IMPERATIVES IN REQUESTS: DIRECT OR IMPOLITE - OBSERVATIONS FROM CHINESE

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1. Introduction

The thesis of this paper is to put forward two simple postulations:

- (1) perceptions of politeness are coloured by cultural expectations
- (2) impositives are perceived as socially appropriate norms.

The corpus of data is derived from fieldwork in the PRC: Elicitations from 82 interviewees and written responses from 170 questionnaire respondents. Some interviewees responded to the questionnaire survey as well. A total of 30 situations (see appendix) designed in the form of a modified discourse completion test (DCT) were used for oral and written elicitations. For interviewing, an average of 14-16 situations were used for each interviewee and for the questionnaire, 30 were used. Altogether 6191 tokens of requests were generated from these two surveys: 1176 tokens from interviewing and 5015 tokens from the questionnaire survey. Each token of request comprises minimally a single main request strategy (core request/head act) with or without supportive moves (i.e. internal modification and or external modification) so that when the supportive moves were enumerated and added to the head act the total number of utterances exceeds the total number of tokens of requests.

2. Findings

Whereas in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization (CCSARP) project 'conventionally indirect strategies constitute the most frequently used main strategy type' (Kulka & House 1989: 127) this study shows impositives, a direct bald on record strategy, as the most frequently used main strategy type. The Chinese speakers of the PRC consistently display a preference for direct request forms. Impositives showing an extremely high percentage of usage at 74.4% for this study is far ahead that of all the language groups in the CCSARP where even Argentinians, the language group with the highest proportion of impositives, 40% is far below that of the Chinese speakers. The low percentage of hints used in this study follows the same trend as that of the CCSARP - a mere 1.1%, comparable to that of the CCSARP which has a 0% to 18.9%.

2.1. Strategy types

Findings in Figure 1 show an overwhelming preference for the conventionally direct strategy i.e. direct bald on record, M1 followed by M2: Conventionally indirect requests. Unconventionally indirect requests, i.e. hints M3 are not favoured. The use of multiple strategies, M4 which is a combination of M1 and M2 are not shown to be widely used too.

The direct bald on record strategy basically comprises impositives of the following four categories: Imperatives, questions, want/need statements and presumptive statements. The trend as shown in table 1 favours the use of imperatives as a request substrategy - the use of imperatives leads by 50.4%, and presumptive statements trails far behind at 4.7%. The dominance of IMPs as a substrategy of request realization suggests that imperatives, unlike English and most other European languages are not regarded as impolite.

Table 1 Frequency distribution of types of impositives

Method	Imperatives	Direct Questions	Want/need Statement	Presumptive Statement
Questionnaire	49.5 (2480)	16.3 (819)	5.3 (263)	4.7 (236)
Interviews	54.4 (641)	10.2 (119)	4.3 (50)	4.5 (53)
Total	50.4 (3121)	15.2 (938)	5.1 (318)	4.7 (289)

() = raw score

2.2. Results and discussion

IMPERATIVES: Action Verbs

A breakdown on the distribution of IMPs shows a predominant use of action *verbs*: 40.4% in questionnaire survey and 41.85% in interviews (excluding reduplicated verbs e.g. *changchang* or *chang yi chang/try try*).

Table 2 M1 Strategy Type: Mood Derivable: IMPs

<u>Ba construction</u>		<u>Action verbs</u>		<u>Reduplicated verbs</u>	
Quest.	Int.	Quest.	Int.	Quest.	Int.
6.6%	8.8%	40.4%	41.8%	2.5%	3.8%
(329)	(104)	(2028)	(492)	(123)	(45)

() = raw score

As the focus in this paper is mainly on the use of action verbs it suffices to mention that out of the three subcategories of IMPs the overwhelming preference is for the category of basic action verbs. The following are typical examples extracted from the survey:

- (1) S1: *Qing huan shuang ganjing de kuaizi.*
 please change pair clean PART chopstick
 Please change a pair of clean chopsticks.
- (2) S5: *Gei wo hao yidianr.*
 give me good a little
 Give me the better ones.

- (3) S6: *Chi, chi duo yidianr.*
eat, eat much a little
Have a little more.
- (4) S11: *Kuai, qu jie dianhua.*
quick go answer telephone
Quick, go and answer the phone.
- (5) S17: *Tang xia qu*
lie down go
Lie down.
- (6) S20: *Dai yidianr tang hui lai.*
bring a little sugar back
Bring a little sugar back.
- (7) S24: *Di wo ji ge tuding.*
pass me a few CL thumbtacks
Pass me a few thumbtacks.
- (8) S30: *Na gei wo kankan..*
take for me look look
Let me have a look.

As linguistic realizations of requests, this group of IMPs are distinguished by two distinct characteristics:

- (i) propositional content is clearly expressed and conveyed by basic action verbs that indicate the desired action e.g. 'bring, get, take, change, show (me), lend (me).' Utterance meaning and sentence meaning or literal meaning is almost identical. For both H(earer) and S(peaker) minimal effort is required in decoding and encoding, respectively. In other words, both proposition and intent of S(peaker) are expressed with a minimal number of words. From H's viewpoint, very little is demanded in encoding the message - speaker intent. Searle's principle of expressibility is well-encapsulated by this category of basic action verbs - an ideal fit of intentionality with conventionality.
- (ii) this class of verbs represents the biggest class of conventions of form in directives, which is not surprising because Chinese has long been regarded as a verbal language: "although Chinese is an isolating or relatively uninflected language, nonetheless it is basically a 'verbal' or 'verboid' language" (Astor, 1976: 20).

Whereas requests formulated with BA construction are perceived to be strong in illocutionary intent and the use of reduplicated verbs are perceived to be weaker, action verbs fall in somewhere between, that is, they are neither regarded as strong nor weak in its requestive force. This group of verbs, by combining pragmatic force with clarity has a definite edge over the other two types of IMPs.

That respondents should show a distinct preference for the use of action verbs as IMPs demonstrates quite clearly the level of directness in their communicative style - their preference for linguistic conventions that are economical, clear and explicit. 'Perspicuity' appears to be the maxim in requestive situations. It is interesting to note that five thousand years ago, 500 B.C. Confucius pre-empted Grice's maxims, specifically that of 'Relevance' in Confucian rhetoric. In his discussion on how to conduct diplomatic missions, no mention was made of politeness rules, instead, in his advice on the style of formality he stressed relevance, a principle echoed in Grice's Maxims of Quantity and Quality:

If the speeches are too long, they sound artificial. If they are too short, they fail to convey the speaker's meaning. The perfection of the speaking art is to make speeches that convey the speaker's meaning and no more (Oliver 1971: 92).

Elsewhere in the *Analects*, one of the purposes of speaking listed was to "communicate ideas clearly" (Oliver 1971: XV).

These principles underlying Confucian rhetoric are indeed relevant to conversational principles today. Horn (1984: 13) reformulates Grice's maxim of Quantity following the general principles of Zipf's. He uses Q and R as labels corresponding to Quantity and Relation to formulate a taxonomy of conversational principles:

- (1a) The Q Principle (Hearer-based):
MAKE YOUR CONTRIBUTION SUFFICIENT
SAY AS MUCH AS YOU CAN (given R)
- (1b) The R Principle (Speaker-based):
MAKE YOUR CONTRIBUTION NECESSARY
SAY NO MORE THAN YOU MUST (given Q)

The underpinning of these conversational principles is the emphasis on striking a delicate balance between meaning and utterance, i.e. 'Say no more than you need to'.

Let us examine utterance length in relation to the use of action verbs in direct bald on record requests. The above examples of request utterances show quite clearly the conciseness of the proposition and the explicitness of speaker intent. As a direct bald on record strategy, it is a case of S saying 'p' to convey 'p' than saying 'q' to convey 'p' as in:

- (1) *Qing huan shuang ganjing de kuaizi.*
Please change [to another] pair of clean chopsticks.

rather than:

- (9) *Ni keyi bu keyi huan shuang ganjing de kuaizi.*
Can you change a pair of chopsticks?

In terms of utterance length (1) is shorter than (9). In terms of conciseness and explicitness it is utterance (1). From the viewpoint of length of inferential processes the shortest path is the preferred strategy (cf. Blum-Kulka 1987: 143). Whether the direct strategy is considered more polite than the conventionally indirect is an issue that is discussed in the later part of this paper. What is conveyed here is not only a preference for conciseness but also an attitude of the speaker. Utterance (1) reflects that attitude of upfront sincerity of S whereas utterance (9) shows a lack of it. Why ask whether H is 'willing to/can do A' when S 'wants H to do A'. Indirectness appears to clash with sincerity.

From the point of structure, action verbs in direct bald on requests are structurally more flexible and multi-functional than query-preparatories:

- (i) a basic action verb can be used transitively and intransitively:

Examples:

- (4) *jie Kuai, qu jie dianhua.*
quick go receive phone
Quick, go and answer the phone.

- (5) *tang Tang xia qu.*
lie down go
Lie down

- (ii) it lends itself to reduplication:

Example:

- (10) *chang Chang chang/chang yi chang zhe ge cai.*
try try try one try this CL dish
Try this dish.

- (iii) it can take on more polite markers in direct requests (e.g. *bang* 'help', *qing* 'please' and *mafan ni* 'bother you').

Example:

- (11) *xie Qing ni bang wo xie yi feng jieshaoxing.*
please you help me write one CL reference
Please help me write a reference.

or

- (12) *Mafan ni, qing ni bang wo xie yi feng jieshaoxing.*
 bother you please you help me write one CL reference
 Sorry to bother you, please help me to write a reference.

As requestives, we want to focus on that structural feature which accommodates the use of single or multiple politeness markers as a form of internal modification, a kind of mitigation. Mitigators in the form of internal modifiers play a crucial role in the speech acts of requests in Chinese. Their functional significance lies in the fact that they enable speakers to operate on a level of directness that is acceptable in the Chinese speech community but which some Westerners might find disconcerting. The data show these modificatory measures to be consistently in the form of 'politeness markers' which are used predominantly as internal modifiers. In contrast to external supportive moves which lie outside the structure of the head act, they are structured within the core request.

2.3. Internal modifiers as politeness markers

INTERNAL MODIFICATION: ECONOMY

Data from the investigation shows statistical evidence to support the thesis that Chinese speakers in their requests prefer strategies which subscribe to the 'Principle of Least Effort' and the 'Principle of Sufficient Effort' i.e. strategies that are not only direct but also show characteristics of economy and clarity. It therefore follows that both participants as encoder and decoder need minimal effort to make communication effective. With economy as one of the motivating factors it is not surprising to find that internal modifiers [hereafter IM] by virtue of their structural flexibility (as part of the head act) have a higher frequency of occurrence than external supportive moves [hereafter EM]:

- (a) questionnaire survey: 67% > 33%
 (b) interviews: 69% > 31%

As part of the structure of the head act or core request an IM can be conveniently slipped into the structure of core requests whereas an EM requires a separate structure with a different propositional content. The latter requires more thought and effort in the formulation of content and the production of utterance. Faerch and Kasper (1989: 244) point out that external modifiers are longer and more explicit because they have their own propositional content and illocution whereas internal modifiers have their discourse characteristics embedded as part of the Head Act which do not require a conscious response from the addressee. Take for instance, the following examples showing IM and EM categories used as supportive moves. The IM/EM categories are underlined.

- (13) IM 1: Shifu, qing huan shuang kuaizi.
 shifu please change pair chopsticks
 Shifu, please change (this) pair of chopsticks.
- (14) IM 2: Shifu, mafan ni, qing huan shuang kuaizi.
 shifu bother you please change pair chopsticks
 Shifu, sorry to bother you, please change (this) pair of chopsticks.
- (15) EM1: Shifu, qing huan shuang kuaizi. Zhe shuang kuaizi diao le.
 shifu please change pair chopsticks. this pair chopsticks drop ASP
 Shifu, please change a pair of chopsticks. This pair of chopsticks has dropped.
- (16) EM2: Shifu, qing huan shuang kuaizi. Zhe shuang kuaizi
 shifu please change pair chopsticks. this pair chopsticks
diaoxia di, zang le.
 drop ground dirty ASP
 Shifu, please change a pair of chopsticks. This pair of chopsticks has dropped to the ground, it's dirty.

3. Normative politeness

The data points conclusively to the use of internal modifiers, in particular terms of address and polite expressions as the basic lexicon exploited for expressing norms of politeness. Out of the total of IM categories used more than 70% were in the category of politeness markers (address forms and polite expressions): questionnaire - 76.7% and interviews - 78.5%. This class of politeness markers are not only economical in usage but they also carry cultural embeddings of politeness in face-to-face interaction.

3.1. Terms of address

Chao (1956: 230-33) listed altogether 114 vocatives and designatives of address forms for kinship terms. Appropriate use of address term is regarded as good manners, the absence of which could often result in social sanctions, in particular in a context of asymmetrical role relationship, for example, where H is older than S. In Chinese fictive kin terms are used for the elderly and the young e.g. *Dama/Daye* 'elderly mother/elderly father'; *Xiao Di* 'Little Brother' or *Da Ge* 'Big Brother'. Terms of address such as these are part of normative politeness in daily face-to-face interaction between strangers, an observation of *li*, the rough equivalents of 'propriety' and 'rationality' (Hsu 1969). Address forms as cultural embeddings represent the verbal handshake in daily routinized rituals of face-to-face

interaction (cf. Laver 1981). A fictitive kin term, for instance contracts both social distance and psychological distance (cf. Hijirida & Sohn 1983: 163) and in so doing paves the way for S to 'impose' on H. Normative politeness places greater value on appropriate address form use than any superficial demonstration of conveying the intention not to impose. To a Chinese addressee, utterance (18), a direct request is perceived to be polite whereas utterance (17), a conventionally indirect request is not.

Examples:

- (17) *Ni neng gaoshu wo Beijing huochezhan zai nar ma?*
 you can tell I Beijing station at where MP
 Can you tell me where Beijing station is?

- (18) *Daye, qingwen, Beijing huochezhan zai nar?*
 Daye please ask Beijing station at where
 Daye, (polite address form for elderly male) please may I ask where is Beijing station?

3.2. Polite expressions

In example (18) above, in addition to address form use, a polite expression *qingwen* 'please ask' is used as an internal modifier. Polite expressions such as this are used frequently with IMPs as norms of linguistic politeness: questionnaire survey: 43.1% and interviews: 34.4%. Unlike conventionally indirect requests where H is explicitly asked as to whether s/he can do X, direct requests mitigated by such polite expressions as *mafan ni* 'bother you' or *duibuqi* 'sorry' asks H to do X. Other more explicit forms appeal to H for assistance e.g. *bang* 'help' and *qing* 'please'. Polite expressions such as these essentially perform a dual role - that as request markers and that as softeners. For instance, the marker *please/bitte* was found to collocate with two requestive strategies, imperative and query-preparatory (House 1989: 115). As request markers they are quite coercive although on the surface they seem to solicit H's assistance or even suggest an option such as 'if it pleases you' (Allan 1987: 28).

Example:

- (19) *Tongzhi, qing ni bang wo dakai zhe chuanguhu yixia*
 tongzhi please you help me open this window awhile
 Tongzhi, please help me to open this window for awhile.

Bang although on the one hand could be interpreted as a plea for assistance it is at the same time imposing in the negative politeness sense of the term - impinging on the territorial space of H who is not given a choice of 'whether you would mind' or 'could/would you' sort of opening. However, Chinese speakers tend to disregard the

imposition, preferring to focus on self-abasement. Hence, terms such as these are usually interpreted as overt forms of self-abasement which has the effect of simultaneously elevating H's positive face. Whereas English native speakers would say: 'Would you mind helping me do X?' or 'Could you please do X?' Chinese native speakers would frame their requests direct: 'Please do X' or 'Please help me to do X'. From the Westerners' viewpoint such direct bald on record requests may understandably be perceived as impolite. From the Chinese point of view these are socially acceptable and polite. Therefore, judgements and perceptions of politeness in dyadic encounters need to be made in relation to cultural expectations. Apart from the larger sociocultural context at the macro-level, judgements of politeness need to consider the situational context at the micro-level. Three socio-cultural parameters identified by Brown and Levinson are particularly relevant in the study of requestives in face-to-face interactions, viz: (1) P(ower) (2) D(istance) and R(anking).

4. Findings: Strategy types and contextual factors

There is empirical evidence to support the influence of context on choice of linguistic forms, in particular the level of directness that is perceived to be appropriate. Findings from both the interviewing and questionnaire survey indicate a close relationship between the use of impositives (action verbs) in direct bald on record strategy and contextual factors. Cross-tabulations were used to assess the significance of correlations between main request strategy type and each of the contextual factors. Table 3 shows significant positive and negative correlations between strategies and P D R.

Table 3 Correlations of main strategy type with relative power, social distance and ranking of imposition

Positive Correlations	Significance Level
1. Impositives (M1): relative power	Q. .0491** I. .1471**
2. Conventionally Indirect (M2): distance	Q. .1424**
Negative Correlations	Significance Level
1. Conventionally Indirect (M2): power	Q. -.1961**
2. Impositives (M1): ranking of imposition	Q. -.0485** I. -.1061**

Q = Questionnaire survey; I = Interviews; ** = .001 ($p < .001$)

4.1. Relative Power: Imperatives

'Power' in the Chinese context is specifically defined in terms of seniority: Age and status. In this study two types of power relationships can be delineated:

- (a) non-solidary: Authority official e.g. the Customs officer (S26) and one's superior at work, e.g. the manager in S14.
- (b) solidary: Family members eg. Grandpa in S11 or elderly relations e.g. the elderly visitor in S17

Findings in Table 3 show the interaction of relative power with two levels of request strategy - direct bald on record (IMPs) and conventionally indirect (query-preparatories): Relative power is positively correlated with M1 request strategy and negatively correlated with M2, that is: (1) the use of impositives increases with a corresponding increase in power and (2) the use of query-preparatories decreases with a corresponding increase in power. This statistical evidence is further supported by findings of IMPs used in certain situations. Table 4 shows that in situations marked high P or equal P, strategy type M1 (using the sub category of imperatives) was preferred to M2 strategy type (using query-preparatories) as shown in table 4 where (N)=raw score:

Table 4 Relative Power

Power	Situation	IMPS (N)	Convent. Indirect (N)
H	S26	169	0
H	S14	167	0
H	S17	161	0
H	S11	157	0
E	S24	167	0
E	S20	166	3
E	S1	162	6
E	S6	158	0
L	S4	2	23
L	S7	9	82
L	S9	82	47
L	S21	97	49

These findings suggest the following conclusions:

- (1) it is socially acceptable for (a) a speaker who enjoys a relatively higher social position and (b) social equals to formulate direct bald on record requests using imperatives as illustrated by S26, S14, S17 and S11, and S4 and S7.
- (2) restraint is exercised in the case of low P shown by the markedly lower number of occurrences in S4, S7, S9 and S21; and S24, S20, S1 and S6.

In S26, the Customs officer is authorised to direct H to open the suitcase for checking. In S14, the manager of the office is also well within his right to direct his secretary to transfer the long distance call to him. In both situations there is no necessity for S to accord H any ostensible negotiability associated with the use of a conventionally indirect form of request. Respondents perceive it as appropriate that both speakers entrusted with the power to get on with their job can use directives in the imperative mood. The role relationships of the speakers in S11 and S17 are different. Their position of power is derived from their status as seniors who are perceived to have the right to speak to their juniors as parents to their children. The relationship between the old and the young is spelt out in 'The Doctrine of the Way of Man' known as the *Ren Lun*, 'The Principle of Human Beings' (Shih 1975: 30) which is essentially a code of ethics intended to maintain social order. It encompasses five cardinal relationships - the relationships between the king and the minister, between father and son, between husband and wife, between the old and the young (or the elder brother and younger brother), and between friends. It signifies that people should treat each other according to the distinctions set out in this hierarchy. This principle is strictly observed in speech by Chinese speakers who make an overt pronouncement in the distinction of 'older than' or 'younger than' lexicalised by these two terms: *zhangbei* and *wanbei*. 'Zhangbei' as S, do not need to accord 'wanbei' H, any linguistic politeness in a solidary power relationship. 'Wanbei' on the other hand, are expected to acknowledge their seniors in linguistically appropriate polite forms. Linguistic deference in solidary power role relationships is asymmetrical and employed upwards.

Examples from Beijing interviews:

1. IMPS employed downwards: (High P)

(20) S26 (Customs):

Qing ba xiangzi dakai, women yao jiancha.
 please CV suitcase open, we want check
 Please open the suitcase, we want to check.

- (21) S14 (Manager to sec.):

Xiao Li, jie dao dianhua tongzhi wo.
 young Li receive call inform me
 Xiao Li, when you receive the call, inform me.

- (22) S17 (Elderly visitor):

Haizi, bu yao dong, hao hao xiuxi. Ganjue hao xie ma?
 child don't move good good rest feel good some MP
 My child, don't move, have a good rest. Are you feeling somewhat better?

- (23) S11 (Grandpa to child):

Xiao Bao, kuai qu jie xia dianhua.
 young Bao quickly go answer awhile phone
 Xiao Bao, quickly go and answer the phone.

2. IMPS employed between social equals:

- (24) S24 (Member of staff):

Ali, di wo liang ge tuding.
 Ali pass me two CL thumbtacks
 Ali, pass me two thumbtacks.

- (25) S20 (To Spouse):

Ni xia ban bie wan le, qu mai dian yan.
 you after work don't forget ASP go buy a little salt
 After work, don't forget to buy some salt.

- (26) S1 (To waitress):

Xiaojie, qing zai gei wo shuang kuaizi.
 miss please again give me pair chopsticks
 Miss, please give me another pair of chopsticks.

- (27) S6 (Hostess to guests):

Lai, duo chi yidian zhe ge, shi wo tebie
 come more eat a little this CL is I specially
wei nimen zuo de.
 for 2nd Pl prepare PART
 Come, eat a little more. This is what I specially prepared for you both.

The interaction of power and solidarity underlying the usage of IMPs is clearly shown by the findings of the investigation. It is shown that the more power the speaker has the less the tendency to solicit agreement as to 'whether X can be done.' Similarly, the closer the relationship the greater the tendency to be direct and explicit. The vertical hierarchy of the Chinese social structure legitimises the use of IMPs in directives. It is socially acceptable for the manager to issue directives to his

juniors. There is supportive empirical evidence from this study to show the use of IMPs as common requests.

Examples:

(28) *Xiao Li changtu yi dao mashang gaoshu wo.*
 young Li long distance once come at once tell me
 Young Li, as soon as the long distance comes inform me at once.

(29) *Xiao Li, changtu dao de shihou ni neng bu neng gaoshu wo yixia?*
 young Li long distance come PART time you can NEG can tell me awhile
 Young Li, when the long distance comes, can you inform me?

If the manager were to use utterance (29), the implicature could be read by H as either the speaker is conveying displeasure or irony or else something is amiss.

4.2. *Social distance*

Social distance is defined along the scale of familiarity and kinship. Those who are related (e.g. kins) or who are close to one another through a close established relationship (e.g. close friends) are described as 'close'. Strangers or people with whom no relationship is established are marked by a social distance termed 'distant.' Table 5 shows social distance to be closely interacting with main request strategy type.

Table 5 Relative Social Distance

Situation	Social Distance	Convent. Indirect (N)
S12	distant	72
S9	distant	47
S25	close	15
S28	close	2
S11	close	1

The use of conventionally indirect requests is perceived to be appropriate in situations that are characterised as maximal in social distance and inappropriate in situations where social distance is minimal such as S25 (neighbours), S28 and S11 (family). Within the family, or between close neighbours where social distance is at its minimal, directness is perceived as the norm.

Examples:

(a) To a neighbour:

- (30) S25: *Lao Wu, gei wo dian yan. Wo jizhe chao cai.*
 old Wu give me a little salt I in a hurry fry vegetables
 Lao Wu, give me a little salt, I'm in a hurry frying some vegetables.

(b) To a stranger:

- (31) S12: *Tongzhi, neng ba chuanguhu dakai yihuir ma?*
 tongzhi can CV window open a while MP
 Tongzhi, can you open the window for a while?

In (a) if S were to use a query-preparatory, it could convey the wrong signal - that is, a distancing of S. On the other hand, it would still be acceptable to use an IMP in (b) with the appropriate politeness marker or explanation:

- (32) S12: *Tongzhi, che li tai men, qing ba chuanguhu*
 tongzhi compartment inside too stuffy please CV window
dakai yidianr, hao ma?
 open a little good MP
 Tongzhi, it's too stuffy inside this compartment, please open the window for a little while, ok?

Here in S12, passenger A sees a need to open the window and seeks to solicit passenger B's agreement. The approach is one of directness. It is interesting that no respondents used hints such as "It's stuffy in here." That respondents see no necessity to be indirect in a situation which Westerners might regard as imposing and even face threatening points to Chinese speakers' preference for a level of directness even with strangers.

4.3. Ranking of imposition

The ranking of imposition basically defines the ease or difficulty of carrying out a request, the evaluation of which being made in socio-cultural terms - the rights and obligations of both participants and the expectations of compliance by speaker. There is supportive statistical evidence to show close interaction between ranking and the level of directness. Data shows a negative relationship between direct bald on record strategy M1 (impositives) and R, that is to say, as the weighting (Wx) of R increases, use of impositives decreases (see Table 3). Percentage distribution of request strategy type from the questionnaire survey presented in Table 6 confirms R as an important variable in determining the level of directness that is acceptable. The findings point to a tendency of imperative avoidance in direct bald on record

requests in situations marked by a high R.

In Table 6 all Rs marked '+' show a much lower percentage of M1 occurrences as a strategy choice compared to those with a '-' rating. What constitutes an FTA as a request is basically what S considers as being difficult for H to comply, regardless of social distance. Rights and obligations come a close second to this. Statistical evidence from the questionnaire survey shows that when the other contextual factors P and D are constant, R is the single most influential factor on request strategy type, especially in regard to M1 - impositives and M2 - conventionally indirect. The use of impositives in each of these situations decreases with a corresponding increase in R: S25 borrowing salt - 89.3%; S15 borrowing bike - 76.1%; and S22 borrowing money - 7.6%.

Table 6 R in relation to P and D

SIT	(N)	P	D	R	M1 %	M2 %	M4 %	M3 %
S14	(167)	+	+-	-	100	0.0	0.0	0.0
S29	(168)	+	+-	+-	35.7	54.8	9.5	0.0
S6	(167)	+-	-	-	98.2	0.0	1.8	0.0
S22	(163)	+-	-	+	27.6	59.5	4.9	8.0
S19	(168)	+-	+	-	99.4	0.0	0.6	0.0
S12	(171)	+-	+	+	57.3	42.1	0.6	0.0
S25	(168)	+-	-	+-	89.3	8.9	0.0	1.8
S15	(159)	+-	-	+	76.1	22.0	1.3	0.6

(N) = total tokens of utterances for each situation

% = % of occurrences

+ = P: high; D: distant; R: high

- = P: low; D: close; R: low

+- = P: equal; D: casual; R: mid

The results in the table show a close relationship between the Wx of R and the level of acceptability in directness. In a context of high R it would not be considered appropriate to use impositives that are otherwise found to be acceptable in a context of small D and high P. This finding is another manifestation of Chinese speakers' adherence to *li*, that of 'reasonableness' i.e. it is not polite to use impositives where the request might be perceived to pose difficulty for H to comply. Respondents unanimously show through their choice of strategy that it is impolite to impose when imposition verges on inconsideration of other. In other words, there are degrees of imposition. For instance, borrowing a bike from a friend is not

considered a great imposition by many speakers. Request utterances such as the following are typical of many respondents' use of IMPs:

- (33) *Xiao Rong, ba zixingche jie wo yong yixia, wo mai dian cai qu.*
 xiao Rong CV bike lend me use a while I buy a little green grocery go
 Xiao Rong, lend me your bike for a while, I'm going to the market.
- (34) *Xiao Rong, wo yao qu shichang mai dian cai,*
 xiao Rong I want go market buy a little green grocery
qing jie gei wo zixingche.
 please lend to me bicycle
 Xiao Rong, I want to go to market to get some green grocery, please lend me your bike.

From these requests, it can be seen that apart from giving reasons for borrowing the bike S does not go to great length to inquire about the possibility or willingness of H if s/he would mind him using his bike. To do so would contradict both the sincerity of S and the 'Principle of Least Effort'. By sincerity we mean that of the sincerity of requests as in *a* sincerely requests of *b* which implies then that (i) *a* wants *b* to do R (ii) that *a* assumes that *b* can do R (iii) that *a* assumes that *b* would be willing to do R (Gordon & Lakoff 1975: 85).

5. Cultural values: Sincerity vs solidarity

Sincerity is not unrelated to solidarity. The sincere belief on the part of S that H would do X implies the belief on the part of S that H would not mind doing X. This assumption by S that H would co-operate as demonstrated by utterances (33) and (34) needs to be examined in a culture specific context, a context where bicycles are freely borrowed and made use of. In China there are families who own several bicycles, thus justifying S's assumption that borrowing a bike is not going to cause inconvenience to H. In another society, it is probable that borrowing a bicycle could be ranked high on the imposition scale and therefore constitute a face-threatening act. Similarly, the request of asking one's neighbour for some salt in S25. In comparison to the bicycle request this is a perceptibly smaller request. However, it is still an imposition and in the Brown and Levinson sense would constitute a face-threatening act, an FTA. Survey results point to the fact that it is not perceived as such - 89.3% of tokens were in the form of direct bald on record strategy, some with politeness markers, others without.

Examples: S25 (To neighbour):

- (35) *Lao Wu, gei wo dian yan. Wo jizhe chao cai.*
 old Wu give me a little salt I in a hurry fry vegetables
 Lao Wu, give me a little salt. I'm in a hurry, frying some vegetables.

- (36) *Dama, nin gei wo dian yan yong. Wo mei you le.*
 Dama polite you give me a little salt to use I haven't ASP
 Dama, please give me a little salt. I haven't any.
- (37) *Lao Wu, kuai na dian yan gei wo. Wode cai*
 Old Wu quick get a little salt for me my vegetables
xia guo hou faxian yan yong guan le.
 go down pot after realize salt use finish PFV
 Lao Wu, quick give me a little salt. I realize after putting the vegetables in
 the pot that there's no more salt.

To use a query-preparatory like the following will have different implicatures for a Chinese as opposed to an English-speaking native addressee.

- (38) *Lao Wu, ni neng gei wo yidian yan ma?*
 old Wu you can give me a little salt MP
 Lao Wu, can you give me a little salt?

In English though an indirect request like (37) is the perfect norm: "Could you give me a little salt?" it is not necessarily deemed to be so in Chinese. Cultural values and beliefs do not expect S to ostensibly ask H whether s/he could part with a little salt. To query H here would contradict S's sincerity. Using a conventionally indirect request might appear tentative and polite to a non-native speaker of Chinese but to convey tentativeness in this context could result in sending the wrong signal to H - that S is not certain if H would want to give him/her some salt. If that is the attitudinal message S wishes to convey, then H could be offended, that is, S is doubting his/her generosity.

That both S and H believe that directness is appropriate and acceptable identifies the context as a manifestation of what Bach and Harnish term 'Mutual Contextual Belief' (1979). Both interactants in this context perceive the use of direct requests in the form of imperatives as appropriate linguistic forms. This is not only an expression of solidarity but it also reveals their pragmatic knowledge or what Lakoff terms 'Pragmatic Competence' (1973: 296). Lakoff lists two rules of pragmatic competence:

1. Be clear
2. Be polite.

Speakers of utterances (35), (36) and (37) clearly display pragmatic competence. The propositional content in each of the three request utterances is explicit and clear; and the request is seen as justifiable - core request (Give me a little salt) + reason (e.g. I'm in the middle of cooking). Therefore, imposition is downplayed or regarded as irrelevant, and politeness is conveyed by the grounders given.

In these utterances however, no options are given to H to refuse and according to Lakoff's 'rules of politeness' (1973: 298):

- (i) Don't impose
- (ii) Give options
- (iii) Make A feel good - be friendly

there is clearly an imposition here. If rules (i) and (ii) are violated how can one possibly observe rule (iii)? However, being friendly can be interpreted as being solitary which in the Chinese socio-cultural context says:

- (i) Do impose within reasonable limits
- (ii) Use linguistic forms which express the belief that H will co-operate with S.

Chinese conceptualisation of solidarity tolerates imposition. Lakoff's rules of politeness therefore become irrelevant. There is danger in tying politeness to non-imposition. What is considered imposing and rude in one society may not necessarily be so in another society where imposition can be interpreted as an expression of solidarity.

6. Theoretical implications: Chinese culture, directness and politeness

Chinese social structure is conceived and perceived as an extension of the family structure. In China's traditional past the feudal system legitimised a steeply vertical class structure. Individuality had no place except for the powerful. The individual self is only but a social unit, a part of a larger whole. The Confucian political philosophy stresses subordination and respect for established authority (Oliver 1971: 97). With the advent of socialism there is the same emphasis on social needs above individual preferences, albeit for a different end. Individuality was submerged under the socialist ideal of egalitarianism encapsulated in the address form *tongzhi* 'comrade.' In the Brown and Levinson's dichotomy of politeness, the cultural norm places greater emphasis on positive politeness (the need for social approval) rather than negative politeness (the need to be unimposed upon). From the Chinese viewpoint, negative politeness is irrelevant in a context where being indirect can be perceived as inappropriate - as (a) where the request is deemed to be easily carried out, (b) where both interactants are familiar or socially close, (c) where the speaker is in a position of power or authority. Requests expressed as imperatives are socially acceptable in this context. Thus Searle's statement:

... ordinary conversational requirements of politeness normally make it awkward to issue flat imperative statements (e.g. *Leave the room*) ... and we therefore seek to find indirect means to our illocutionary ends (e.g. *I wonder if you would mind leaving the room*). In directives, politeness is the chief motivation for indirectness. (1975: 64)

is not validated by the results of this investigation. Blum-Kulka found that in a basically "solidarity-politeness oriented society" like Israel, speakers attach a great value to sincerity and differ in attitude to the British (1987: 140) in relation to perceptions of negative politeness; ... the results of the rating experiments show no

linear relationship between indirectness and politeness." It is obvious that notions of directness and politeness need to be investigated cross-culturally. Wierzbicka calls for a consideration of cultural diversity in terms of 'cultural logic':

Natural logic provides a considerable range of options. The choices embodied in individual languages reflect not only 'natural logic', and not only a combination of 'natural logic' with historical accidents. They reflect what Gumperz (1982: 182) aptly calls 'cultural logic'. (1985: 174)

The term 'cultural logic' is a useful notion in any conceptual framework one purports to examine politeness and directness. The results of this study point towards several conclusions:

- (i) it is culturally logical that the Chinese society with its traditional emphasis on rituals and practice of *li* as a code of conduct should observe relative social distance, ranking and seniority;
- (ii) that such observations are richly lexicalised in an elaborate system of address terms;
- (iii) that levels of directness are in essence the linguistic expressions of a cultural practice at the level of syntax;
- (iv) that using IMPs are motivated by the need to be explicit and clear, a rationale that underlies the need to convey upfront sincerity.

It follows that the 'Principle of Least Effort' and the 'Principle of Sufficient Effort' are logically related to this cultural belief - 'be sincere, be direct, be brief'. It is logical that in order to communicate effectively, one should avoid verbosity of any form, which is a case of saying 'p' to convey 'p' than saying 'q' to imply 'p'. Directness, seen in this light is simply rational linguistic behaviour. If being rational implies being efficient or economical in one's action then the most rational way of achieving one's goal is to select action that involves the least cost to one's effort. "Given a certain goal, the most rational way to reach it is the way with the least costs involved" (Allwood 1987: 22). 'Cultural logic' therefore need not be seen as completely different to 'natural logic'.

Rules of politeness or politeness *per se* should therefore be examined not only from the point of cultural norms but also from the perspective of rational behaviour. Language and behaviour need not be analysed in isolation. The logic of politeness can best be summed up by Lakoff (1973: 303) in her views on the functions of politeness:

... the rules of language and the rules for other types of cooperative human transactions are all parts of the same system; it is futile to set linguistic behavior apart from other forms of human behavior.

A similar parallel can be drawn - that between linguistic behaviour and linguistic forms. As socialised beings we are invariably conditioned to act and verbalise in socially acceptable ways, as rational beings we want to communicate efficiently

within such cultural boundaries. This relationship - that between human behaviour and language, should be a pivotal point in any discussion of politeness and directness. Cultural relativity should take into consideration rationality.

6. Concluding remarks

The overwhelming preference for direct bald on record strategy shown by respondents in this study points to the Chinese dislike of circumlocution. Anything that can be expressed directly is preferred. Querying H's ability or willingness to do X is not generally seen as the requestive norm. "Can you pass the salt?" as pointed out by Horn (1984: 14) is quite "pointless" as a yes-no question if "I know for a fact that you can pass me the salt." It may be true to say: whereas English speakers exploit the CP - the maxim of manner, in order to be indirect and polite, Chinese speakers observe the CP, in order to subscribe to the two functional economies of Zipf and Martinet 'the Principle of Least Effort' and 'the Principle of Sufficient Effort' which Horn (1984: 13) identifies with Grice's maxim of Quantity. The use of impositives in direct bald on record requests give Chinese speakers just that fine balance of 'Sufficiency' and 'Necessity'. It enables them simultaneously to express their cultural belief, that of upfront sincerity, and to use imperatives without sounding imperious.

APPENDIX

Situations in the modified DCT used in this study

- S1 A customer in a restaurant has dropped a chopstick and asks for a replacement.
- S2 A person outside a telephone booth asks another person in the queue if s/he has any coins for change.
- S3 A customer asks the postal clerk at the counter about the cost of a registered parcel.
- S4 A student asks his teacher what his test score is.
- S5 An old lady asks the fruit vendor to select some fresh and tasty mandarins for her.
- S6 At the dinner table, Mrs Lin asks her guests, Mr and Mrs Ma to help themselves to the special dish she has prepared for them.
- S7 A factory worker's son is in hospital and he asks his supervisor for an extended lunch break so that he can pay a visit to the hospital.
- S8 Peter asks his colleague Anna if she would like to accompany him to a show (this would be their first date).
- S9 David asks the librarian to help him locate a book.
- S10 A tourist asks a passer-by for directions to his hotel.
- S11 Grandpa asks his grandson to answer the phone as he is reading the newspaper.
- S12 A passenger on a train wants his/her co-passenger sitting next to the window to open it.
- S13 A parent asks a young teacher at a school office how to enrol his/her son at that school.
- S14 Mr Huang, the manager wants his secretary to inform him the moment the long-distance call he is waiting for comes through.
- S15 A student at the hostel wants to borrow his friend's bike to do some shopping.
- S16 A policeman wants a street vendor to remove his basket off the footpath.
- S17 An old lady pays a visit to her friend's daughter in hospital. When the young girl wants to get

- up from her bed, she tells her to lie down.
- S18 At a building construction site, one worker asks another if he would mind him smoking.
- S19 A student at a cafeteria asks another student sitting next to him/her what time it is.
- S20 Mrs Zhan asks her husband to buy sugar on his way home from work.
- S21 A little girl asks her mother to help her get a present for her friend's birthday.
- S22 Mrs. Lan's son is going abroad for further study. She visits her friend, whose husband has just returned from the United States, for financial assistance.
- S23 An employee wants to apply for a scholarship and asks his immediate superior to write him a recommendation.
- S24 Anna is up on a ladder putting up Christmas decorations, she asks her male colleague to pass her some thumb-tacks.
- S25 One neighbour asks another for some salt because midway through cooking has discovered she has run out.
- S26 At the airport a customs officer asks a female passenger to open her suitcase for inspection.
- S27 A university supervisor is unexpectedly indisposed and wants to postpone the appointment with his student.
- S28 A six-year old child wants her grandmother to buy one of the windmills she has just spotted.
- S29 A director in a department wants his chauffeur to go to the station to meet his friend and enquires whether he can be there by 4.00 p.m.
- S30 An old lady asks a young shop assistant to show her a garment.

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