\_\_\_
  2. 1 is very unconvincing, 5 is very convincing, your score is \_\_\_\_\_
  3. 1 is very impolite, 5 is very polite, your score is \_\_\_\_\_

II. Short answer questions

The emails above contain explanatory statements. Do you think these statements in emails are necessary and why?

\_\_\_\_\_

If it is necessary to make an explanation in the email, what is a good, convincing explanation?

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2: Survey in German and English translation

### German Online Survey

I Geben Sie bitte eine Gesamtbeurteilung der Emails nach den folgenden Kriterien:

- a. Leider kann ich im Moment mein Examen nicht abspeichern. Aus technischen Gründen. Ich versuche es weiter und reiche es so bald wie möglich nach!

Sehr unhöflich	1 2 3 4 5	sehr höflich	<i>Kreuzen sie einen Wert ein.</i>
Nicht überzeugend	1 2 3 4 5	sehr überzeugend	<i>Kreuzen sie einen Wert ein.</i>
Sehr unzufriedenstellend	1 2 3 4 5	sehr zufriedenstellend	<i>Kreuzen sie einen Wert ein.</i>

- b. Ich hatte ein Problem mit Microsoft Word, weil die Datei nicht als PDF gespeichert wurde. Aus diesem Grund habe ich die Datei zuerst als Word Datei geschickt und sie wurde wiederum aufgrund der Größe mit MailDrop versendet. Ich weiß, dass dies nicht erwünscht ist. Ich konnte um 16.00 Uhr noch rechtzeitig eine PDF Datei schicken, da mein Programm die Datei dann endlich exportieren konnte. Entschuldigen Sie bitte die textlose Mail, ich war besorgt darum, dass die Mail nicht mehr rechtzeitig ankommen würde. Ich hoffe, dass dies im Falle von 16.00 Uhr gegeben ist und bitte um eine kurze Rückmeldung. In diesem Zuge möchte ich mich bei Ihnen für die Unannehmlichkeiten entschuldigen und hoffe, dass Sie hierfür Verständnis haben und meine Klausur regulär gewertet werden kann.

Sehr unhöflich	1 2 3 4 5	sehr höflich	<i>Kreuzen sie einen Wert ein.</i>
Nicht überzeugend	1 2 3 4 5	sehr überzeugend	<i>Kreuzen sie einen Wert ein.</i>
Sehr unzufriedenstellend	1 2 3 4 5	sehr zufriedenstellend	<i>Kreuzen sie einen Wert ein.</i>

- c. Ich hatte Zeichnungen per Foto eingefügt. Ich versuchte 4 mal die Mail zu verschicken, bis ich merkte, dass der Speicher durch die Fotos nicht groß genug ist. Anbei meine Klausur ohne Zeichnungen (diese kommen in seperaten Mails). Bitte verzeihen Sie die verspätete Abgabe. Ich habe auch ein Beweisfoto gemacht.

Sehr unhöflich	1 2 3 4 5	sehr höflich	<i>Kreuzen sie einen Wert ein.</i>
Nicht überzeugend	1 2 3 4 5	sehr überzeugend	<i>Kreuzen sie einen Wert ein.</i>
Sehr unzufriedenstellend	1 2 3 4 5	sehr zufriedenstellend	<i>Kreuzen sie einen Wert ein.</i>

- d. Nun ein letztes Mal. Ich habe Ihnen im Anhang zwei Bestätigungen bzw. Screenshot angehängt, welche beweisen, dass ich die Klausur rechtzeitig abgesendet habe. Von meinem Exchange Postfach, als auch meiner Webmail. Ich hoffe wirklich, dass es keinen Abzug gibt! Ich habe wirklich sehr viel Arbeit in diesen Kurs investiert und gelernt! Mein Ziel war bzw. ist es, mit einer 1, zu bestehen. Nur so kann ich wohl, wie Sie mir an der letzten Fragerunde erzählt hatten, womöglich Tutor im nächsten Semester sein! Ich hoffe mal das Beste! Ich hatte gerade wirklich Angst, dass ich womöglich deshalb die Klausur nicht bestanden habe.

Sehr unhöflich	1 2 3 4 5	sehr höflich	<i>Kreuzen sie einen Wert ein.</i>
Nicht überzeugend	1 2 3 4 5	sehr überzeugend	<i>Kreuzen sie einen Wert ein.</i>
Sehr unzufriedenstellende	1 2 3 4 5	sehr zufriedenstellend	<i>Kreuzen sie einen Wert ein.</i>

- e. Konnte die Klausur vorhin nicht in einem Dokument versenden weil der Server das wieder einmal nicht zugelassen hat. Tut mir sehr leid ich für die Unannehmlichkeiten und die Schwierigkeiten mit der Technik. Nun das ganze gestaffelt und übersichtlich. Die Prüfung habe ich pünktlich beendet und pünktlich abgesendet. Im Notfall hätte ich auch das dementsprechende Beweismaterial im Sinne von Fotos bei denen die Uhrzeit ersichtlich ist, dass es vor dem Abgabetermin fertig war.

Sehr unhöflich	1 2 3 4 5	sehr höflich	<i>Kreuzen sie einen Wert ein.</i>
Nicht überzeugend	1 2 3 4 5	sehr überzeugend	<i>Kreuzen sie einen Wert ein.</i>
Sehr unzufriedenstellende	1 2 3 4 5	sehr zufriedenstellend	<i>Kreuzen sie einen Wert ein.</i>

### II Kurze Fragen

Die E-Mails oben enthalten erklärende Aussagen. Glauben Sie, dass diese Aussagen in Emails notwendig sind, und warum? \_\_\_\_\_

Was ist eine gute, überzeugende Erklärung, falls sie notwendig ist? \_\_\_\_\_

## German Online Survey (English translation)

I. Please give an overall rating based on the following criteria for the email above:

- a. Unfortunately, I can't save my exam at the moment. For technical reasons. I'll keep trying and will submit it as soon as possible!

Very impolite	1 2 3 4 5	very polite
Very unconvincing	1 2 3 4 5	very convincing
Very unsatisfactory	1 2 3 4 5	very satisfactory

- b. I had a problem with Microsoft Word because the file wasn't saved as a PDF. Because of this, I first sent the file as a Word file and it was again sent with MailDrop due to the size. I know this is not desirable. I was able to send a PDF file in time at 4:00 p.m. because my program was finally able to export the file. Please excuse the textless mail, I was worried that the mail would not arrive on time. I hope that this is the case from 4 p.m. and ask for a short reply. In this context I would like to apologize to you for the inconvenience and hope that you will understand this and that my exam can be evaluated regularly.

Very impolite	1 2 3 4 5	very polite.
Very unconvincing	1 2 3 4 5	very convincing
Very unsatisfactory	1 2 3 4 5	very satisfactory

- c. I had inserted drawings by photo. I tried to send the mail 4 times until I noticed that the memory is not large enough for the photos. Attached is my exam without drawings (these will come in separate emails). Please forgive the late submission. I took a photo as evidence as well.

Very impolite	1 2 3 4 5	very polite
Very unconvincing	1 2 3 4 5	very convincing
Very unsatisfactory	1 2 3 4 5	very satisfactory

- d. Now one last time. I have attached two confirmations or screenshots, which prove that I sent the exam on time. From my Exchange mailbox, as well as my webmail. I really hope that there is no deduction! I really put a lot of work into this course and learned a lot in this course! My goal was or is to pass with a 1. This is the only way I can possibly be a tutor next semester, as you told me during the last review session! I hope for the best! I was really scared that maybe that's why I didn't pass the exam.

Very impolite	1 2 3 4 5	very polite
Very unconvincing	1 2 3 4 5	very convincing
Very unsatisfactory	1 2 3 4 5	very satisfactory

- e. Couldn't send the exam in one document earlier because the server didn't allow it again. I'm very sorry for the inconvenience and the difficulties with the technology. Now the whole thing is organised and clear. I finished the exam on time and sent it off on time. If necessary, I could send the corresponding evidence in the form of photos showing the time that it was ready before the deadline.

Very impolite	1 2 3 4 5	very polite
Very unconvincing	1 2 3 4 5	very convincing
Very unsatisfactory	1 2 3 4 5	very satisfactory

## II Short questions

The emails above contain explanatory statements. Do you think these statements in emails are necessary and why?

---

If it is necessary to make an explanation in the email, what is a good, convincing explanation?

---

## Abstract

The present dissertation explores an important albeit understudied pragmatic phenomenon, *interactional explanation*. An *interactional explanation* is the response to a perceived information appeal from the interaction. Although a body of research has been dedicated to *explanation* in various academic disciplines, interestingly little attention has been given to this phenomenon in pragmatics and interaction studies. The aim of the current research is to pin down this interactional phenomenon and to establish a replicable analytic scheme.

I use a mixed methods approach in the exploration of *interactional explanation*, including both ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ approaches. I investigate the linguistic features of *interactional explanations* based on corpora examination. I analyse the use of *interactional explanations* in the speech acts of request and apology. I study the interactants’ evaluation of *interactional explanations* based on the metadiscourse data collected by ex post facto interview.

The study of linguistic features illustrates that the linguistic markers are not indispensable as interactants tend to recognise the information appeals and *interactional explanations* in interaction. Linguacultural differences are found and affirmed in the use of *interactional explanations* in the speech acts of request and apology. I also find that interactional rituals and attribution types of *interactional explanations* can influence the interactants’ evaluation of *interactional explanations*. On the basis of these research, I propose a working IE Model and an intercultural IE model of Chinese for the analysis of this pragmatic phenomenon.

The current study extends the explanation study into pragmatics and interaction analysis. The proposed replicable research model is advantageous for a systematic examination of this interactional phenomenon. This innovative IE theory supplements the contrastive study of speech acts, particularly those including explanation as a realisation strategy, brings in the interface with interaction ritual theory, and sheds light on other pragmatic domains, such as studies of linguistic (im)politeness. In conclusion, the study of *interactional explanation* proposes an innovative research perspective in pragmatics and deepens our comprehension of the dynamics of interpersonal communication.



## Absztrakt

A jelen disszertáció az interakciós magyarázat jelenségét kutatja, amely sajnálatosan kevés figyelmet kapott a korábbi pragmatikai kutatásokban. Az interakciós magyarázat jelensége információkérésekre adott interakciós válaszok formájában jelenik meg. Noha más kutatási területeken e jelenség kiemelt figyelmet kapott, a pragmatikai kutatásokban meglepő módon elhanyagolták, így replikábilis modellezésével értekezésem tudományos hiányt pótol.

A disszertációban bemutatott modell kevertmódszerű elemzésen alapul, amely az interakciós magyarázat jelenségét, illetve annak nyelvi elemeit empirikus módon, korpuszok segítségével vizsgálja. Kiemelt figyelmet fordítok az interakciós magyarázat beszédaktus alapú vizsgálatára: e jelenséget a kérés és bocsánatkérés beszédaktusai segítségével közelítem meg. Vizsgálom továbbá interakciós magyarázatok értelmezéseit metadiskurzív adatok segítségével, amelyeket post facto interjúk során gyűjtöttem.

Kutatásom rámutat arra, hogy az interakciós magyarázatok, illetve magyarázatkéresek létrejöttében a nyelvi jelölők nélkülözhetők. Az interakciós magyarázatul szolgáló kérések és bocsánatkérések realizációiban számos nyelvkulturális variációt figyelhetünk meg. A kutatásból kiderül továbbá, hogy az interakciós rítusok befolyásolhatják, hogy egy adott interakciós magyarázatot a résztvevők milyen módon ítélnék meg. Ezen eredmények alapján a disszertációban kidolgozom Interakciós Magyarázat Modelletem (IE Model), és egy kapcsolódó, kínai nyelvi adatokra használható kultúraközi kommunikációs modellt.

A fenti modell a pragmatikai és interakciós kutatásokhoz járul hozzá elsősorban. A modell ugyancsak hozzájárul a beszédaktusok összehasonlító kutatásához, továbbá az interakciós rítuselmélethez és a nyelvi udvariasságkutatáshoz.