1 Introduction

1.1 Pragmatics and Cross-Cultural Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a field of inquiry focusing on language as it is used by human beings. While the mathematician and philosopher Charles S. Peirce (1839–1914) coined the term 'pragmatism', the word 'pragmatics' was supposedly used first by the philosopher Charles Morris (1901–1979) in 1938.[1] Morris distinguished three branches of the science of signs, or 'semiotics': syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Syntax refers to the formal relation between signs. Semantics refers to the study of the relationship between signs and objects indicated by these signs. Pragmatics is the study of the relationship between signs and their users and interpreters. The field of pragmatics has two major traditions: the so-called 'Anglo-American branch', viewing pragmatics as a component of linguistics, and the 'Continental European branch', regarding pragmatics as a specific field in its own right. Owing to the global impact of pragmatics, this division is becoming increasingly blurred today.

Cross-cultural pragmatics encompasses the comparative study of the use of language by human beings in different languages and cultures. The present book examines this field. The following is a simple example of what we examine in cross-cultural pragmatic analysis:

(1.1)
Can you open the window? (English)

Bang wo dakai chuanghu. (Chinese)
帮我打开窗户。
Help me open the window.

From the cross-cultural pragmatician's point of view, comparing even seemingly simple conventionalised utterances like the ones featured in example (1.1) is full of hidden intricacies. For instance, we may note the following key pragmatic difference between the English and Chinese requests in example (1.1): English prefers the modal verb *can*, while in Chinese the corresponding request may be formulated as an imperative. Of course, to make such a comparative claim we also need to make sure that our two utterances are actually comparable.

The expression 'cross-cultural' conventionally describes the comparison of behavioural patterns in two or more cultures. A notion closely related to the concept of 'cross-cultural' is '**intercultural**', which usually refers to the study of encounters between members of two or more cultures.[2] In pragmatics, 'cross-cultural' investigations focus on similarities and differences between patterns of the use and interpretation of language across cultures. Such a cross-cultural line of inquiry differs from intercultural pragmatics, as the latter generally studies interaction between language users with different cultural backgrounds. The term 'cross-cultural' emerged first in the social sciences in the 1930s, largely as a result of a cross-cultural survey provided by the anthropologist George Murdock in 1969. Murdock studied the statistical compilations of anthropological data drawn from various cultures. Although Murdock was not a linguist, his work remains relevant to cross-cultural pragmatics, largely because he pointed out that any rigorous cross-cultural comparison of cultural patterns can only be done in a strictly data-based way. As the present chapter will illustrate, having a reasonably large collection of data is perhaps the most important distinctive feature of the field of cross-cultural pragmatics. Until the 1970s, the notion 'cross-cultural' had not been frequented in linguistics; it had mostly been associated with other fields such as cross-cultural psychology. In linguistic pragmatics, interest in cross-cultural research had started to grow from the late 1970s (see e.g. Coulmas, 1978; House, 1979). The year 1989 marked a turning point in the development of the field: in this year, a group of scholars, including the first author of this book, published the results of a research project called **'Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project' (CCSARP)** (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). This project provided, for the first time, a systematic way of comparing realisations of pragmatic phenomena across different languages and language varieties. Following the global success of the CCSARP Project, cross-cultural pragmatics became a household term and one of the most influential areas within pragmatics. The CCSARP Project provided the field with various basic criteria for conducting rigorous cross-cultural pragmatic analysis, such as how one can systematically compare levels of directness in comparable language use across various languages. Unfortunately, in later years, cross-cultural pragmatics seems to have lost much of its original focus and rigour, in that various well-known studies such as Wierzbicka (1991) and Goddard and Wierzbicka (2004) all but abandoned the strictly linguistics-anchored approach of the field. Such studies not only proposed universalist concepts for cross-cultural pragmatic research but also deployed psychological and sociological analytic categories – very different from Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), who argued that cross-cultural pragmatics needs to rely on an essentially linguistically anchored pragmatic analytic inventory.

In this book, we aim 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. We aim to

provide the reader with a framework that allows her[3] to engage in a fully fledged cross-cultural pragmatic research in which the main principles of the field are not watered down. We believe that this framework will be particularly useful for understanding the relationship between language and culture from a strictly linguistic pragmatic point of view.

1.2 What Is Cross-Cultural Pragmatics?

Cross-cultural pragmatics and **contrastive pragmatics** have often been used as synonyms (see Blum-Kulka et al., 1989: 6). Both encompass strictly language-based approaches to the relationship between language use and conventionalised cultural patterns. However, 'cross-cultural pragmatics' as we interpret this term in this book is somewhat broader than contrastive pragmatics. Contrastive pragmatic research, in our terminology, covers a **basic methodological approach** by means of which the cross-cultural pragmatician conducts data-based comparative linguistic analyses. Cross-cultural pragmatics, on the other hand, not only relies on contrastive pragmatic research: it also uses **ancillary methodologies**. Such ancillary methodologies either (a) precede the basic contrastive analysis, as a form of pilot study by means of which one establishes what is worth comparing in contrastive research, or (b) follow the contrastive research by testing its validity. For instance, in Chapter 7 we will present a study in which we compare pragmatically important expressions in large Chinese and English corpora. In this research, we involved 'native' speakers[4] of Chinese and English as informants, asking them to identify comparable expressions worth contrastively examining. In other words, we here used an ancillary pilot study to identify objects worth comparing in our contrastive analysis. In Chapter 11, on the other hand, we first conduct a corpus-based contrastive pragmatic analysis and then test the validity of the results of this analysis with the aid of interviews functioning as an ancillary methodology. Figure 1.1 illustrates the relationship between basic contrastive pragmatic research, ancillary research and cross-cultural pragmatic research.

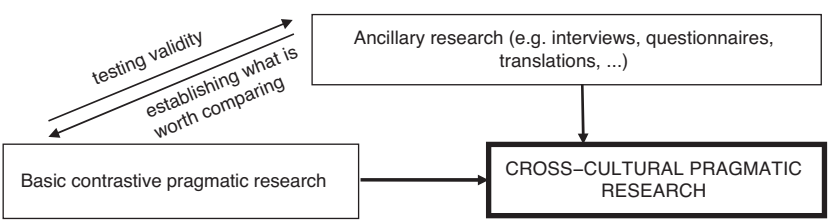

Figure 1.1 The components of cross-cultural pragmatic research

As Figure 1.1 shows, ideally cross-cultural pragmatic research involves both basic contrastive pragmatic and ancillary research. Note, however, that in some forms of cross-cultural pragmatic analysis the role of ancillary research is unavoidably limited: the most important limiting factor is that we can only engage in a fully fledged ancillary inquiry if we study synchronic data. In Chapter 12, for instance, we contrastively examine nineteenth-century pragmatic data. Considering the time gap involved, here we cannot make use of conventional ancillary research methodologies such as interviewing subjects. Also note that basic contrastive pragmatic research often involves several parallel contrastive investigations: for example, in Chapter 7 we simultaneously focus on various pairs of pragmatically important expressions.

Following this overview of the components of cross-cultural pragmatic research, we will now list the key criteria of engaging in cross-cultural pragmatic analysis:

1. *Corpora:* Cross-cultural pragmatic research needs to be 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.
2. *Qualitative and quantitative research methods:* Cross-cultural pragmatic research is, ideally, both quantitative and qualitative. Simply put, in **quantitative research**, the cross-cultural pragmatician examines and compares data by looking into the frequency of occurrence of a 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. As we will argue in Chapter 4 of this book, quantitative and qualitative analyses tend to go hand in hand in cross-cultural pragmatic research.
3. *Variation and/or more than one language:* Cross-cultural pragmaticians may pursue interest in intracultural and intralinguistic variation of languages, including social and regional dialects, style levels, variation of language according to gender and age, and so on. However, cross-cultural pragmatic research more often includes various different languages. The more typologically distant these languages are, the more challenging it may be to contrastively examine them. In the current book we will often contrast such typologically distant languages as Chinese and English.
4. *Emic and etic perspectives:* The anthropologist Kenneth Pike (1954, 1967) defined the language and culture insider's view on certain phenomena as '**emic**', while he defined the language and culture outsider's perspective on

the same phenomena as '**etic**'. Considering that the researcher's view of cross-cultural pragmatic data is often etic because he may not be a cultural insider of all the languages he compares, it is important to balance etic and emic views. Such balancing of etic and emic viewpoints can be achieved by involving native speaker informants in our analysis and investigating their cultural insider views of the phenomena.

5. *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'. A typical example of a cross-cultural pragmatic term, which we will use throughout this book, is '**linguaculture**', meaning culture manifested through patterns of language use. We prefer this term over 'culture' because it emphasises the inherently close relationship between language and culture.[5]
6. *Comparability:* An important issue in cross-cultural pragmatic research is how we conduct the comparison itself. The issue 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 conventionalised they are in their respective linguacultures.

1.3 Language and Culture

In order to properly understand the scope of cross-cultural pragmatic research, it is necessary here to (a) explicate what we mean by culture, (b) discuss layers of the relationship between language and culture, and (c) define which of these layers represent the main foci of cross-cultural pragmatic inquires.

The concept of '**culture**' has been the concern of many different disciplines, such as philosophy, sociology, anthropology, literature and cultural studies. The definitions offered in these fields vary according to the particular frame of reference invoked. In 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn had collected as many as 156 definitions of culture. In all academic attempts at coming to grips with the notion of 'culture', two basic views have emerged: the humanistic concept of culture and the anthropological one. The humanistic concept centres on the 'cultural heritage' of a community. Culture here refers to a representative collection of a community's masterpieces in literature, fine arts, music, and so on. The anthropological concept of culture refers to the overall way of life of a community or any other social formation, that is, all those traditional, explicit

and implicit designs for living which act as potential guides for the behaviour of the members of a culture (see Geertz, 1973). Culture in the anthropological sense captures a group's dominant and learned set of habits, conventions and traditions – all of which are, of course, neither easily accessible nor verifiable. Cross-cultural pragmatic research is based on this anthropological sense of culture.

In the field of linguistics, culture has traditionally been linked with language. For instance, linguists in the Prague school of linguistics and in British contextualism looked at language as primarily a social phenomenon, which is inextricably intertwined with culture. Following such early research, in a body of linguistic research language has continued to be viewed as embedded in culture. This view implies that the meaning of any instance of language use can only be understood with reference to the cultural context enveloping it. In pragmatics, culture has been conventionally associated with patterns of language use, although pragmaticians have engaged in extensive debates regarding the exact relationship between language use and culture (see e.g. Eelen, 2001).

The first author of this book (cf. House, 2005) has distinguished four analytical levels on which culture can be characterised, as displayed in Figure 1.2. The first one is the general human level, where human beings differ from animals. Human beings, unlike animals, are capable of reflection, and they are able to creatively shape and change their environment. The second level is the societal, national level, with culture here being the unifying, binding

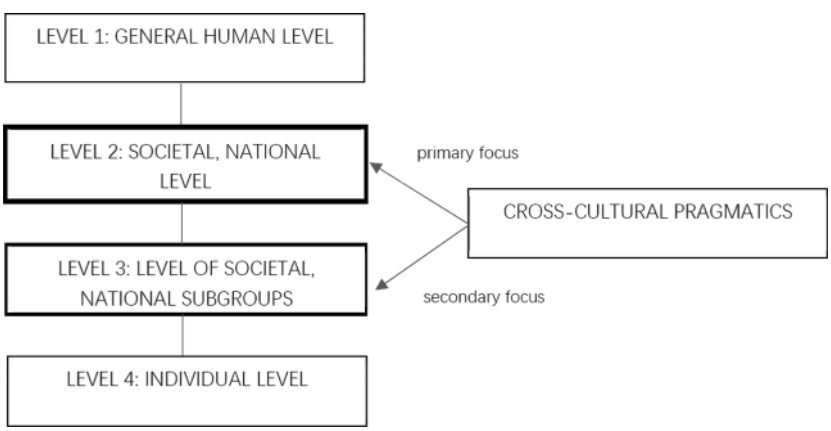

Figure 1.2 The focus of cross-cultural pragmatics (adapted from House, 2005)

force which enables human beings to position themselves vis-à-vis systems of government, domains of activities, religious beliefs and values in which human thinking expresses itself. The third level corresponds to the second level but captures various societal and national subgroups according to geographical region, social class, age, sex, professional activity and topic. It is important for the cross-cultural pragmatician to focus on both these levels of culture: the second level of culture represents language use in 'linguacultures' and the third level represents the language use of certain social groupings. The view that culture can be captured on both the aforementioned second and third levels accords with what various pragmaticians such as Mills (2003) and Grainger and Mills (2016) have argued, namely that 'culture' in pragmatic research should not be limited to national culture only. The fourth level in Figure 1.2 is the personal and individual one, relating to the individual's guidelines for thinking and acting. This is the level of cultural consciousness, which enables a human being to be aware of what characterises his own culture and what makes it distinct from others.

The first general human level is hardly relevant for our concern in this book, considering that cultural variation does not generally include comparisons of human and animal communication. Equally irrelevant for our concern in this book is the fourth level because cross-cultural pragmatics needs to draw abstractions from individual behaviour and cognition, in order to arrive at replicable patterns of the conventional use of language. As we will argue in Chapter 6, **idiosyncrasy** is explicitly excluded from cross-cultural pragmatic analysis. The levels relevant for cross-cultural pragmatic research are therefore the second and third ones. These levels are also highlighted in bold in Figure 1.2. The natural 'partner' of the cross-cultural pragmatician is the second level, that is, language use across distinctively different linguacultures. Along with this level, cross-cultural pragmaticians also pursue interest in the third level, which encompasses instances of variation. Such variation is studied in the area of so-called 'variational pragmatics' (cf. Schneider and Barron, 2010), which represents a subfield of cross-cultural pragmatics and a crossover between cross-cultural pragmatic and sociolinguistic research.

1.4 Why Is Cross-Cultural Pragmatics Important?

The question may emerge why cross-cultural pragmatics should have become particularly influential within pragmatic inquiries. An obvious answer to this question resides in the importance of understanding culturally embedded language use in a globalised world. It has become increasingly important to be able to rigorously analyse data from various linguacultures across globalised settings such as workplaces, educational institutions and many other areas of life affected by migration and related multilingualism.

Considering that cross-cultural pragmaticians often study complex phenomena such as linguacultural differences in global language use, and cross-linguistic activities such as translation and interpreting, engaging in cross-cultural pragmatics often necessitates multidisciplinary thinking. Despite this pursuit of multidisciplinarity, cross-cultural pragmatics in our view can fruitfully collaborate only with linguistics-anchored fields, such as corpus linguistics, translation, language teaching and second language acquisition. As an example, here we can mention the explicit linguistic focus of the recently established cross-disciplinary journal *Contrastive Pragmatics*, co-edited by the authors of this book. This journal features research on the interface between cross-cultural pragmatics and fields of linguistics such as computational linguistics (Fischer and Prondzinska, 2020), language and politics (Kramsch, 2020), corpus linguistics (Aijmer, 2020), academic writing (Hasselgård, 2020) and other typically language-based areas.

1.5 Contents

This book consists of three parts. Part I provides an overview of the foundations of the field; Part II outlines our analytic framework; Part III introduces various case studies illustrating the operation of the framework.

In Chapter 1, we have defined the components and criteria of cross-cultural pragmatic analysis. We have also discussed the relationship between language and culture, and the ways in which cross-cultural pragmatic research examines the language and culture interface. Finally, we have considered the reasons for the importance of doing cross-cultural pragmatic research.

Part I of this book consists of Chapter 2 to Chapter 5. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the chronological background of cross-cultural pragmatics. We argue that cross-cultural pragmatics cannot be traced back to a single academic tradition but rather it is an outcome of the confluence of various strands of academic inquiry. Chapter 2 also provides an overview of the ground-breaking CCSARP Project and discusses the development of cross-cultural pragmatics to the present day.

Chapter 3 examines the intriguing question of how contrasting pragmatic data is possible. We argue that not everything can be contrastively examined – rather we need to identify our ***tertium comparationis***. In so doing, it is fundamental to consider the phenomenon of conventionalisation: the cross-cultural pragmatician needs always to determine whether the phenomena to be compared are sufficiently conventionalised in the respective linguacultures or not.

Chapter 4 provides a summary of the data types studied in cross-cultural pragmatics and the fundamental methodologies used in the field. First, we systematically discuss different types of data, by arguing that the conventional

categories of 'naturally occurring' and 'elicited' data are equally important for cross-cultural pragmatic research. The relationship between these two categories is particularly important to discuss, considering recent criticisms of using elicited data in the field of pragmatics. Following our overview of data types, we summarise qualitative and quantitative approaches frequented in the field. The chapter explains in detail why it is pivotal for the cross-cultural pragmatician to attempt to combine qualitative and quantitative research if he wants to compare language use in a rigorous and replicable way.

Chapter 5 examines a key phenomenon in the field of cross-cultural pragmatics, namely, linguistic politeness and impoliteness. While politeness popularly describes 'proper' behaviour, as a technical term it encompasses all kinds of behaviour by means of which language users express that they take others' feelings into account. Similarly, impoliteness not only refers to rude language use but rather covers all types of behaviour that are meant and felt to cause offence. Politeness and impoliteness have been the most researched phenomena in the field, and in Chapter 5 we provide a summary of those politeness- and impoliteness-related phenomena which are particularly relevant for cross-cultural pragmatic inquiries.

Part II of this book consists of Chapter 6 to Chapter 9. Chapter 6 provides a summary of our cross-cultural pragmatic analytic framework. The framework breaks down cross-cultural pragmatic data into three units of analysis, namely, expressions, speech acts and discourse. These analytic units are interrelated: no cross-cultural pragmatic unit of analysis should be envisaged as a pragmatic layer strictly separable from the other units. The remaining chapters in Part II explain how to put the framework into practical use: Chapter 7 focuses on expressions, Chapter 8 on speech acts and Chapter 9 on discourse.

In Chapter 7, we discuss expressions, constituting the 'lowest' unit of analysis in our model. We here focus specifically on pragmatically salient conventionalised expressions indicating the interactants' rights and obligations in a particular context. We propose a new analytic procedure by means of which such expressions can be systematically compared by using large corpora. As a case study, we examine Chinese and British English expressions.

Chapter 8 discusses how our framework can be operationalised in cross-cultural pragmatic research involving the unit of speech act. We first propose a typology of speech acts and argue that irrespective of which typology one adopts in cross-cultural pragmatic research, it is essential to rely on a rigorous categorisation of speech acts and avoid unnecessarily proliferating speech act categories. After outlining our model of speech act categories, we provide a coding scheme by means of which speech acts can be systematically described in data analysis.

In Chapter 9 we examine discourse, the highest analytic unit. We argue that discourse can only be approached rigorously across linguacultures if it is broken down into components, that is, if we systematically analyse and contrast the units constituting comparable instances of discourse.

Part III of this book consists of Chapter 10 to Chapter 13. These chapters present case studies, illustrating applications of our framework, involving each unit of analysis proposed in Part II of this book. The word 'illustrating' needs to be emphasised here: due to space limitation we are only able to illustrate certain aspects of the framework presented in Part II. Note that studies in this part of the book are based on our previous work disseminated in the form of journal articles.

Chapters 10 and 11 focus on the study of expressions. In Chapter 10, we invite the reader to join us in a journey into applied linguistics and linguistically anchored cross-cultural pragmatics, by examining cross-cultural pragmatic differences between the ways in which British learners of Chinese and Chinese learners of English evaluate a set of pragmatically important expressions in their target language. Chapter 10 reveals that the use of seemingly 'simple' pragmatically salient expressions such as *sorry* in English can cause significant difficulties for foreign language learners. In Chapter 11, we venture into the realm of translation by examining the ways in which translated IKEA catalogues handle (or fail to handle) potential cross-cultural irritations triggered by the translation of the English pronoun *you*.

In Chapter 12, we turn to the cross-cultural pragmatic application of the unit of speech act by contrastively examining the ways in which historical letters are conventionally closed in three different linguacultures: Chinese, German and English. By focusing on historical data, we highlight the overlap between the fields of cross-cultural pragmatics and historical pragmatics. The chapter illustrates how our speech act coding scheme outlined in Chapter 8 can be put into use in data analysis.

Chapter 13 provides a case study of cross-cultural discourse analysis, by examining war crime apologies made by the representatives of the German and Japanese governments. Along with illustrating how the unit of discourse can be systematically compared across linguacultures, the chapter also illustrates that cross-cultural pragmatics provides a highly innovative way of engaging in the study of language and politics because it allows us to systematically analyse controversial and emotively loaded political phenomena, such as war crime apologies, from a strictly linguistic and non-ideologised angle.

Finally, Chapter 14 summarises the contents of the book and proposes directions for future research. The chapters are followed by a Glossary.