



Research Report: *Cross-cultural Pragmatics*

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In this research report, we present some of the outcomes of our joint work dedicated to cross-cultural pragmatics, i.e. the field of studying language use in a contrastive way across languages and language varieties. We use the vague wording “some” here because it is clearly beyond the scope of a brief report like this to include all or even most of the outcomes of four years of joint work. Also, we are aware of the fact that *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica* is a journal with an interest in many areas of linguistics, and pragmatics is only one of these areas, and so we wish to avoid bombarding the reader with technical details of our research. Instead, we believe that it is much better to proceed in this research report by introducing those aspects of our work that are relevant to other areas of linguistic research as well. For readers with interest in more details of our work, we would like to refer here to the following book: Juliane House and Dániel Z. Kádár 2021. *Cross-cultural Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

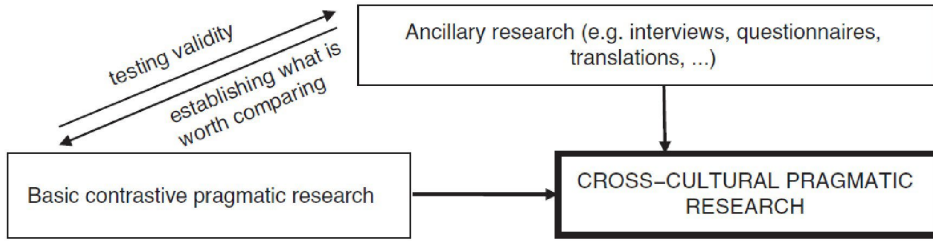
The field of cross-cultural pragmatics is an area that was established in the 1980s and gained momentum with the publication of the volume *Cross-cultural Speech Act Realisation Project*, edited by Shoshana Blum-Kulka, Juliane House, and Gabriele Kasper, published in 1989. Following the publication of this book, cross-cultural pragmatics has become one of the most influential areas in pragmatics. However, until recently, the field had largely focused on simply applying the framework and methodology of the above 1989 book, without infusing it with new ideas and research findings. In our joint work, we attempted to reinvigorate the field of cross-cultural pragmatics as it was pioneered in the CCSARP Project by going back to its basic principles and integrating these principles into present-day pragmatic theory.

A distinctive characteristic of cross-cultural pragmatics is its cross-disciplinary relevance: it has been widely used in research on applied linguistics, translation,

linguistic politeness, and other areas. The reason for the relevance of cross-cultural pragmatics for other fields is related to its key principles. In the following, we outline these principles, and by doing so we also describe various empirical studies described in our recent (2021) book:

1. *Bottom-up research*: We believe that cross-cultural pragmaticians should follow a bottom-up take on language use. Thus, instead of analysing data through cultural preconceptions such as “speakers of Chinese are face-sensitive”, “British speakers of English are indirect”, and so on, and also instead of relying on non-linguistic notions such as “emotions”, “values”, and “identities,” the cross-cultural pragmatician first needs to examine his/her data and attempt to identify recurrent patterns of language use in it. As part of this endeavour, the cross-cultural pragmatician is advised not to set out to “confirm” the validity of their assumptions but rather to intend to disconfirm any hypothesis they might have formulated. While such research may appear to be less grandiose than what one can carry out through a top-down (typically intercultural) approach, a key advantage of the bottom-up take is the replicability and rigour of the outcomes. To provide an example, in our book we studied war crime apologies realized by representatives of the German and Japanese states following the Second World War. In the study of such apologies, a body of previous research has used sweeping cultural overgeneralizations such as that the Japanese is a “shame culture”, “Germans apologized more appropriately than the Japanese”, and so on. While such notions may seem to help the researcher in interpreting his data, in empirical research they are problematic because they reflect the researcher’s own overgeneralizing attitudes to the linguaculturally embedded data involved, and so their use precludes studying data with a cold eye. So, instead of relying on such notions, we studied corpora of WWII war crime apologies in an “innocent” way, by examining the realization patterns of Head Acts of these apologies and categorizing such realization patterns. Our research has revealed both similarities and differences between the two linguacultures studied. For example, it has become clear that the Head Act Strategies “explanation and account” never gets involved in the realization of war crime apologies because the crimes involved can never be explained or justified. On the other hand, we have shown that German and Japanese representatives of states had linguaculturally preferred Head Acts Strategies: for example, the German apologies frequently involved the Head Act Strategy of “expressing guilt and shame” much more than their Japanese counterparts, which flies in the face of the claim that Japanese is a so-called “shame culture”.

2. *Multimethod approach to researching language use*: The cross-cultural pragmatician is advised to rely on multimethod, or “mixed-method” approaches to language use. The following figure from House and Kádár (2021: 3) shows the way in which a multimethod approach can be operationalized in cross-cultural pragmatic inquiries.



Source: House and Kádár 2021: 3

Figure 1. *The components of cross-cultural pragmatic research*

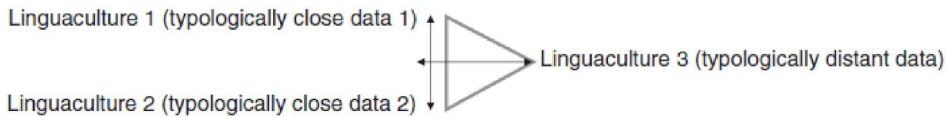
As *Figure 1* shows, cross-cultural pragmatic research may depart from a basic contrastive analysis, through which the researcher achieves the main outcomes. One is advised to test the validity of such outcomes with the aid of what we call ancillary research in our framework, which frequently consists of interviews, DCTs, questionnaires, and other data-eliciting methods. Basic contrastive and ancillary research may be based on different data types (see more below), i.e. the mixed-method approach may involve the use of both naturally occurring and elicited data. The following is an example for how such a multimethod approach can be carried out: In our 2021 book, we presented a case study of how second-person T and V pronouns are used in IKEA catalogues published in many different languages and the ways in which T and V pronouns in such catalogues tend to be perceived by speakers of these languages. This research was based on the issue that IKEA traditionally prefers using the T pronoun to promote the Swedish convention of egalitarianism. Our basic contrastive pragmatic research included the study of T/V pronominal choices in the catalogues – the study of such choices in the catalogues only could have already allowed us to reach research conclusions about linguacultural preferences of T/V pronominal choices. However, by considering language user evaluations through our ancillary take, we could triangulate our research and at the same time avoid relying on our own analyst interpretations only. Such a triangulation can be particularly important in cross-cultural pragmatics where the researcher may need to work on several different languages, as in the case of the IKEA catalogues that we studied. As *Figure 1* shows, the relationship between ancillary and basic research can also be reversed, that is, one may conduct ancillary exploration first in order to set the parameters of the subsequent main contrastive inquiry. For example, in our 2021 book, we conducted an applied linguistics inquiry to explore how Chinese learners of English and British learners of Chinese assess appropriate and inappropriate uses of expressions that are conventionally associated with the speech acts of Request and Apologize. In this research, we identified the expressions to be featured in the assessment task provided for our learners through a corpus-based

investigation, i.e. our corpus research provided the ancillary lead-in for the subsequent main study. Optimally, both the basic contrastive and the ancillary approaches are qualitative and quantitative in scope in cross-cultural pragmatics. Simply put, in quantitative research, the cross-cultural pragmatician examines and compares data by looking into the frequency of occurrence of a given pragmatic phenomenon. In qualitative research, the cross-cultural pragmatician engages in a detailed comparative examination of instances of language use in order to gain a deeper understanding of the pragmatic phenomenon under investigation.

3. *Relying on interrelated but distinct units of analysis and finite typologies of these units:* In conducting strictly language-anchored cross-cultural pragmatic analysis, the researcher is advised to identify a particular unit of analysis to examine linguaculturally embedded data. In our 2021 book, we proposed three basic units of analysis: expression, speech act, and discourse. All such units are, of course, interrelated – for instance, speech acts are indicated by expression and discourse can be systematically broken down into exchanges of speech acts. Thus, choosing a particular unit of analysis does not imply that one should (or can afford to) disregard other units, but simply that any analysis needs to depart from one particular unit of analysis as a “gateway” to the data studied. For instance, in our above-outlined study of WWII war crime apologies, we conducted a speech-act-anchored investigation, even though such apologies themselves are not confined to simple utterances, i.e. they represent the realm of discourse. Importantly, any unit that one studies needs to be described with the aid of finite typologies. For example, in the study of speech acts, we relied on a typology of Edmondson and House (1981; see also Edmondson et al. 2022) consisting of 25 interactionally defined speech act categories. In cross-cultural pragmatic research where the analyst compares data from different linguacultures, relying on such finite typologies is particularly important because finiteness ensures that all our analytic categories are actually comparable. As Edmondson and House (1981: 48–49) argue about this sense of finiteness: “We must attempt to be *systematic* if possible. It is no use introducing illocutions rather like a conjuror producing rabbits out of a hat, such that nobody knows where they come from, how many more there might be left in, or whether, indeed, the whole procedure is an illusion.”

4. *Variation and/or more than one language:* Cross-cultural pragmaticians may pursue interest in intracultural and intralinguistic variations of languages, including social and regional dialects, style levels, variations of language according to gender and age, and so on. As such, cross-cultural pragmatic research involves what has been covered under the umbrella of so-called “variational pragmatics”, but it also includes many other aspects of variation beyond the simple sociolinguistic parameters studied by variationists. More importantly, cross-cultural pragmatic research most often includes various different languages. The more typologically distant these languages are, the more

challenging it may be to contrastively examine them. For example, in our 2021 book, we often presented contrasts of such typologically distant languages as Chinese and English. Contrastive work may also involve the study of more than two linguacultures – in the case of the above-mentioned IKEA catalogues, we examined seven different languages and language varieties. Furthermore, the cross-cultural pragmatician can engage in complex contrastive work, e.g. by comparing how a particular pragmatic phenomenon is realized in typologically close and distant linguacultures – a procedure we call “double contrasting” in our book. For example, we contrasted patterns of speech act realization in the closing phase of historical family letters written in English, German, and Chinese, by first contrasting our linguaculturally close English and German data and then comparing the outcomes with what we found in our Chinese data. The following figure illustrates this scheme of contrasting.



Source: House and Kádár 2021: 204

Figure 2. Our scheme of double contrasting

By following this contrasting design, we were able to venture beyond the boundaries of the phenomenon under investigation: our research outcomes also allowed us to revisit discussions on the so-called “East–West Divide”.

5. *Relying on corpora and the Principle of Comparability:* Cross-cultural pragmatic research is ideally based on corpora. The term “corpus” refers to any searchable collection of texts. Cross-cultural pragmaticians use both small and large corpora. In any rigorous cross-cultural pragmatic research, the size and other features of the corpora investigated need to be as comparable as possible. This leads us to what we call the Principle of Comparability in our book: A fundamental issue in cross-cultural pragmatic research is how one conducts the comparison itself by identifying *tertia comparationis*. The principle of comparability applies to both the corpora and the phenomena analysed in cross-cultural pragmatic research. Whenever we use corpora compiled by others, we need to consider whether the generic, temporal, and other features of the corpora are actually comparable. As to the phenomena to be contrastively examined, we need to consider how representative and conventionalized they are in their respective linguacultures. This latter pursuit of conventionalizedness also largely precludes studying idiosyncratic behaviour in the realm of cross-cultural pragmatics. Conventional patterns of language use can be teased out from data mainly through quantitative analysis (see above). For example, in our above-

mentioned study of expressions, we considered whether expressions popularly associated with speech acts are “speech-act-anchored” or “non-speech-act-anchored” in our English and Chinese corpora. Speech-act anchoredness refers to whether a particular expression actually indicates the speech act it is popularly associated with. Our study has shown that while English expressions associated with the speech acts of Apologize and Request are nearly always speech-act-anchored, their English counterparts afford alternative “giveaway” uses such as self-correction. This outcome does not mean that we could not observe giveaway uses at all in our Chinese corpus, but statistically the number of such uses was so low that we could reliably argue that the “giveaway” function of such expressions is much more conventionalized in English than in Chinese.

6. *Using linguistically-based terminology*: Cross-cultural pragmatics ideally operates with a linguistically-based terminology, reflecting an endeavour to avoid using cultural and psychological concepts such as “ideology”, “values”, and “identity” (see also above). A typical example of a cross-cultural pragmatic term – which we used throughout our book (and also in the current research report) – is “linguaculture”, by which we intend to describe culture manifested through patterns of language use. We prefer this term over “culture” because it emphasizes the inherently close relationship between language and culture.

We hope that by overviewing the above principles of cross-cultural pragmatics and some outcomes of our research, we presented concrete examples of what cross-cultural pragmatics is actually like in the practice of research. We also believe that such principles are relevant to any area of linguistics where the analyst examines larger chunks of linguaculturally embedded data in a non-predetermining bottom-up way.

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