Illocutional concurrences: The case of evaluative speech acts and face-work in spoken Mandarin and American English

Vittorio Tantucci [a, *], Aiqing Wang [b]

[a] Department of Linguistics and English Language, Lancaster University, UK[1]
[b] Department of Languages and Cultures, Lancaster University, UK[2]

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a novel usage-based approach to modal and illocutionary analysis. As a case study, it provides a holistic picture of the interplay between evaluations and face-work (i.a. Goffman, 1967) as they occur in the Spoken Callhome corpora of Mandarin and American English. We plotted a conditional inference tree model (Hothorn et al., 2006) to gather what we call language-specific illocutional concurrences (IC). IC encompass converging factors at various levels of verbal experience that contribute both locally (i.e. at the morphosyntactic level) and peripherally (i.e. at the illocutionary level) to the encoding of contextually and culturally situated speech acts or pragmemes (i.a. Mey, 2001; Author, 2016a). From this study will emerge that Mandarin evaluations tend to include a higher number of instances of propositional face-work, viz. cases where the speaker overtly addresses the hearer as the target of his/her evaluation. Similarly, Mandarin evaluations show higher illocutional complexity, in the sense of having a more diverse pool of overtly coded dimensions that speakers account for whilst making evaluations. Finally, Mandarin evaluations also show a stronger tendency to overtly account for harmonious rapport-maintenance (i.a. Goffman, 1967; Spencer-Oatey, 2008) and intersubjectivity (i.a. Traugott and Dasher, 2002; Traugott, 2010).

Crown Copyright © 2018 Published by Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

This study aims at disentangling the role played by pragmatic, syntactical and semantic factors in the encoding of modal evaluations in Mandarin and American English (henceforth AE). The present analysis will unveil that modalised evaluative speech acts in the two languages show remarkable mismatches underpinning face, the presence of sentence-periphery and intersubjective marking. In fact, Chinese evaluations will show a much stronger tendency to overtly account for the addressee's potential reactions to the utterance. Similarly, they will unveil a higher proportion of cases where the addressee is the target of the speakers' evaluations.

This novel usage-based approach to modal and illocutionary analysis aims at providing a holistic picture of evaluations as they occur cross-linguistically and cross-culturally. The ultimate goal of this paper is to develop a corpus-based paradigm centred on the utterance of a unit of meaning, informing typological and cross-cultural pragmatic research on modality, but

---

also significantly impacting research on intercultural communication. We plotted a conditional inference tree model (Hothorn et al., 2006; Tagliamonte and Baayen, 2012) to gather unbiased converges of form, meaning, contextual conditions and pragmatic effects that contribute to the spontaneous encoding of evaluations in the two languages. Significant intersections of the variables subsumed by these 4 dimensions are what we call **illocutional concurrences** (**IC**). **IC** encompass converging factors at various levels of verbal experience that contribute both locally (i.e. at the morphosyntactic level) and peripherally (i.e. at the illocutionary level) to the encoding of contextually and culturally situated speech acts or pragmemes (i.a. Mey, 2001; Capone, 2005; Tantucci, 2016a).

We gathered our data from two comparable spoken corpora of spontaneous telephone conversation, respectively the CallHome corpus of Mandarin and AE.[3] Our results are further substantiated by additional methods of data-manipulation such as random forest modelling (i.a. Breiman, 2001) and multiple correspondence analysis (Nenadic and Greenacre, 2007). Mandarin evaluations will show a tendency to include a significantly higher number of instances of **propositional face-work**, viz. cases where the speaker (henceforth, S) overtly addresses the hearer (henceforth, H) as the target of his/her evaluation. Similarly, our Mandarin dataset is characterised by a significantly higher **illocutional complexity**, in the sense of having a much more diverse range of overtly coded dimensions that speakers account for whilst making evaluations. Finally, Mandarin evaluations will also show a stronger tendency to overtly account for face-work management (i.a. Goffman, 1967) and intersubjectivity (i.a. Traugott and Dasher, 2002; Traugott, 2010).

A fundamental prerequisite for carrying out a large-scale corpus-based analysis encompassing formal and functional variables is probably the identification of the annotation criteria both theoretically and operationally. To do so, Sections 1 and 2 aim at narrowing down the scope of our survey both theoretically and methodologically. More specifically, in Section 1.1 we first introduce the notion of evaluations and how they intersect with a number of modal categories. In Section 2 we discuss the notion of 'face-work' (i.a. Goffman, 1961, 1967) in connection with evaluations. Section 2.1 then provides a multilayered taxonomy, addressing face-work as a dimension that is primarily driven by interactants' intentions to enhance, neglect, challenge or maintain their on-going rapport (cf. Spencer-Oatey, 2008). The rest of Section 2 focuses on the interactional relationship between rapport-management and clause-peripheral pragmatic marking (PMs) in American English and Mandarin evaluative speech acts. Section 3 illustrates the retrieval of our data and the operationalisation of our annotation criteria. Section 4 introduces the important notions of propositional face-work and illocutional concurrence and puts them into practise through language-specific conditional inference tree modelling, random forest and multiple correspondence analyses. In Section 5 are formulated the conclusions of this study.

1.1. Modalised evaluations

In Searlean terms, evaluations might be considered a subclass either of assertions (evaluations involve an affirmation of some proposition) or of expressives (they imply the expression of a certain psychic state). Along a similar line of thought, Lyons (1977) refers to connotations, Halliday (1994) generally defines the same class of speech acts as attitudes, while the notion of stance or appraisals are adopted in Martin and White (2005), Conrad and Biber (2000), Englebretson (2007). In Dam-Jensen and Zethsen (2007) evaluations are intended to regard communal value systems and relations between language and society. In their view, 'evaluations' regard positive/negative interpretations of linguistic expressions and the context in which they occur. Hunston and Thompson (2000) look at evaluations as the speaker's (S) linguistic act of expressing his/her opinion, which may either qualify a proposition as (un-)certain or evaluate a state-of-affairs as positive vs negative. Their working definition of evaluations acknowledges a clear overlap with modality, while stressing the "speaker or writer's attitude or stance towards, view point on, or feelings about the entities or the propositions that he or she is talking about. That attitude may relate to certainty or obligation or desirability or any of a number of other sets of values" (2000: 5).

This study is centred on modalised evaluations (i.a. Papafragou, 2000; Palmer, 2001; Narrog, 2005a, 2005b, 2012), viz. evaluative speech acts that distinctively include a modal item qualifying the proposition in terms of certainty, obligations, wants and so on. Importantly, evaluative speech acts do often intersect with modal elements which can be **performative** (involving the speaker's own, subjective evaluation) or **descriptive** (reporting the epistemic qualification of a state of affair) (i.a. Tantucci, 2017b; Aijmer, 2016; Nuyts, 2016). In fact, most modal subtypes often count as attitudinal categories, viz. involving the extent to which the assessor can commit him/herself to the state of affairs (i.a. Lyons, 1977; Palmer, 1986; Bybee et al., 1994; Narrog, 2005a, 2005b, 2018). This approach covers deontic modality (the extent of the assessor's moral commitment) and epistemic modality (the extent of the assessor's existential commitment). However, still according to Nuyts (2005, 2016), it may exclude "dynamic modality (including situational modality: when a speaker states that *it can rain here in summer*, i.e. that there is a potential for rain, (s)he is describing facts, but not expressing a degree of commitment to the state of affairs)" (Nuyts, 2016: 44).

Concerning this issue, it is important to note that the categorisation of evaluative speech acts in the present study adopts a sensibly broader stance, thus including both performative and descriptive usages of modalised expressions, as long as they contribute to the encoding of some evaluative force. In this sense, even dynamic-situational modality, as descriptive as it may be, can underpin the pragmatic attempt of evaluating the state of affairs of some situation or event. In (1) below, *can* encodes

---

[3] https://talkbank.org/access/CABank/CallHome/zho.html; https://talkbank.org/access/CABank/CallHome/eng.html (Last accessed 7/04/18)