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A Comparative Study on Hedges in English Abstracts of Research Articles from Chinese and American Economic Journals

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Abstract

The appropriate use of hedges in academic discourse could make language more objective, improving the credibility of the research article. The abstract section of a research article tends to be a summary of the main content and plays an important role in increasing the frequency of publication, retrieval, reading, and citation. This study examines the use of hedges in economic papers between two corpora: the abstracts from American journals and the abstracts from Chinese journals. Based on Prince et al.'s (1982) taxonomy of hedges and the numbers and frequencies of their various types, hedges in the two corpora were identified and quantified. Considerable variations were found in the overall number and frequency of hedges, the types of hedging devices, and the wordings of hedges in the two corpora. Findings were interpreted concerning Chinese authors' lack of familiarity with hedges and their first language transfer. In general, the results may have some implications for Chinese economic scholars' English abstract writing and its related teaching. Some suggestions on the topic and the limitations of this study are also presented at the end of this paper.

Keywords: hedge, abstract, pragmatics, academic discourse

1. Introduction

Hedges, one type of the most important strategies for mitigating certainty, have been successfully applied to various discourses, including business discourse, legal discourse, academic discourse, and daily conversation. In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of research undertaken on hedges and their functions, especially in academic discourse. Hedges are words with uncertainty, fuzziness, and possibility. They have been proved to play a prominent role in mitigating the statements to avert possible criticism. Appropriate use of hedges in academic discourse involving propositions and deductions is conducive to lowering assertiveness, making statements more personal opinions than pure facts, and increasing credibility (Hyland, 1998).

Studies on hedges in research articles or such parts as abstract and conclusion have been carried out from different perspectives, among which cross-cultural, interdisciplinary, and diachronic studies are the most conducted ones (e.g., Liu & Chen, 2020; Wang & Lv, 2016; Paul & Freek, 2010). There have been researches analyzing hedges in linguistic, sociological, biological research articles, and so on (e.g., Abdollahzadeh, 2011; Guo & Ma, 2016; Yang, 2013). Economic research articles are seldomly included except for the paper by Zhao and Sun (2014), which made a comparison of hedging in papers on natural science and social science involving economics. Generally, little is known about the forms and functions of hedges in economic research articles, let alone a comparative study on them from Chinese and American economic journals. To be more specific, this paper focuses mainly on the abstract section, a summary, and an introduction of the main content or a time-saving device for readers (Martin, 2003). It has been pointed out that abstracts are of vital importance in increasing the frequency of publication, retrieval, reading, and citation of research articles.

This research is designed to examine the use of hedges in the abstracts of economic research articles from Chinese and American core journals. It aims at exploring (1) the differences in hedging in terms of forms and functions between the two corpora, and (2) the deep-seated causes. Then it will tentatively give some suggestions for Chinese economic researchers on how to write academic abstracts so that their articles could be more acceptable by international influential journals. The present paper is made up of seven sections and its layout is provided to make it easier to follow. The next section sets out to make reviews on the previous studies on hedges and find out the gap in this research. The methodology is arranged in Section 3, where selection criteria for the corpora, data collection and compilation, the instruments, and analytical framework will be discussed to attain reliability as well as the validity of the study. The main body of the paper is Sections 4 and 5. Through detailed tables, quantitative data, and qualitative explanations, each category, and sub-category of hedges is analyzed and compared to explore the differences between the two corpora, and then the causes of differences are going to be discussed. Lastly, Section 6 concludes the research by giving a summary of the main findings, the implications, and limitations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Hedges in academic discourse

A hedge is a word or a phrase whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy (Lakoff, 1972). It is believed that hedges could lower assertiveness, make scientific statements more personal opinions than pure facts, and thus increase the credibility of research results (Hyland, 1998).

Researchers have studied hedges and their functions from different perspectives and in such discourses as research articles in various disciplines (Liu & Chen, 2020; Yang, 2013; Abdollahzadeh, 2011), legal documents (Holly, 2017), economic reports (McLaren-Hankin, 2008), medical discourses (Jiang & Kou, 2011) and so on. Among these genre types, hedging and its function in academic discourse have been the focal point of a lot of research.

Hedges are widely used in academic discourses to express epistemic modality, that is, the degree of certainty and truth value. Scientific writers tend to be careful in acknowledging the limits of what can be concluded from their lines and thus give a cautious assessment of the truth of statements. Hedging allows a way of "conveying honesty, modesty, and proper caution" (Swales, 1990). Employing hedges represents the writers' own doubt about the information and presenting it as nothing but opinion, by which they could reduce the degree of responsibility they might face in presenting their research.

In addition to epistemic functions, it is suggested that hedges play an important role in interpersonal communication between writers and readers by serving as a device for giving others a chance to disagree. Politeness concerns and cultural standing concerns are mainly involved when considering the interpersonal function of hedges (Strauss, 2004). To be more specific, by hedging, scholars are conveying information that they want to avoid personal offense and/or that they are expected to realize there are competing views regarding their studies. In other words, hedges mitigate communications as writers tend to anticipate either controversial or supportive reflections on their research outcomes by other academic colleagues. That is to say, whether a research article is appropriately hedged is a critical criterion in the selection process by journal editors, affecting its publication, retrieval, and citation in the long run.

Apart from expressing epistemic and interpersonal meanings, proper use of hedges in academic discourse can increase the credibility of research articles. The study by Jensen (2008) shows that researchers who present the limitation and uncertainty of their study are considered to be more trustworthy since the academic community is believed to prefer "a more self-critical style of communication". Therefore, the use of hedges has been one of the linguistic norms of the academic community and helps to increase the credibility of both the research and the scholar.

2.2 Comparative studies on the use of hedges in academic discourse

Most of the cross-cultural studies which make a contrastive analysis of papers written by native English scholars and non-natives suggest that cultural and linguistic backgrounds affect the use of hedges (Liu & Chen, 2020; Guo & Ma, 2016; Hu & Cao, 2010). And most of these studies indicate that English journals feature a significantly higher frequency of hedges than Chinese journals. For example, Hu & Cao (2010) examined abstracts of applied linguistics articles of Anglo-American and Chinese, and their quantitative analysis indicated that abstracts published in English-medium journals featured markedly more hedges than those published in Chinese-medium journals.

However, Guo & Ma (2016) analyze the use of hedges by comparing Chinese scholars and native English speakers based on Hyland's (2005) taxonomy of hedges, but the results tend to be the opposite. They have established a dataset of 240 English abstracts from four journals in sociology, with two Chinese journals and two English, and suggested that there is no significant difference in the frequency of hedges between Chinese and English journals. Additionally, Abdollahzadeh (2011) conducted a contrastive analysis of applied linguistics articles written in English by Iranian and Anglo-American academic writers according to Vande Kopple's (1985) classification of metadiscourse, and the results show no significant difference in the use of hedges between them.

To sum up, the results from these comparative studies on hedges are far from consistent and therefore warrant further investigation, especially with comparable corpora across different linguistic and cultural groups.

An examination of previous literature suggests that there are already some studies on comparative analysis of hedges in linguistic, sociological, biological research articles, and so on (e.g., Abdollahzadeh, 2011; Guo & Ma, 2016; Yang, 2013). Economic research articles are seldomly included except for the paper by Zhao and Sun (2014) which made a comparison of hedging in papers on natural science and social science involving economics. Moreover, there is even less research concerning the comparative analysis of hedges in the abstract section of economic articles, especially between Chinese and American core journals.

Therefore, this study may fill the research gap and broaden the scope of studies on hedges. It is designed to examine the use of hedges in the abstract section of economic research articles from Chinese and American core journals based on Prince et al's (1982) taxonomy of hedges applying both quantitative and qualitative methods.

3. Method

3.1 Research questions

Building on previous research, the present study aims to answer the following research questions:

(1) What are the features of frequency and distribution of hedges in the abstracts of economic articles from Chinese and American core journals respectively?

(2) How do the hedges used in the abstracts of research articles from Chinese core economic journals and American ones differ from each other?

(3) Why do there exist differences in the usage of hedges in the abstracts from Chinese and American economic journals?

3.2 The identification of hedges and the two corpora

The analysis of hedges in the present study is based on two corpora which are established by the criteria of representativity, reputation, and accessibility (Nwogu, 1991). The first corpus consists of five Chinese economic journals and the second five American ones. According to the latest Annual Report for World Academic Journal Clout Index, these are the most influential journals in China and the U.S. (Table 1). The reasons why this report is employed as the channel for further sifting journals are as follows. Firstly, the annual report is mainly ranked by the international influence of journals. This study intends to provide a reference for the improvement of abstract writing, which could, to some extent, increase the number of publications of research articles and enhance their influence. So, international influence should be the criterion for selecting a rank list, and that annual report meets the requirement. Secondly, it is the latest accessible report indicating the international influence of journals. Lastly, the journals in that report can be found in China National Knowledge Infrastructure and Web of Science and downloaded from them, so they are easy to obtain and have a certain reputation. Totally 60 abstracts, with 30 from Chinese journals and 30 from American ones, are collected with stratified random sampling regardless of the author's name, gender difference, and university to minimize subjectivity. Their publication time is restricted to the period from January 1st to September 30th, 2020, during which that report made its research on the influential index to ensure validity. The number of abstracts from each journal is also listed in Table 1. There is a total of 6,624 words in the Chinese journal corpus and 3,734 words in the American journal corpus. Although the number of words in each corpus is different, I have normalized the two corpora by examining the frequency of hedges in terms of their occurrence per 1000 words.

Table 1. Ten Focused Journals in The Present Study

	Name of Journal	World Academic Journal Clout Index (WAJCI)	Number of Abstracts from Each Journal
American Journals	*Quarterly Journal of Economics*	11.646	4
	American Economic Review	9.591	9
	Journal of Political Economy	8.665	8
	Journal of Economic Perspectives	6.459	6
	Journal of Economic Literature	5.093	3
Chinese Journals	*Economic Research Journal*	6.580	5
	Chinese Rural Economy	3.101	8
	China Industrial Economics	2.951	7
	The Journal of World Economy	2.863	7
	China Economic Quarterly	2.669	3

The classification of hedges is mainly based on their surface features. Being specific and widely accepted, Prince et al's (1982) taxonomy of hedges is employed in this study. What's more, 16 out of 20 randomly sampled abstracts from the selected journals turned out to contain all the subcategories of it rather than other classifications including Hyland's (2005), Hyland and Milton's (1997), and Salager-Meyer's (1994) taxonomy of hedges, indicating that it is closer to the abstract writing traditions in economic research articles. Then the abstracts in both corpora were classified into one of the four following categories: adaptor, rounder, plausibility, and attribution. For the sake of greater clearness and accessibility, the following Figure 1 is presented to illustrate the classification.

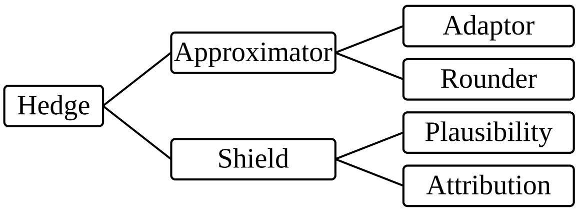

Figure 1. Prince et al.'s (1982) Taxonomy of Hedges

Examples of hedges in each sub-type are given:

(1) Adaptors:

sort of, kind of, somewhat, almost, quite, entirely, a little bit, to some extent, more or less…

(2) Rounders:

approximately, essentially, something between A and B, about, around, roughly...

(3) Plausible shields:

Expressions whose subjects tend to be the first person: I think, I believe, I suppose, we assume, we suppose, we find…

Modal auxiliaries: can, could, may, might…

Adjectives, adverbs, or nouns showing possibility: probably, likely, possible, potential, possibility, and probability.

(4) Attributing shields:

Expressions whose subjects are not the first person like he supposes, she believes, they propose, the results reveal, it seems…

Phrases: according to, based on…

Forms of hedges in the Chinese journal corpus and the American journal corpus were examined and quantified manually. It should be noted that the identification process is based on both language and context. Take the phrase "let us conclude" as an example. Although it is not in the form of "first personal pronoun subject" plus "a plausible shield verb," it still belongs to the type of plausible shields since its meaning is the same as "we conclude." To limit subjectivity, this process was subjected to repetition a few times. The overall frequencies of hedges employed in the two corpora were tabulated, together with the distribution of different types of hedges. The significant difference between them is figured out by the Chi-square test. Then, another rater was asked to code the data to increase the validity of this paper. The two coders discussed the discrepancy and agreed on the statistical results.

4. Results and Discussion

Based on the principles of identifying hedges, the overall numbers of hedges in abstracts from American as well as Chinese economic journals are collected. Considering the different sizes of the two corpora, this paper intends to standardize the frequency by converting the total number of identified hedges into 1,000 words. As demonstrated in the tables in the following section, the results show that the use of hedges in the abstracts from American and Chinese journals varies considerably. They not only vary in terms of the overall number and frequency but also their distribution of four sub-categories.

4.1 Statistics and Data Analysis

Table 2 summarizes the overall number and frequency of hedges in the economic abstracts in the two corpora. The frequency of hedges in the abstracts from American journals (AAJ) is 50.40 per 1000 words, higher than the number in the abstracts from Chinese journals (ACJ), which is 48.84 per 1000 words. Abstracts in the American journals are richer in hedges than English abstracts written by Chinese economic scholars. The authors in the AAJ corpora are more tentative in stating a claim or presenting research outcomes, while the Chinese authors in the ACJ corpora, when writing in their second language, seem to be more assertive. This finding is similar to Wei's study (2007), which shows that Chinese writers rarely use hedges to ease tone and show the temporality of their conclusions.

Table 2. Overall Frequency of Hedges in the Two Corpora

	Abstracts from American Journals (AAJ)	Abstracts from Chinese Journals (ACJ)
Number of Texts	30	30
Total Number of Hedges	188	179
Hedges per 1000 Words	50.40	48.84

With regards to the different types of hedges used in the two corpora, the distribution also varies to a large extent. Based on the taxonomy proposed by Prince et al., hedges in the present study are classified into two main categories including approximators and shields, and four sub-categories. They are adaptors, rounders, plausible shields, and attributing shields. As is shown in Table 3, there is no significant difference between the two corpora in the overall frequency of approximators, but this does not mean that there is no difference in the use of adaptors or rounders. The frequency of adaptors in the ACJ corpus is significantly higher than that in the AAJ corpora (P = 0. 002), while Chinese authors in the ACJ corpus appear to employ significantly fewer rounders than the authors in the AAJ corpus (P = 0.002). In addition, shields are more abundant in the AAJ corpus (26.76%) than in the ACJ corpus (25.22%). To be more specific, there is a significant difference in attributing shields (P = 0.001) but not in plausible shields.

Table 3. Overall Frequency of Main Categories of Hedges

	No.		Freq.		P-Value
	AAJ	ACJ	AAJ	ACJ	
Adaptors	45	48	11.96	12.94	*0.002
Rounders	44	39	11.68	10.68	*0.002
Approximators	88	87	23.64	23.62	0.965
Plausibility	51	49	13.56	13.38	0.547
Attribution	49	43	13.20	11.84	*0.001
Shields	100	92	26.76	25.22	*0.003

Notes:* stands for the significant level P≤0.05

No. stands for the number of hedges

Freq. stands for hedges per 1000 words

In addition to the differences in the distribution of types and sub-types of hedges across the two corpora, the results also show disparities in the wording of each sub-category. Adaptors are expressions that modify the original meaning based on the actual situation to some extent. This study finds that adaptors that are frequently employed by Chinese scholars in the ACJ corpora are such expressions as significant(ly), high, much, almost, great(ly), and obvious(ly). But the following words are much more rarely used by them than authors in the AAJ corpora: very, highly, relatively, moderate(ly), somewhat, quite, apparent(ly), and so on. Thus, despite the higher frequency of adaptors in the ACJ corpora, those in the AAJ corpora appear to be much more diversified. Much different from adaptors, rounders, which are expressions setting a certain variation range of the original discourse, are both less frequently adopted and less rich in their wording in the ACJ corpora than in the AAJ corpora.

Plausible shields are expressions concerning the writer’s subjective inferences or judgments, involving something related to doubt or lack of certainty. As mentioned above, there is a significant difference in attributing shields (P = 0.001) between the two corpora. To figure out the different wordings of plausibility, it was further classified into (a) modal auxiliaries like can, could, might, and (b) verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and nouns such as I suppose that, possibly, be likely that, probability. As demonstrated in Table 4, Chinese scholars in economics rely too much on modal auxiliaries to express modalities in their English abstracts and seldom use verbs, adverbs, adjectives, or nouns. On the contrary, two types of plausible shields are used by authors in the AAJ corpora in a more balanced manner.

Table 4. Frequency of Different Types of Plausible Shields

	No.		Freq.		P-Value
	AAJ	ACJ	AAJ	ACJ	

Modal Auxiliaries	36	41	9.84	10.90	*0.002
Verbs, Adverbs, Adjectives, Nouns	15	8	3.72	2.48	*0.001

Notes:* stands for the significant level P≤0.05

No. stands for the number of hedges

Freq. stands for hedges per 1000 words

Attributing shields attribute the speaker's or the writer's belief to someone other than himself. As presented above, the frequency of attributing shields in the AAJ corpus was significantly higher than that in the ACJ corpus (P = 0. 001). After repetitive reading of the texts, attributing shields in the two corpora are divided into (a) reporting verbs like the study shows that, it seems that, the author believes that and (b) prepositional phrases including according to, based on. It can be seen from Table 5 that in writing English abstracts, Chinese authors in the ACJ corpus use reporting verbs at a dramatically higher percentage than authors of American economic journals. However, they fail to use preposition phrases as frequently as authors in the AAJ corpus.

Table 5. Frequency of Different Types of Plausible Shields

	No.		Freq.		P-Value
	AAJ	ACJ	AAJ	ACJ	
Reporting Verbs	48	35	12.80	9.38	*0.000
Prepositional Phrases	1	8	0.40	4.00	*0.000

Notes:* stands for the significant level P≤0.05

No. stands for the number of hedges

Freq. stands for hedges per 1000 words

4.2 Discussion

In the two corpora, as is mentioned, hedges are used as a way of lessening assertions in scientific claims or mitigating interpersonal relationships. Academic writers tend to employ different types of hedges to achieve their purpose. The two corpora show differences in the overall number of hedges, the different types of hedges, and the wordings of hedges in the abstract section. A complicated array of factors including Chinese authors' lack of familiarity with hedges and their first language transfer may explain the results.

First and foremost, Chinese authors' lack of some understanding of hedges might account for the finding that overall, hedges are used less frequently and less diversely in the ACJ corpus than in the AAJ corpus. This finding is congruent with previous studies which reported that non-native speakers may not have a good command of the linguistic devices of hedging (Vassileva, 2001; Hu & Cao, 2011). They came to propose that skillful use of hedges requires a high level of language proficiency that can only be achieved when the author advances beyond the level of vocabulary and syntactic structure. For example, Chinese economic researchers, when using adaptors to modify the original meaning based on the actual situation, tend to rely too much on expressions such as significant(ly), high, much, almost, great(ly), and obvious(ly), which is far less diversified than those in the AAJ corpus. Another plausible explanation for Chinese authors' unfamiliarity with meeting the expectations of the international academic community could be a kind of pragmatic failure. Some of them may hold the view that abstracts should be objective, accurate, and authoritative, and thus excessive use of hedges in academic abstracts should be avoided. The cooperative principle proposed by Grice in 1975 is a rational requirement of communication, revealing that both sides of communication who seem to violate the principles follow the maxims of quantity, quality, manner, and relation in a deeper sense. The use of hedges is, in fact, an embodiment of the cooperative principle. The authors in the AAJ corpus view abstracts as a communication to the audience, and by employing hedges appropriately they intend to make scientific findings more persuasive and avoid overgeneralization.

Secondly, due to first language transfer, Chinese authors may be unlikely to employ hedges as much and diversely as native speakers when they write English abstracts. On the one hand, previous comparative studies on hedges in research articles written in English and Chinese suggest that the frequency and distribution of them in articles written in Chinese are dramatically lower than those in English (Liu, 2003; Jiang & Tao, 2007; Jiang & Kou, 2011). In the present corpora, as in Jiang and Tao (2007)'s corpora, hedges like ''unexpectedly'' and ''surprisingly'' appear in relatively low frequency because Chinese authors regard scientific discourse as being serious, factual, impersonal, and objective. Thus, in their scientific articles, they use limited hedges which allow for personal feelings they consider inappropriate and non-authoritative. On the other hand, when writing English abstracts, Chinese scholars may be influenced by their literal translation of some expressions. For example, they appear to use prepositional phrases as attributing shields much more frequently than the writers in the AAJ corpus, while their frequency of reporting verbs is significantly lower than that in the abstracts of American journals. The reason why Chinese researchers rely too much on such phrases as according to and based on could be the impact of first language transfer. It could be found that the word ″根据 (genju)″ in Chinese, which can be translated to according to or based on in English, is widely used to quote other people′s statements or views in Chinese articles. To make up for it, Chinese authors are also required to advance their language proficiency.

5. Conclusion

This research examines the use of hedges in the abstracts of economic research articles from Chinese and American core journals to explore the differences in the frequency and distribution of hedging between the two corpora as well as their deep-seated causes.

The findings of the present study show differences in not only the overall number and frequency of hedges but also the distribution of sub-categories and wordings of hedges in the two corpora. Hedges are employed more frequently and diversely in the abstracts from American journals than those from Chinese journals, indicating that Chinese economic authors appear to put forward ideas or reveal their findings more affirmatively, while American authors usually ease their tone by hedging. Apart from the discrepancy in the overall frequency, the diversity and richness in the wordings of hedges across the two corpora are far from the same.

These results are partly because the Chinese authors' English proficiency may not be highly developed at the discourse level. It is known that the ability to make a good command of hedges in academic discourse is a crucial factor for full participation in the international academic community. Therefore, Chinese economic researchers are recommended to read more research articles written by native scholars in economics and more pedagogical materials that may help them develop an awareness of the variety of hedging devices. For non-native English speakers, a great deal of time and effort may be needed to learn how to present their claims or scientific findings persuasively so that they can be accepted by members of the academic community. In addition to Chinese authors' lack of familiarity with hedges, the findings of the present study reveal that there may be first language transfer that determines the use of hedges by Chinese writers. They seem to employ hedges in English discourse as little as in their Chinese articles when presenting scientific proposals or outcomes and can be influenced by their literal translation of some expressions from Chinese to English.

The present study adds to the body of research that compares the use of hedges in abstracts from Chinese and American core journals, and may to some extent advance Chinese authors' knowledge of the academic culture in American economic journals. However, this research only focuses on two small corpora due to limited personal time, energy, and ability, affecting the generalization of the research results. Additionally, subjectivity is unavoidably involved in the process of manual identification and classification of hedges even if it was subjected to several times and another rater was asked to do the same work. Future research may reduce the limitations and conduct a deeper and further comparative analysis of hedges in articles across various disciplines written by scholars of various linguistic or cultural groups.

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Brand Image Construction of Food Corporate: A Cognitive Linguistic Study of Multimodal Metaphor in English Video Advertising during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The past two years have witnessed the widespread of COVID-19, which has triggered conspicuous changes in business around the world. As an important marketing communication between the sellers and the buyers, advertising has also been affected by the pandemic. Multimodal metaphor in advertising has attracted the interest of many researchers as more modes of expression appear in advertising. In this study, the author attempts to investigate multimodal metaphor in English video advertising during the COVID-19 pandemic, endeavoring to explore the functions of multimodal metaphor in constructing the brand image of food corporates within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor and Multimodal Metaphor. By examining the construction process of multimodal metaphors, the interactions of multimodal metaphor and metonymy, the image schema and the intended message in these advertisements, several findings are suggested. Firstly, multimodal metaphor is used to promote product or service by highlighting their attributes of evading potential risks of the pandemic. Secondly, the mainly used modes in these advertisements to construct meaning are visual and aural. The referring process of product/service is realized by multimodal metonymies; the transferring process of information from the advertiser to the audience is realized by image schemas. Thirdly, the brand images are constructed mainly by soft attributes. The company image and user image are built explicitly, while the product/service image is built implicitly.

Keywords: video advertising, multimodal metaphor, brand image, food corporates

1. **Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic has exerted a detrimental influence on people’s psychological states (Wang et al., 2020). For instance, people tend to feel highly uncertain about their health, work, finances, and socializing (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). Moreover, the overload of information about COVID-19 induces feelings of uncertainty since people are unable to process all the information (Farooq et al., 2020). Another negative psychological consequence of COVID-19 is a sense of powerlessness due to an increasing number of confirmed cases and deaths, the lack of widespread construction process of the COVID-19 vaccine, the fear of food shortages and the difficulty in acquiring accurate information (Kirk & Rifkin, 2020). Recent research on COVID-19 suggests that feelings of uncertainty and powerlessness influence consumers’ purchasing actions (Leduc & Liu, 2020).

Advertising is a marketing communication that employs an openly sponsored, non-personal message to promote or sell a product, service or idea (Stanton & Sommers, 1973), and it proves to be an indispensable part of human life influencing consumers’ spending and opinions about the company. Advertising functions not only to promote the products or services but also to reinforce the company’s own identity (e.g., corporate business identity) (Downing & Mujic, 2015). Nowadays, thanks to the thriving of mass media, advertising allows into play the modes of language, visuals, and sound/music.

On the other hand, the recent decades have witnessed a dramatic change in people’s opinion about metaphor. In *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) hold that metaphor is not merely a linguistic or rhetorical phenomenon, but also a mode of thinking which affects people’s behavior and they put forward Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which marks the significant paradigm shift in the cognition of metaphor. Since then, studies on CMT have been very productive, which mainly focus on the verbal metaphor. However, non-verbal and multimodal metaphors have been far less exclusively studied than their verbal sisters (Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009). To attest to the multimodal nature of metaphor, Forceville (1996) examines many pictorial advertisements. In this way, he lays a foundation for the first step of multimodal metaphor study. Multimodal metaphor has had a close relationship with advertising since it was initiated.

Current research on multimodal metaphor in advertising focuses on the meaning construction functions and the interaction of multimodal metaphor with other subjects, such as metonymy in advertising discourse itself, and little scholarly attention has been paid to the role of multimodal metaphorical advertising serving to construct the brand images of corporates. More research is conducted on the multimodality of images and texts, while that of video and sound which are of equal importance, is less concerned. Moreover, the studies investigating multimodal metaphorical advertising during the COVID-19 pandemic are lacking. In this case, this study attaches importance to multimodal metaphor in Food video advertising during the COVID-19 pandemic and explores the functions of these advertisements serving to construct a brand image.

This study aims at investigating multimodal metaphor in Food video advertising during the COVID-19 pandemic, endeavoring to explore the functions of multimodal metaphor in the process of meaning construction and the different types of interaction of multimodal metaphor and metonymy in these advertisements will be analyzed within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor. By interpreting the image schema and the intended message embodied in these advertisements, this study will also expound on the functions of multimodal metaphorical advertisements in constructing a brand image. Therefore, three research questions are put forward as follows:

1) What is the construction process of multimodal metaphor in English food video advertising during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2) How do multimodal metaphors interact with multimodal metonymy and image schema to construct meaning in English Food Video Advertising during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3) What kind of brand image do multimodal metaphors construct through meaning construction in English Food Video Advertising during the COVID-19 pandemic according to Biel's Brand Image Model?

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Conceptual metaphor

The conceptual metaphor was put forward by cognitive linguists in the publication of *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) which is a basic cognitive mechanism and metaphorical language is an external representation of the human mind (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). As a cognitive mechanism, conceptual metaphors help people understand strange, unknown, and abstract things via familiar ones (Zhang & Xu, 2018). For example, the concept of LIFE is abstract, invisible, and untouchable but people can understand it via the concrete and familiar concept of JOURNEY. Many daily expressions attest to this conceptualization process: "He has no direction in life", "There is a long way to go in your life", and "You can meet a lot of obstacles in your life". According to the conceptual metaphor theory, behind these daily expressions, there is an operating conceptual metaphor: LIFE IS A JOURNEY (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

A conceptual metaphor consists of two conceptual domains i.e., the target domain and source domain. According to CMT, the source domain refers to the conceptual domain from which we drew metaphorical expressions (e.g., life is a *journey*) while the target domain means the conceptual domain that we tried to understand (e.g., *life* is a journey) (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). The process that dominates metaphor is a one-way principle; that is, conceptual metaphor usually uses more abstract concepts as its target, and uses more concrete concepts as its source. Therefore, the source domain often represents familiar, tangible, common, and concrete things or concepts, while the target domain refers to novel, intangible, unfamiliar, and abstract things or concepts.

Another important component in conceptual metaphor is mapping. A metaphor is a mapping from a familiar and concrete source domain to an unfamiliar and abstract target domain. There are a series of ontological or cognitive correspondences between the source domain and the target domain, and its psychological basis is abstract image schema. We map the source domain onto the target domain so that we can understand the novel, intangible, unknown, or abstract concepts via familiar, tangible, or concrete concepts. Take the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS JOURNEY as an example. The mappings of this metaphor are demonstrated in Figure 3.1.1.

The mentioned conceptual metaphor is built on our general understanding and conventional cognition of LIFE and JOURNEY. The image schema in this metaphor is shown in Figure 3.1.2. Source domains often map ideas onto the target beyond the basic correspondences.

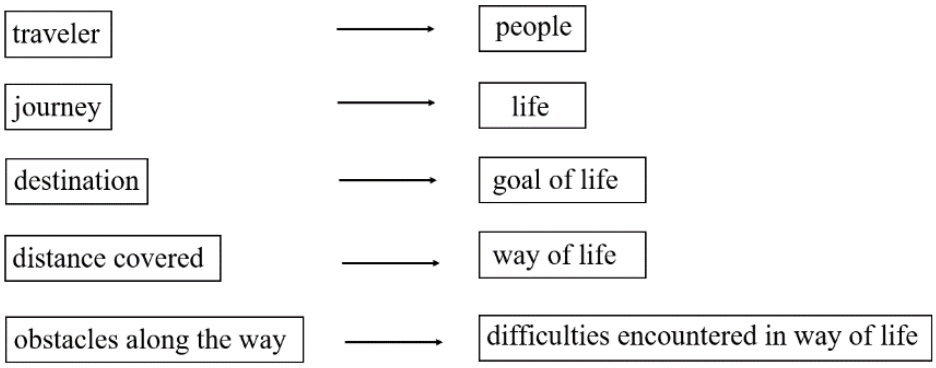

Figure 3.1.1 Mappings of the Metaphor LIFE IS JOURNEY

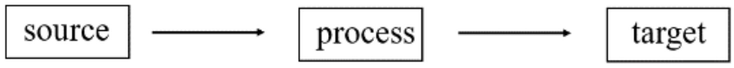

Figure 3.1.2 Image Schema of the Metaphor LIFE IS JOURNEY

2.2 Multimodal metaphor

Conceptual metaphor theory argues that metaphor is the cognitive mechanism that structures how we perceive, how we think, and what we do (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 2003). As an inter-disciplinary approach, multimodality understands communication and representation other than language and attends systematically to the social interpretation of various forms of meaning-making (Price et al., 2013). The term modality refers to a semiotic system that can be explained by a concrete perception process (Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009). In this book, they concluded several categories of modalities, i.e. 1) pictorial; 2) written signs; 3) spoken signs; 4) gesture; 5) sounds; 6) music; 7) smells; 8) tastes; 9) touch (Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009). Multimodal metaphor has nowadays become a vital constituent of metaphor studies (Zhang & Xu, 2018). Multimodal metaphor refers to “metaphors whose target and source are rendered exclusively or predominantly in two different modes/modalities” (Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009). By analyzing video advertising with the help of multimodal metaphor, the preference of modalities employed by the food corporates can be found and the underlying image propositions can be extracted.

2.3 Analytical Framework of the Present Research

The study will be conducted from three major procedures. The first step involves the identification of various multimodal metaphors and target and source, based on CMT. The second step is to analyze how multimodal metaphor and metonymy interact in meaning construction, various image schemas used, and the intended message of the advertising, based on the analytical framework of multimodal metaphor and metonymy in Urios-Aparisi (2009) and the types of image schemas found in Evans (2006). The third step is to analyze how multimodal metaphors construct brand image based on Biel’s Brand Image Model (Biel, 1992). Specific research procedures are demonstrated in Figure 3.1.

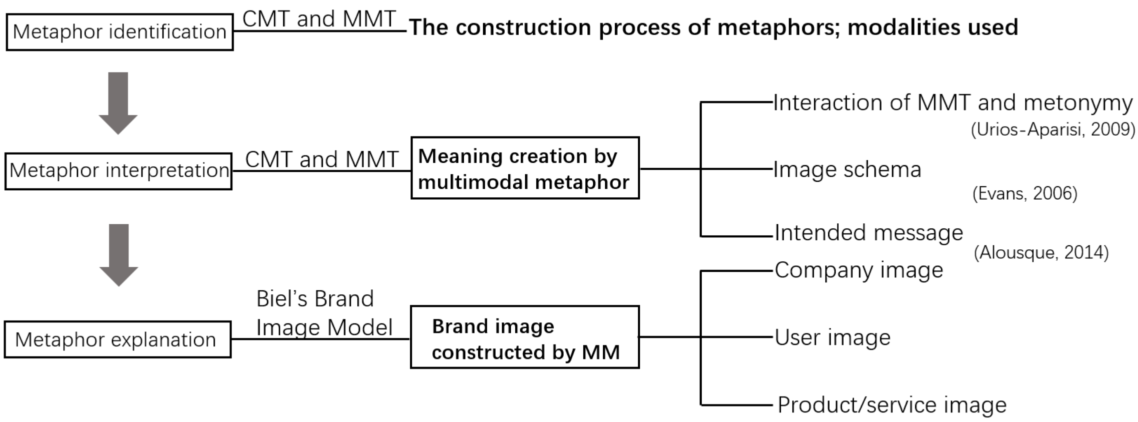

Figure 3.1 Analytical Framework of this study

3. Methodology

This thesis adopts a method of qualitative-and-quantitative analysis of multimodal metaphor in food video advertising, aiming to explore the function of multimodal metaphor in constructing brand images. For the quantitative method, a food video advertising during the COVID-19 pandemic will be established and the author will categorize and generalize the kinds of multimodal metaphors, mappings, and entailments, and the modalities for the presentation of target and source domains in these advertisements. For the qualitative method, the process of multimodal metaphor contributing to meaning construction will be examined by analyzing the interaction of multimodal metaphor and metonymy, the image schema used and the intended message based on the analytical framework of multimodal metaphor and metonymy in Urios-Aparisi (2009) and the types of image schemas found in Evans (2006). Secondly, Biel’s Brand Image Model (Biel, 1992) will be applied to analyze multimodal metaphors in constructing brand images of food corporations

In this study, the video advertisement is collected from the Ads of the World website (www.adsoftheworld.com/collection/covid19_ads). The video advertisement came from a special collection of COVID-19 ads organized by the Clio organization since spring 2020.

This study aims to investigate the functions of multimodal metaphors in constructing brand image through the analysis of multimodal metaphors in Food video advertising during the COVID-19 pandemic published by food corporates. This study will conduct quantitative and qualitative methods and the procedures are as follows:

1) Calculate and categorize the kinds of multimodal metaphors, mappings and entailments, and the modalities for the presentation of target and source domains.
2) Examine the process of multimodal metaphor contributing to meaning construction by analyzing the interaction of multimodal metaphor and metonymy, the image schema used and the intended message in these ads.
3) Further, interpret how these multimodal metaphors in the ads contribute to constructing brand image.

4. Analysis and Discussion

In this part, a food video advertisement during the COVID-19 pandemic from McDonald's will be examined in detail to identify the construction process of multimodal metaphors, the ways multimodal metaphors function in meaning construction and the brand image constructed by multimodal metaphors in the advertising.

4.1 Construction Process of Multimodal Metaphor used in the Advertisement

The 1-minute-long MacDonald's ad was made in Germany in 2020, aiming at a Western culture audience. Multimodal metaphors in this ad are based on the interaction of visual and aural triggers which are mainly presented in English. There are verbal forms of expression at the end of the ad that is shown in German. Music in this ad is particularly important as the connection of source and target of this as is accomplished by music.

In this advertisement, four multimodal metaphors, VIRUS IS PHYSICAL OBJECT, VIRUS IS HUMAN, PROTECTION IS MACDONALD'S and HAPPINESS IS MACDONALD'S, are fundamentally manifested through verbal, non-verbal and multimodal expressions.

In this advertisement, four multimodal metaphors are employed: VIRUS IS PHYSICAL OBJECT, VIRUS IS HUMAN, PROTECTION IS MACDONALD'S and HAPPINESS IS MACDONALD'S. The construction process of these four multimodal metaphors in advertising will be analyzed separately from the perspective of multimodal metaphors in the following part.

VIRUS IS PHYSICAL OBJECT

In this video advertisement, the virus does not appear directly but is expressed by some physical objects. In Scenes 1-6 and Scene 7 (see Appendix 1 for screenshots), the virus is presented by different physical objects, e.g., in Scenes 1 and 6, the virus is shown by buttons, while in Scene 2 by a handrail. Table 5.1 show a various physical object that metaphorically represents virus.

Table 5.1 Metaphorical Expressions in Metaphor VIRUS IS PHYSICAL OBJECT and Modalities Employed

Source	Modality (ies)	Target	Scene(s)
Button	Image/Words	Virus	1/6
Handrail	Image	Virus	2
Gift	Image	Virus	3
Pole	Image	Virus	4
Football	Image	Virus	5
Vase	Image	Virus	8

On the one hand, no matter what the source domain is, it implies that the advertiser of the ad intends to remind us of the potential risk of the objects in our life being contaminated by the COVID-19 virus. By metaphorically projecting these objects to the virus, the audience can understand more vividly the means of protecting themselves from the pandemic. On the other hand, this multimodal metaphor provides a basis for the following metaphors and it is realized by the interaction of multimodal metaphor and metonymy, which will be analyzed in the following part.

VIRUS IS HUMAN

In Scene 7, two animated people in the drawing refuse to touch each other's hands when hearing the background music. This "HUMAN" metaphor is embodied in the metaphorical expression "virus is others' hand". The interaction of multimodal metaphor and metonymy in this metaphor will be analyzed in Section 5.2.1. The modality employed is an image.

INFECTION IS CONTACT

Through the first eight scenes of this advertising, the main multimodal metaphor is INFECTION IS CONTACT which presents in different variants and multimodal expressions. For instance, in the third scene (Figure 3), a man is sent a present by his friends. They handed the gift to the man with their hands, hoping that he would catch it with his hands. The man was struggling with whether to catch the gift with his hands. He was in fear of touching the gift may lead to his infection with the virus. The music that sings “can’t touch this” begins and the man decides not the catch the gift with his hands to avoid contact with others. The source domain, CONTACT, is presented as the action of touching the gift handed over by two friends in visual mode and as the song lyric “can’t touch this” in aural mode, while the target domain, INFECTION, is presented as a gift handed over by two friends. One thing worthy of noting is that music plays a crucial role in the presentation of this metaphor as it provides a strong connection between the source and target domain in the presentation of this metaphor. This metaphor also appears in the other seven scenes. Table 1 demonstrates the variant presentations of this metaphor in the eight scenes are demonstrated in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Metaphorical Expressions in Metaphor INFECTION IS CONTACT and Modalities Employed

Source	Modality (ies)	Target	Scene(s)
Pressing Button	Action/Verbal	Infection	1/6
Touching BusHandrail	Action	Infection	2
Touching gift	Action	Infection	3
Touching the Pole	Action	Infection	4
Touching Football	Action	Infection	5
Touching Other’s Hand	Action	Infection	7
Touching Vase	Action	Infection	8
Background Music	Sounds /Words		1-9

As shown by Table 5.2, the majority of the modality employed is action, while one is verbal and another is sounds/words. The source domain in this metaphor is mainly expressed visually; thus, it provides a warning for the audience to avoid contacting others during the pandemic. The target domain of this metaphor is activated by the target domain former one VIRUS IS PHYSICAL OBJECT which projects physical objects in the ad to the COVID-19 virus.

PROTECTION IS MACDONALD’S

In Scene 9, MacDonald’s APP is shown on the cell phone display held by teenagers and the music lyric changes to “I can touch this.” The contrast between the music in the present scene and the previous scene implies that people cannot touch anything except for touching their smartphones to order their meals via MacDonald’s APP, as the APP prevents people from contacting others, thus protecting people from being infected by the virus. The metaphorical expression of this multimodal metaphor is “protecting ourselves from COVID-19 is ordering meals via MacDonald’s APP. The modalities employed are image and sounds.

HAPPINESS IS MACDONALD’S

In the Scene 10/11, teenagers are happy when stepping out of the MacDonald’s restaurant after getting the MacDonald’s food they ordered online and they are happily eating MacDonald’s food together outside a MacDonald’s restaurant. The metaphorical expressions of this metaphor are “happiness is getting MacDonald’s food” and “happiness is eating MacDonald’s food with friends.” The modalities employed are image and sounds.

4.2 Meaning construction by the Multimodal Metaphors

In the ads collected in this study, many innovations are achieved by the advertisers by using new metaphors whereby a link is forged between two seemingly unrelated domains, to attract the audience’s interest and make a stronger advertising impact. However, the use of new metaphors may trigger a cognitive clash. The bigger the clash is, the more audience feels hard to receive the messages from the advertiser. Thus, it is necessary to interpret the meaning construction of multimodal metaphor and reveal the intended message expressed by the ad.

In this part, to investigate the meaning construction of multimodal metaphors in the ad, a cognitive approach will be used to analyze the interaction of metaphor and metonymy, the image schemas used, and the intended message of the ad.

4.2.1 Interaction of Multimodal Metaphor and Metonymy

Apart from the four major multimodal metaphors discussed above, this ad has also deployed several metonymies to achieve its meaning construction and persuasive purpose. In this section, the interaction of multimodal metaphors and multimodal metonymies will be analyzed.

The first metonymy is TOUCH STANDS FOR INFECTION. In Scenes 1-8, the characters are all confronted with the choice of whether touching the objects or the people around them, which are considered as the representation of the virus, which has already been discussed above. At that moment, the music starts, which sings “can’t touch this”, the characters decide not to touch anything or anybody in their surroundings when hearing the music. As mentioned above, the virus is metaphorically represented by the physical objects and people around the characters in the ad; and it can be seen that people are suggested not to touch anything or anybody during the COVID-19 pandemic as they probably have to do with the virus and the action of touch leads to the infection of coronavirus disease. The metonymy TOUCH STANDS FOR INFECTION are deployed in all the eight scenes with the same clip of music singing “can’t touch this,” though different in environments and characters, as summarized in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Metonymic Expressions in Metonymy TOUCH STANDS FOR INFECTION and Modalities Employed

Source	Modality (ies)	Target	Scene(s)
Pressing Button	Image/Words	Infection	1/6
Touching BusHandrail	Image	Infection	2
Touching gift	Image	Infection	3
Touching the Pole	Image	Infection	4
Touching Football	Image	Infection	5
Touching Other’s Hand	Image	Infection	7
Touching Vase	Image	Infection	8
Background Music	Sounds /Words		1-8

As shown in Table 5.2, in this metonymy, the source is explicitly presented visually, verbally and aurally by the action of touching things/people and the music while the target is implicitly implied. The metaphors VIRUS IS PHYSICAL OBJECTS and VIRUS IS HUMAN, realized visually and verbally, are important components of this metonymy that contribute to presenting the source in this metonymy: CONTACT.

Another metonymy deployed in this ad is PRODUCTS/SERVICE STANDS FOR PRODUCER. In Scenes 9-11, two multimodal metaphors are used, i.e., PROTECTION IS MACDONALD’S and HAPPINESS IS MACDONALD’S with the same target, namely MacDonald’s. This target in the metaphor is not represented explicitly, but rather through the use of the metonymy PRODUCTS/SERVICE STANDS FOR PRODUCER.

In Scene 9, the yellow logo of MacDonald’s is shown on its APP on the cell phone display held by teenagers, and the lyric of the music switches to “I can touch this.” In effect, two other metonymies are also used in the presentation of this metonymy, i.e., EMBLEM FOR PRODUCT and PRODUCT FOR SERVICE.

Based on the analysis of metonymies above, the interaction of metaphor and metonymy of the metaphors PROTECTION IS MACDONALD’S and HAPPINESS IS MACDONALD’S can be demonstrated in Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2.

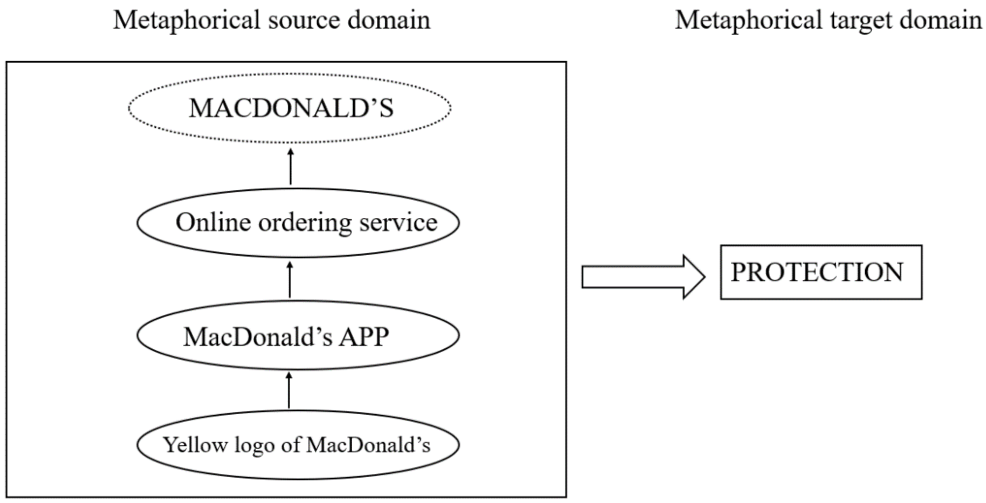

Figure 5.1 Interaction of Multimodal Metaphor and Metonymy in the Metaphor PROTECTION IS MACDONALD'S

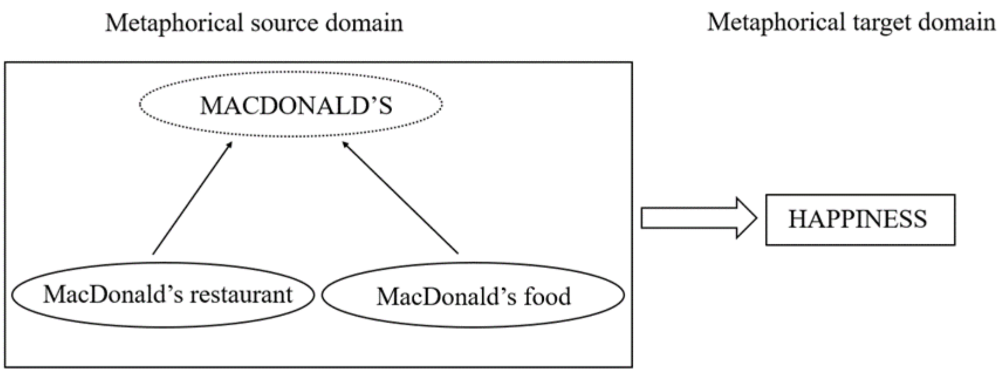

Figure 5.2 Interaction of Multimodal Metaphor and Metonymy in the Metaphor HAPPINESS IS MACDONALD'S

In summary, the first metonymy used in this ad falls into the general metonymy POTENTIAL REASON FOR EVENT, while the second metonymy, including two sub-metonymies that constitute the metonymy, can be classified in the general metonymy PART FOR WHOLE. As has been analyzed, these metonymies can be manifested visually, aurally and verbally and interact with multimodal metaphors to construct different meanings.

4.2.2 Image Schema

Numerous metaphors and metonymies used in advertising are grounded in image schemas (Velasco Sacristan & Cortés de los Ríos, 2009). Image schemas are schematic mental patterns derived from the sensory and perceptual experiences that structure our thinking and reasoning about the world (Evans, 2006). Evans (2006) proposes the following image schemas:

1) Space: up-down, front-back, left-right, near-far, center-periphery, path, straight-curved, scale;
2) Containment: in-out;
3) Multiplicity: part-whole, count-mass;
4) Balance: axis balance, point balance equilibrium;
5) Force: compulsion, blockage, counterforce, diversion, enablement, attraction, resistance;
6) Cycle;
7) Attribute: heavy-light, dark-bright, big-small, warm-cold, strong-weak.

In this part, the image schema used in this advertising will be analyzed following the proposed image schemas in Evans (2006).

The first image schema to be analyzed is CONTAINER. Concrete objects have structures of containers, and abstract entities that are invisible and intangible can also be felt by the human body may also be a container (Wilkie et al., 2010). Scene 9 establishes the source and target domain of the metonymy SERVICE STANDS FOR PRODUCER. The target domain of this multimodal metonymy is MacDonald's, which is an invisible and artificially defined container. In

Scene 9, the image on the smartphone display held by teenagers in which the logo of MacDonald's is presented is the launching page of MacDonald's APP. The producer can be conceptualized as a container as they are the owner of several products, services, restaurants and brands. Therefore, in this metonymy, the container is MacDonald's, which is the target domain of the metonymy. MacDonald's, from a conceptualized perspective, contains its yellow logo, APP, food and online ordering service in this ad.

This phenomenon is called "chained metonymy". It can be inferred that there are three layers of image schematic structures of the container here, as shown in Figure 5.3.

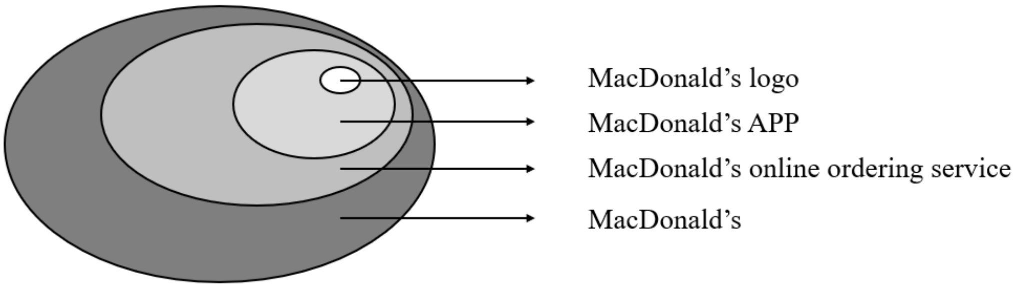

Figure 5.3 The Image Schematic Structure of the CONTAINERS in Scene 9

4.2.3 Intended Message

In this advertisement, from Scene 1 to Scene 8, it intends to be a public service advertisement serving to provide an advocacy for the audience to avoid contacting others as it may lead to the infection of the COVID-19 virus. By presenting different scenes drawn on the experiences of people's daily life, such as scenes of doing sports, taking public transport, taking an elevator and etc. In this sense, the audience can vividly receive the intended message from the advertiser that it is of importance to avoid unnecessary contact with others for the sake of health concerns during the COVID-19 period. In Scene 9, the representation of the MacDonald's APP and the switch of the background music suggest being a promotion of not only MacDonald's APP but also its service to protect consumers away from the virus. The contrast between the previous song lyric "can't touch this" and that in this scene "I can touch this" motivates the metaphor PROTECTION IS SERVICE to be enacted. Therefore, the intended message of this scene can be implied that "don't worry about COVID-19; Macdonald's online ordering service via its APP can protect you from the virus." In Scene 10 and Scene 11, MacDonald's restaurant appears in the background of the image, while MacDonald's food and teenagers that hold/eat it appear in the foreground. In both scenes, teenagers put on a happy face in front of MacDonald's restaurant with its food. These two scenes promote the core properties of MacDonald's, i.e., food and restaurant by depicting the happy expressions of the customers. The intended message can be interpreted as "whatever time you are in, Macdonald's food will give you fun and happiness, even when you don't eat right in the restaurant."

4.3 Brand Image Constructed by Multimodal Metaphor through Meaning construction

As an important means of external publicity, commercial advertisement plays a vital role for corporates to construct a good brand image. Advertisement is a form of persuasion in which multimodal metaphor is widely used. Biel (1992) argues that brand image can be embodied through three sub-images: company image, user image and product/service image. Consumers' perception of brand-related characteristics can be divided into Hard Attributes and Soft Attributes.

Consumers organize all the information about the company and their experience of using the company's products to construct the company image, including the following aspects: innovation, historical continuity (such as the history, scale and strength of corporates, etc.) and marketing, as well as the sense of trust for consumers. User image refers to the demographic characteristics of brand users, which is a Hard Attribute. In addition, it also includes Soft Attributes of users' personalities, values and lifestyles. Product/service image is a brand characteristic corresponding to the function of the product/service itself or the benefits brought by it. In addition, the characteristics of the product origin, packaging, etc., can also contribute to constituting the image of the product/service. Biel's Brand Image Model is demonstrated in Figure 5.4.

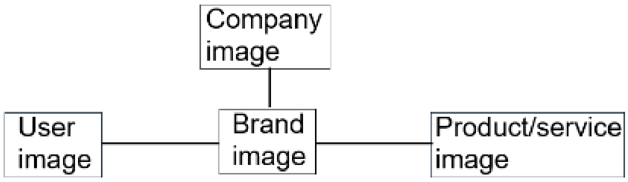

Figure 5.4 Biel's Brand Image Model

Based on the former analysis of meaning construction and Biel's Brand Image Model, the brand images constructed by multimodal metaphors in this advertisement will be analyzed.

4.3.1 Company Image

This advertisement has twelve scenes in total. The first eight scenes represent eight different situations of our daily life in which we may have contact with the things or people around us. This advertisement reveals the hard attributes of MacDonald's, namely, the multiplicity and convenience of its services. This advertisement shows that apart from dining in its restaurant, people can also order foods in its APP online conveniently. The soft attributes of MacDonald's in this advertisement can be concluded as it is customer-oriented and positive in performing social responsibility. MacDonald's advertisement presents eight scenes in our daily life to advocate for the audience to protect themselves by avoiding unnecessary contact with others during the COVID-19 pandemic. By this advocacy, the spreading of the COVID-19 virus may be curbed and no one may suffer from the pandemic. By creating meaning through the use of multimodal metaphors, multimodal metonymies and image schema, MacDonald's combines the soft and hard attributes to construct its company image of being meticulous and attending to details in everything, and being caring and responsible for its customers.

4.3.2 User Image

In Scenes 9, 10 and 11, some teenagers are dancing energetically on the city road. After the dance, they order food via MacDonald's APP online. They are happy after catching their food from MacDonald's restaurant and happily eat together in the car in front of MacDonald's restaurant. In these three scenes, the user image of MacDonald's depicted as energetic teenagers who often gather to have fun. By presenting the scenes of teenagers dancing on the city road, the advertiser artfully publicizes the energetic and cooperative brand image of MacDonald's that it is young and creative and it is willing to cooperate with others like dancing teenagers. The happy face of teenagers who catch their food from MacDonald's restaurant and eat together reveals the soft attributes of MacDonald's product/service that it can provide emotional value, i.e., happiness to its customers. These attributes are combined to construct a positive brand image of MacDonald's that it is young, energetic and creative, and it can provide happiness for its customer.

4.3.3 Product/Service Image

In Scenes 9-11, the product and service of MacDonald's are not presented explicitly. In these scenes, the yellow logo of MacDonald's is shown on the display of the smartphone held by teenagers. In these scenes, the interaction of CONTAINER image schema and multimodal metonymy PART FOR WHOLE are deployed to allow the contained elements, namely, MacDonald's APP, food, restaurant and online ordering service to present the container MacDonald's in an implicit way. The use of multimodal metaphors HAPPINESS IS MACDONALD'S and PROTECTION IS MACDONALD'S make the abstract concepts visually and aurally by presenting the scene of people happily eating MacDonald's food together and the conspicuous contrast of different lyrics of music sounds. The advertiser intends to convey the message that people should order the meal online to avoid contacting each other during this special period. In this sense, the hard attribute of MacDonald's food/service revealed is that online ordering service is provided to the customers, while the soft attributes revealed are happiness and protection. The soft and hard attributes combined construct the brand images of MacDonald, including valuing everyone's health and being positive in difficulties.

5. Conclusion

To summarize the functions of multimodal metaphor in constructing brand image through meaning construction in this Food video advertisement during the COVID-19 pandemic, there are a few things needed to be mentioned.

Firstly, in the first eight scenes, this advertisement intends to be a public service advertisement that advocates for people to avoid unnecessary contact with potential sources of the infection. By mainly applying metaphors of visual and aural modalities, the potential infection sources are presented in the physical objects and people around us. People thus can be aware that the virus may underlie the surrounding environment. The multimodal metonymy TOUCH STANDS FOR INFECTION interacts with the multimodal metaphors in these scenes. This interaction conveys the intended message that people should not touch anything or anyone touched by others before as it may trigger health issues. In summary, the use of multimodal metaphors as well as its interaction with multimodal metonymy, allows explicit presentations of potential infection sources in our daily life to achieve a better persuasion for people to avoid close contact. Therefore, the audience may perceive the positive company image of MacDonald's that it calls for public awareness of social distance and cares about its customers' health, which contributes to constructing MacDonald's brand image that it is customer-oriented and it carries out social responsibility in an active way.

Secondly, in Scenes 9-11, the image of the users is presented as energetic teenagers. The interaction of CONTAINER image schema and multimodal metonymy PART FOR WHOLE are deployed to present MacDonald's product and service in an implicit way. The use of multimodal metaphors HAPPINESS IS MACDONALD'S and PROTECTION IS MACDONALD'S presents a pleasant experience for its customers and conveys the intended message that MacDonald's can provide happiness and protection for its customers. FORCE image schema is employed to transfer the intended messages to the audience of this advertisement. The meaning construction discussed above constructs the user image of MacDonald's that the users are cheerful young teenagers, while the food/service images constructed are a multiplicity of its service, happiness and protection. They combine to construct the brand images of MacDonald's that it is positive, young, creative and cooperative like teenagers, and it values customers' experience and public health.

Finally, in short, the advertiser conveys the intended message in the first eight scenes that people should keep social distance and avoid unnecessary contact to protect themselves from COVID-19, while in the latter scenes, the intended messages conveyed are MacDonald's can protect its customer from COVID-19 and provide happiness for them. This advertisement constructs the brand image of MacDonald's that it is customer-oriented and it carries out social responsibility in an active way, built by company image; it is positive, young, creative and cooperative like teenagers, built by user image; customer-oriented and it carries out social responsibility in an active way; it values customers' experience and public health, built by product/service image.

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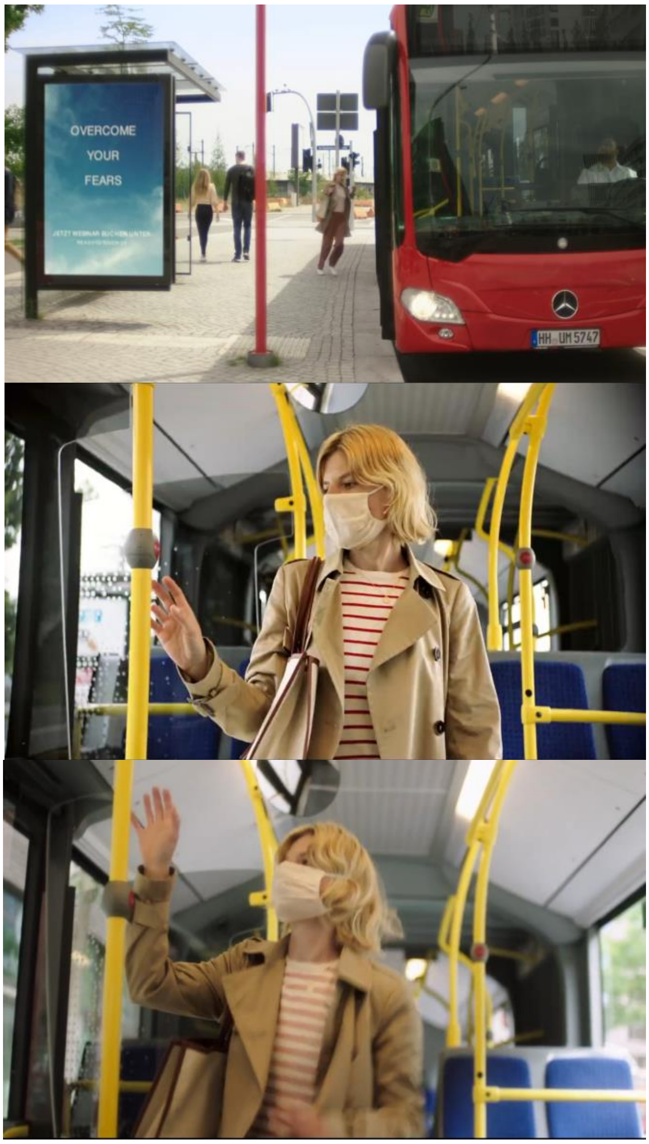
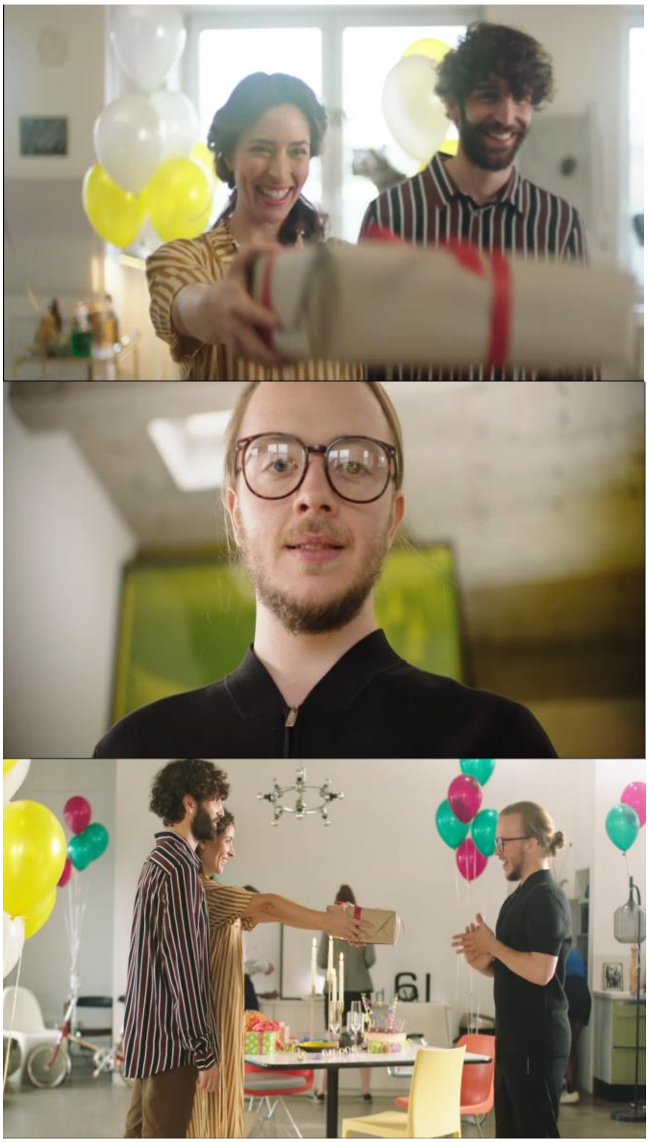
Appendix 1

Scenes of the McDonald's advertisement (2020)

Source: vimeo.com/448886354
Campaign: #Touch This
Advertiser: McDonald's
Agency: Track
Filmproduction: Cobblestone Filmproduktion GmbH
Music: Rework "U Can't Touch This" (MC Hammer)



Scene 1 Scene 2



Scene 3

Scene 4

Scene 5

Scene 6

Scene 7

Scene 8

Scene 9

Scene 10

Scene 11

Scene 12

A Contrastive Appraisal Analysis of the Chairman's Statements in ICBC's and Citigroup's Corporate Social Responsibility Reports

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Abstract

The corporate social responsibility report (CSRR) has been developed as an important medium for measuring corporate sustainability. In its opening part, the chairman's statement, both informational and promotional, stands arguably to build and enhance a favorable corporate identity by the prominent adoption of appraisal resources. Given its common generic features, CSRR is linguistically and culturally afforded. Currently, China's initiation of green finance for the country's green development against the background of carbon peak and carbon neutrality, especially since the two sessions in March 2021, is urging Chinese commercial banks' conformity to the international CSR reporting standards. In such a context, this study investigates the attitude resources in the chairman's statements in CSRR of Chinese and western commercial banks from a culturally contrastive perspective, underpinned by Martin and White's Appraisal system and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory, taking Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC)'s and Citigroup as examples. It finds that copious attitude resources in distinctive patterns are adopted by the two different institutions, and the distinction results from individualism and collectivism, power distance, masculinity and femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term vs. short-term orientation. This study enriches the cultural contrastive study of CSRR on appraisal meaning. Suggestions on the composition of the chairman's statements in CSRR have been offered.

Keywords: chairman's statements, contrastive analysis, cultural differences, Appraisal system, Cultural Dimensions theory

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the growing concerns for ecological civilization and sustainable development highlight the significance of CSR; meanwhile, CSRR has been developed as a significant medium for enterprises to reveal their sustainable efforts to their stakeholders. For transnational companies, CSRR has been considered an effective channel to maintain a favorable corporate image and promote business performance in overseas markets (An, 2021; Chen et al., 2021).

Until now, the research on CSR is still at its early stage. The studies have focused on the business realm involving its contents, assessments, and influence. And the linguistic focus on the discourse per se is relatively limited, particularly the examination of the interpersonal meaning of CSR discourse underpinned by the Appraisal system. The various appraisal resources of people's evaluation in this discourse could help enterprises to construct and enhance their corporate identity in CSRRs (Fuoli, 2012; 2018). Besides, appraisal resources' distribution characteristics closely relate to aspects like genre, communication occasion, cultural background, etc. (Hunston & Thompson, 2000), which makes intriguing the study on the application of appraisal resources in various fields, and most importantly, the restrictive role of contexts (Macken-Horarik, 2003). Even though studies have testified that CSR is shaped and influenced by distinct cultural backgrounds, how cultural differences affect appraisal choices in CSR discourse is still insufficiently studied.

2021 is the first year for the implementation of the 14th Five-Year Plan; our process of building ecological civilization has aroused widespread attention from the world (Ye et al., 2022). Since the two sessions in March 2021, the central bank has identified green finance as a key task for the 14th Five-Year Plan; meanwhile, the advocacy of carbon peak and carbon neutrality has led the development of green finance to enter the fast lane (Xia, 2021; Wang et al., 2022). As an important part of the national economy, the banking industry has played a significant role in promoting China's green finance development, which steers the Chinese banking industry's CSRR toward conformity to international reporting standards for greener development and better internationalization.

Hence, under such a background, this study is to contrast the chairman's statements of Chinese and western commercial banks based on the Appraisal system and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, taking the CSRRs of ICBC and Citigroup as instances. Due to the scope, this study focuses only on the attitudinal resources. The potential reasons behind their different patterns of attitude choices will be explored from a cross-cultural perspective so that how the two companies' cultures in terms of Hofstede's five dimensions influence the use of attitude resources would be delved into.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Previous Research on Interpersonal Meaning of CSRR

CSR was first put forward by Sheldon (1924), who proposes that enterprises should undertake responsibility for the society, the environment, pertinent stakeholders, etc. while creating profits and being responsible to their shareholders. Gradually, CSRR has been developed as an essential business tool to ensure high reliability and transparency of corporate information disclosure to its stakeholders (Lu, 2020), with a rising number of companies publishing CSRR, and correspondingly a significant increase in the research on CSR performance and discourse.

The discourse of CSR has been extensively approached with a linguistic focus. Some scholars intended to make a genre analysis (Bhatia, 2012; Bondi, 2016; Basanta & Vangehuchten, 2022). Generally, CSR discourse can be regarded as a hybrid genre, both informative and promotional (Bondi, 2016). Lately, a critical genre analysis has been conducted on the sustainability reports in three of the main dialectological variants of the Spanish language, namely Chilean, Mexican and peninsular Spanish, and the authors believe that CSR discourse is a hybrid form of business communication which, in addition to its primary informational role, performs the communication functions of legitimizing the company's actions, managing its reputation and establishing a sustainable dialogue with stakeholders (Basanta & Vangehuchten, 2022). Critical discourse analysis has also been employed to examine CSRRs to underline the significant role of linguistic factors in ecological balance, environment protection, and sustainable development (Nwagbara & Belal, 2019; Bernard, 2020; Xia & Xu, 2020). Other related research usually analyzed copious linguistic features in CSRR, for instance, the use of metaphor, metadiscourse, personal narratives, its readability, and applied research methods including synchronic study, diachronic study, contrastive analysis, and corpus-based analysis, in a bid to interpret the importance of constructing the concept of sustainability and its relevance on aspects like economic development, companies' profit gaining, reputation and corporate identity (Livesey & Kearins, 2002; Milne et al., 2003; Laine, 2010; Fuoli, 2018; Smeuninx et al., 2020; Yu, 2020; Du & Yu, 2021; Zhang, 2021; Gao, 2022).

About existing literature on the interpersonal meaning of CSRRs, relatively limited attention has been paid to this research field although several discourse genres have been touched upon so far. Usually, studies on interpersonal meaning are based on research approaches from pragmatics, systemic functional linguistics (hereafter SFL), and cognitive linguistics, among which SFL mainly contains three theoretical models: Halliday's, Martin's, and Thompson's model. The Appraisal system is regarded as a further extension of Halliday's study on interpersonal meaning, which analyzes interpersonal meaning at the semantic level, while Thompson extended Halliday's study to the discourse level and added personal function and interactive function to improve his framework. In general, the Appraisal system has been widely applied to interpersonal meaning studies, whose related research genres include media discourse (White, 1998; Pounds, 2010; Aloy Mayo & Taboada, 2017; White, 2020; Huan et al., 2021), legal discourse (Korner, 2000; Marchese & Celerier, 2017; Ahmed, 2020), literary discourse (Peng, 2011; Wang, 2022), academic discourse (Susan, 2011; Ote ́za, 2020; Lin & Lau, 2021; Puspitasari et al., 2021), and so forth. However, present studies taking the Appraisal system to examine interpersonal meaning in CSRRs are still inadequate. For example, Fuoli (2012) has explored the differences in the construction of corporate identity between BP and IKEA through appraisal resources in their CSR reports. Chen (2018) has investigated authorial stance and distinctive language use according to one subsystem of the Appraisal system, Engagement, to analyze interpersonal meaning in American and Chinese CSRRs.

2.2 Previous Research on Cultural Dimensions of CSR Reports

Many scholars have discussed culture and cultural differences embodied in CSRR from different perspectives, most of which have been underpinned by Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory (Bai et al., 2016; Pucheta-Mart ́nez & Gallego-Álvarez, 2020; Tehrani et al., 2021; Colleoni et al., 2022). Some focused on how cultural differences influence CSR as a whole while others paid attention to their effect on particular sides of CSR like CSR cognition, CSR perception, environmental protection, sustainable practice, consumers' attitude, and corporate ethics. For instance, Bai et al. (2016) have found that cultural differences are a crucial influence factor for the content and implementation of CSR in different countries by using the examples of Verizon's and VNPT's CSR reports. Pucheta-Mart ́nez and Gallego-Álvarez (2020) have analyzed and concluded how distinct cultures can influence enterprises' sustainable disclosure practices from Hofstede's cultural dimensions. From a global pandemic setting, Colleoni et al. (2022) have empirically investigated how public perceptions of CSR communication campaigns about pandemic response initiatives could be affected by different cultures through Hofstede's cultural dimensions. In summary, these studies proved that distinct cultural backgrounds have a pivotal impact on all aspects of CSR, which signifies that when enterprises implement CSR, they are not only affected by economic level but also affected by cultural differences. But it is worth noting that most related studies were conducted from management and cross-cultural perspectives, few have paid attention to how cultural dimensions affect the linguistic features of CSR reports.

2.3 Limitations of Previous Studies

Therefore, it can be concluded that appraisal analysis on CSRRs is still under-researched though some scholars have examined interpersonal meaning in CSRRs underpinned by the Appraisal system or from a contrastive perspective. Relation between distribution characteristics of appraisal resources and aspects like genre, communication occasion, cultural background, etc., (Hunston & Thompson, 2000), has not been adequately addressed. To improve the study of the Appraisal system and finally establish appraisal analysis tools suitable for different genres, it is necessary to analyze the application of appraisal resources in various fields, and most importantly, to explain the restrictive role of contexts (Macken-Horarik, 2003) which is particularly insufficient regarding the role of cultural differences on appraisal choices in CSR discourse. Thus, this current study is to examine the attitude resources in the chairman's statements of Chinese and western commercial banks from a cultural contrastive perspective to figure out how the culture shapes the distribution and pattern of attitude resources. It proposes an analytical framework underpinned by the Appraisal system and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory with both linguistic and cross-cultural focus.

3. Methodology

This study aims to investigate how cultural differences affect attitude resources in the chairman's statements between Chinese and western commercial banks, taking ICBC's and Citigroup's 2015-2020 CSRRs as examples. In a bid to achieve the research purpose, it proposes an analytical framework underpinned by the Appraisal system (Martin & White 2005) and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory with both linguistic and cross-cultural focus.

3.1 Corpus Data

The corpus contains the chairman's statements of CSRRs from 2015 to 2020, with each company in six and totaling 11,375 words (see Table 3.1 for the descriptive statistics of the corpus), whose pdf files were collected from the two companies' official websites[1].

Table 3.1 Descriptive statistics about the number of words in the corpus

Company	ICBC		Citigroup	
Year	Number of sentences	Number of words	Number of sentences	Number of words
2015	31	1,112	29	805
2016	36	918	17	427
2017	35	1,150	22	722
2018	30	1,120	28	655
2019	38	1,113	41	978
2020	56	1,216	42	1,159
Total	226	6,629	179	4,746

Although CSRR varies in content and pattern from different companies, the chairman's statement, chairman's message, or letter from the CEO is usually contained, which can be composed by the chairperson of the board or the chief executive officer, even sometimes jointly by the two seniors, suggesting that the publication of CSRR has obtained great supports from the senior management (Lu, 2020). As the first part of CSRR, it functions as a brief overview to introduce the key points of the whole report for the potential readers (ibid.). In a bid to clarify the confusion caused by different naming, the expression of the chairman's statement is adopted in this study.

3.2 Research Questions

The research is guided by these research questions: (1) What are the frequency and distribution of attitude resources in the chairman's statements of ICBC's and Citigroup's CSR reports? (2) What are the patterns of use for attitude resources in the chairman's statements of ICBC's and Citigroup's CSR reports? (3) What potential reasons could contribute to the observed patterns of use for attitude resources according to Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory?

3.3 A Proposed Analytical Framework

According to Martin and Rose (2003), "Appraisal is concerned with evaluation: the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of the feelings involved and the ways in which values are sourced, and reader aligned" (p. 25). It contains a set of appraisal resources or interpersonal operators that can realize speakers/writers' evaluative expressions

[1] Available from http://www.icbc-ltd.com/icbcltd/en/ and https://www.citigroup.com/citi/index.htm

in the following three main parameters as shown in Figure 3.1, which provides a practical theoretical framework for evaluation research (Pounds, 2011).

Among them, the Attitude system, as the core attitudinal parameter of the Appraisal system, will be touched upon in the present study. Attitude evaluates a person's feelings, which includes three subcategories: affect, judgment, and appreciation, just as presented in Figure 3.2 (Martin & White, 2005).

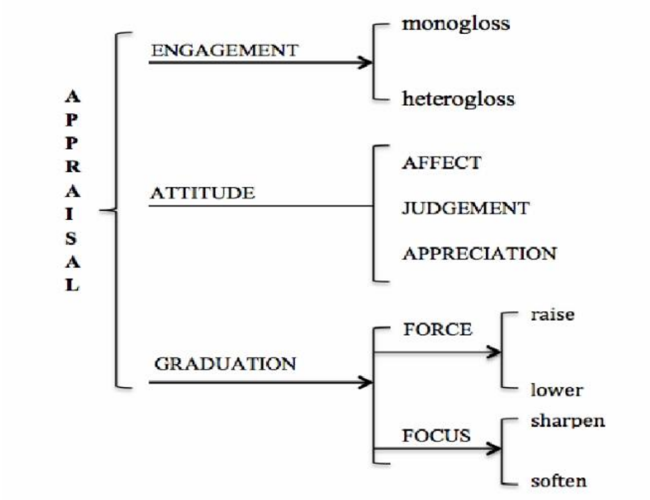

Figure 3.1 A framework of Appraisal resources (Martin & White, 2005, p. 38)

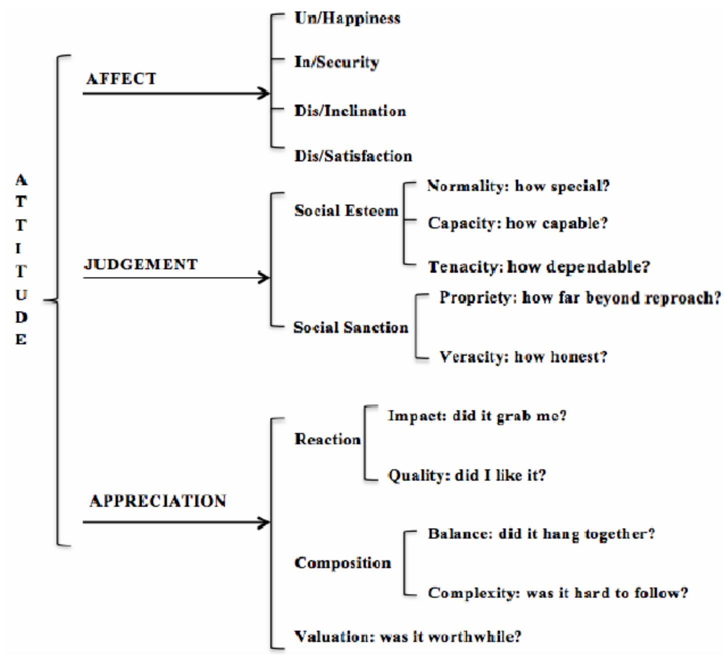

Figure 3.2 A framework of Attitude system (Martin & White, 2005, pp. 45-51)

Affect is about the expression of human emotions; judgment has something to do with the evaluation of people's personalities or behaviors within a series of institutionalized standards; appreciation deals with the evaluation of manufactured or natural objects and abstract structures. There are four features of the Attitude system: (1) Attitude can be conveyed in a positive or negative tone; (2) Attitude can be expressed directly or indirectly; (3) Attitude is gradable: low, medium and high; (4) Attitude is closely related to customs in culture and listener's/reader's ideology (Martin & White, 2005).

Hofstede (2005) proposes from a cross-cultural perspective that cultural differences refer to different recognitions, acquisitions, and views of the world between countries, which leads to differences in their attitudes and behaviors towards things. His Cultural Dimensions theory is considered one of the most influential theories in cross/inter-cultural communication which combines Gudykunst's Anxiety/Uncertain Management theory, coordinated management of meaning by Cronen and Pearce, Ting-Toomey's identity negotiation theory (Dai, 2008). Five cultural dimensions are concluded to deal with problems people would commonly face in Hofstede's research and the results between China and the U.S. are presented in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 The Cultural Dimension Indexes of China and the U.S.

	Individualism	Power distance	Masculinity	Uncertainty avoidance	Long-term orientation
China	20	80	66	30	118
The U.S.	91	40	62	46	29

To be concrete, power distance indicates the degree of the unequal location of power in a society (Hofstede, 2008). The dimension of individualism and collectivism deals with people's conception about whether a group's interest or an individual's interest should be put into priority (Hofstede, 2008). As for masculinity and femininity, a society with high masculinity specializes in social gender roles where men are supposed to be "assertive, tough and focused on material success" but women are "more modest, tender and concerned with the quality of life" (Hofstede, 2008, p.298). On the contrary, "social gender roles overlap" and cooperation at work is prioritized in a society with high femininity where men are more tender and balance both performance and relationships, and women also act the same (Hofstede, 2008, p.298). Uncertainty avoidance relates to "the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations"; thus, low uncertainty avoidance cultures are "more open to change and new ideas" while high uncertainty avoidance ones are "conservative and desirous of law and order" (Hofstede, 2008, pp.160-161). Long-term vs. short-term orientation is closely related to Confucian ethics which promotes prudence and thriftiness as well as self-cultivating (Low, 2013). In long-term-oriented culture, people prefer to "teach virtues directed at the future" while virtues directed at the past and present are emphasized in short-term-oriented cultures (Hofstede, 2008, p.363).

Based on the Appraisal system and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory, the analytical framework for the present research has been proposed (see Figure 3.3). Firstly, the different appropriation of attitude resources in the chairman's statement of the two companies will be identified within the framework of the Appraisal system, including their overall distribution and frequency, types, explicitness, and polarity. Then, potential reasons behind their distinct patterns in the use of attitude resources will be discussed from Hofstede's five cultural dimensions.

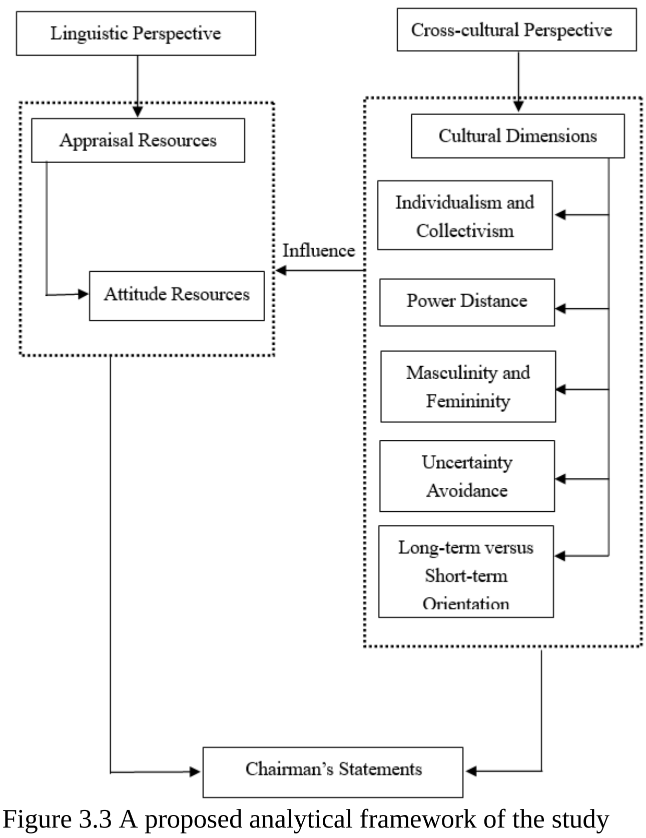

Figure 3.3 A proposed analytical framework of the study

3.4 Analytical Procedures

Concretely, this study was carried out based on the following procedures. First, for the data collection, the CSRRs were selected from the company's official website. After that, the pdf files were manually transferred into word text files which are manually cleaned to avoid the undesirable impact of format, pictures, and special symbols on the results. During this process, contents other than the chairman's statements were deleted. Then, the cleaned word files were transferred into txt files with UFT-8 coding for data analysis. All txt files were imported into UAM CorpusTool 3 for manual annotation of attitude resources and data statistics of their distributions and frequencies. The frequency of attitude resources per 1000 tokens was calculated as the comparing unit for their distributions and frequencies in a bid to avoid potential text length bias as shown in Table 4.1. Next, according to the quantitative statistics, the two companies' different patterns of attitude resources were investigated through a qualitative analysis of the corpus, and concrete examples were retrieved. Last, based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions, potential explanations for different patterns in the use of attitude resources were discussed from a cross-cultural perspective.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Contrastive Analysis of the Overall Distribution of Attitude Resources

To address the first research question, this part focuses on the distribution and frequency of attitude resources in the corpus. After the annotation with UAM CorpusTool 3, the overview distribution of attitude resources is summarized in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 The distribution of attitude resources in the chairman's statements of both companies

	ICBC		Citigroup	
Attitude-Type	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage
Affect	6.26	3.10%	4.84	3.59%
Judgment	93.02	46.09%	74.00	54.97%
Appreciation	102.54	50.81%	55.79	41.44%
Total	201.83	100%	134.64	100%
Attitude-Explicitness	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage
Inscribed	109.07	54.04%	74.97	55.68%
Invoked	92.75	45.96%	59.67	44.32%
Total	201.83	100%	134.64	100%
Attitude-Polarity	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage
Positive	191.44	95.33%	116.43	86.48%
Negative	9.38	4.67%	18.21	13.52%
Total	201.83	100%	134.64	100%

According to the frequency of attitude resources per 1000 tokens, ICBC adopts more attitude resources than Citigroup, almost 1.5 times as much as Citigroup does. Next, for the contrast of their types, explicitness, and polarity, their percentage per 1000 tokens is charted in Figure 4.1 to provide visualized results for a better comparison.

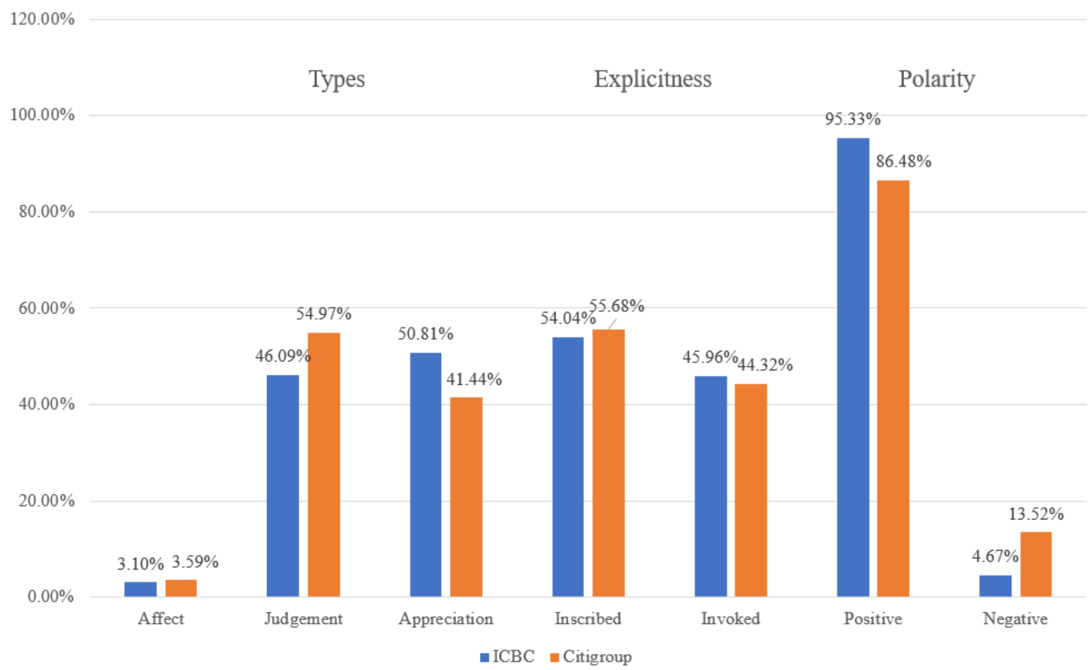

Figure 4.1 The contrast of attitude resources between the two companies

As for the types, affect resources are more frequently used in Citigroup's chairman's statements than ICBC's but their difference is slight, only 0.49%. Also, judgment resources are more frequently used in Citigroup's chairman's statements. Nevertheless, ICBC adopts more appreciation resources than Citigroup does. For their explicitness, even though both tend to express their attitude explicitly, attitude resources are expressed more explicitly by Citigroup. Regarding their polarity, both companies employ a prominently positive tone of voice when conveying their messages, but Citigroup uses more negative attitude resources than ICBC does.

4.2 Contrastive Analysis of Attitude Resources' Patterns of Use

After the analysis of the overall distribution and frequency of attitude resources, we have found several distinctions in their frequency of use, types, explicitness, and polarity. Now their specific patterns will be examined to answer the second research question.

4.2.1 Affect

For a start, regarding affect resources, Citigroup uses them slightly more frequently than ICBC does. The following Table 4.2 shows their specific distribution and Figure 4.2 presents visualized results.

Table 4.2 The distribution of affect resources in the chairman's statements of both companies

	ICBC		Citigroup	
Affect-Type	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage
Un/happiness	0.54	8.64%	0.64	12.01%
Dis/satisfaction	2.72	43.52%	1.92	36.02%
In/security	1.90	30.4%	2.13	39.96%
Dis/inclination	1.09	17.44%	0.64	12.01%
Total	6.26	100%	5.32	100%
Affect-Explicitness	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage
Inscribed	6.12	97.76%	5.11	96.05%
Invoked	0.14	2.24%	0.21	3.95%
Total	6.26	100%	5.32	100%
Affect-Polarity	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage

Positive	6.26	100%	4.47	84.02%
Negative	0.00	0%	0.85	15.98%
Total	6.26	100%	5.32	100%

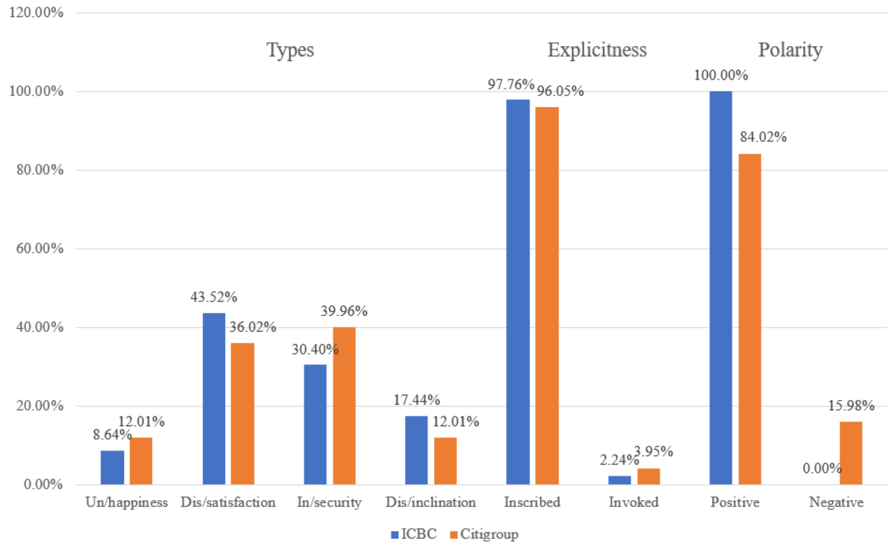

Figure 4.2 The contrast of affect resources between the two companies

Largely both companies prefer to express them explicitly and in a positive tone of voice; ICBC pays more attention to satisfaction whereas Citigroup emphasizes the expression of security, just as shown in the following examples.

4-1 Facing achievements, ***we are grateful to*** [+Affect (Satisfaction), Inscribed] our customers, our employees, and the society. (ICBC's chairman's message in 2015)

4-2 Where we see places where we ***are confident*** [+Affect (Security), Inscribed] that we can meaningfully contribute, we do and we will. (Citigroup's chairman's message in 2015)

In the above examples, ICBC utilizes the positive satisfaction resource "are grateful to" to explicitly express its gratitude and appreciation towards its stakeholders. Citigroup employs a positive security resource "are confident" to directly convey its confidence and commitments to potential audiences.

Besides that, more negative affect resources are used by Citigroup. From the corpus, we can see that they are applied to express the company's insecurity and concerns towards various crises and risks happening in the world, intending to establish empathy with the targeted audience, just as presented in Example 4-3.

4-3 We voiced our ***concerns about*** [-Affect (Insecurity), Inscribed] U.S. immigration policies that discriminate against certain groups, reiterated our support for the Paris Agreement and other policies that address climate change, ***condemned*** [-Affect (Dissatisfaction), Inscribed] racist acts in Charlottesville, signed on to the UK Modern Slavery Act and signed an amicus brief in the Masterpiece Cakeshop, Ltd. v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission case to show our support for the rights of the LGBTQ community. (Citigroup's chairman's message in 2017)

4.2.2 Judgment

As for judgment resources, overall, they are more frequently used by Citigroup. Their concrete distribution is summarized in Table 4.3 and visualized contrast results are charted in Figure 4.3.

Table 4.3 The distribution of judgment resources in the chairman's statements of both companies

	ICBC		Citigroup	
Judgment-Type	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage
Normality	1.22	1.33%	0.58	0.79%

Capacity	66.64	72.59%	55.21	75.20%
Tenacity	12.92	14.07%	10.65	14.51%
Propriety	11.97	13.04%	7.17	9.77%
Veracity	0.27	0.29%	0.39	0.53%
Total	93.02	100%	74.00	100%
Judgment-Explicitness	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage
Inscribed	13.46	14.47%	20.92	28.27%
Invoked	79.56	85.53%	53.08	71.73%
Total	93.02	100%	74.00	100%
Judgment-Polarity	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage
Positive	92.48	99.42%	73.42	99.22%
Negative	0.54	0.58%	0.58	0.78%
Total	93.02	100%	74.00	100%

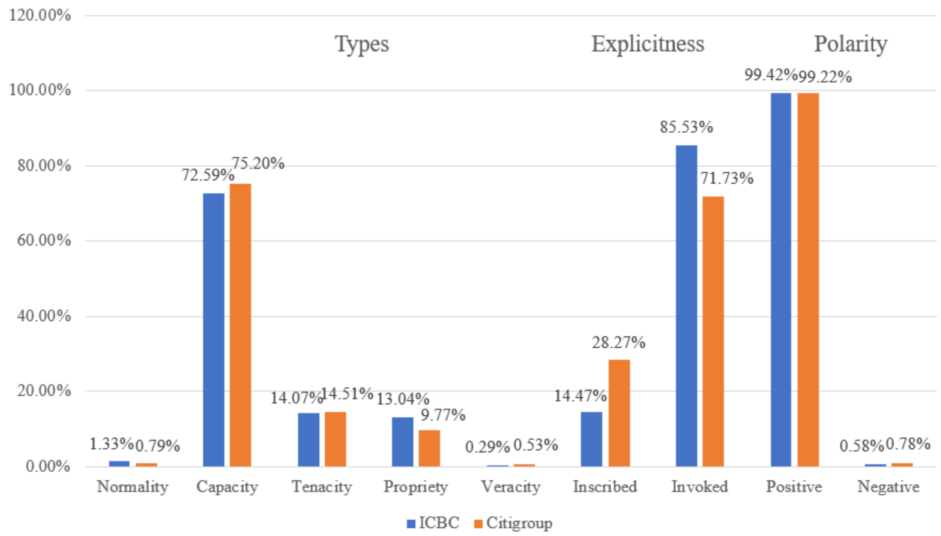

Figure 4.3 The contrast of judgment resources between the two companies

Both companies underscore the positive evaluation of their capacity to create a capable and professional image. Nevertheless, ICBC prefers a more implicit way of expression compared to Citigroup. The instances are listed as follows.

4-4 In addition, we further ***stepped up efforts to reduce costs*** [+Judgment (Capacity), Invoked], ***cut expenditure*** [+Judgment (Capacity), Invoked], ***tap potential*** [+Judgment (Capacity), Invoked], and ***boost efficiency*** [+Judgment (Capacity), Invoked], ***keeping the profits, quality and other fundamentals stable*** [+Judgment (Capacity), Invoked]. (Citigroup's chairman's message in 2020)

4-5 I know that ***the progress*** [+Judgment (Capacity), Inscribed] we have made in the past has meaningfully contributed to our ***ability*** [+Judgment (Capacity), Inscribed] to weather the present storm and, ultimately, to recover from it. (Citigroup's chairman's message in 2019)

In Example 4-4, ICBC lists copious past achievements to indirectly show its outstanding abilities, to gain the trust of the targeted readers; whereas in Example 4-5, Citigroup employs positive capacity resources "the progress" and "ability" to directly express that the company is competent to overcome the hurdles and recover from it.

4.2.3 Appreciation

For appreciation resources, generally, ICBC adopts more appreciation resources than Citigroup does. The following Table 4.4 summarizes their distribution and frequency of use in detail and Figure 4.4 is plotted to visualize the contrast outcomes.

Table 4.4 The distribution of appreciation resources in the chairman's statements of both companies

	ICBC		Citigroup	
Appreciation-Type	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage
Reaction	7.89	7.69%	4.46	7.99%
Composition	6.26	6.10%	1.94	3.48%
Social-valuation	88.40	86.20%	49.40	88.53%
Total	102.54	100%	55.79	100%
Appreciation-Explicitness	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage
Inscribed	89.49	87.26%	49.40	88.55%
Invoked	13.06	12.74%	6.39	11.45%
Total	102.54	100%	55.79	100%
Appreciation-Polarity	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage	Per 1000 tokens	Percentage
Positive	93.70	91.38%	38.94	66.80%
Negative	8.84	8.62%	16.85	30.20%
Total	102.54	100%	55.79	100%

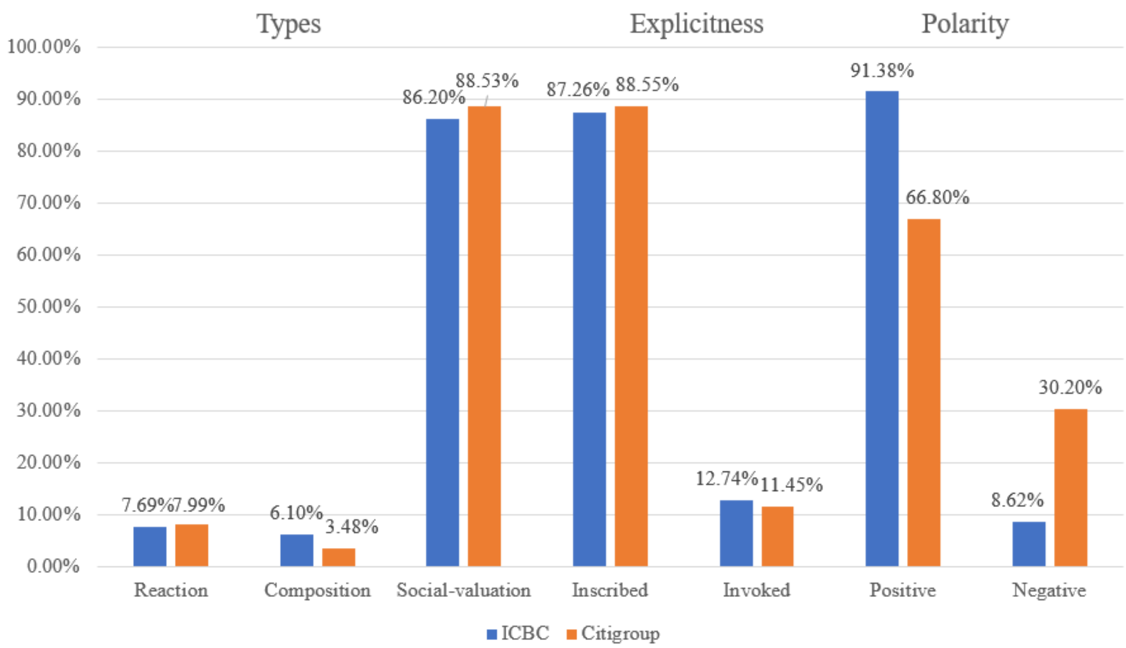

Figure 4.4 The contrast of appreciation resources between the two companies

As demonstrated in the above table and figure, both companies employ a prominently significant percentage of social-valuation resources, but Citigroup takes up slightly more percentage than ICBC does. Besides that, ICBC attaches more attention to the use of composition resources. Meanwhile, Citigroup explicitly expresses appreciation more often than ICBC and conveys a more negative evaluation this time.

After the examination of the corpus, it could be found that both companies attach great attention to the positive social evaluation of the entities or concepts that benefit the public and the society, for example, affordable financial services, green bonds, environmental/green finance. Nonetheless, Citigroup conveys more negative social evaluation towards those risks and challenges the society has been facing, for instance, the widening income gap, gun violence, climate change, pandemic, in a bid to show its concerns for them and better resonate with the victims. The following examples are listed to support the findings.

4-6 We gave full play to the ***crucial*** [+Appreciation (Social-valuation), Inscribed] role of ***green finance innovation*** [+Appreciation (Social-valuation), Inscribed] in promoting the transformation of the economic growth model, and by transforming Internet technology and such ***innovative practices*** [+Appreciation (Social-valuation), Inscribed] as cross-sector integration and application into new modes and means for serving the real economy, promoted the facilitation of social services and business operations and boosted "Internet Plus" development in relative industries. (ICBC's chairman's message in 2015)

4-7 In conjunction with this ambitious climate finance goal, we're working with our clients to evaluate their ***climate risks*** [-Appreciation (Social-valuation), Inscribed] and ***vulnerabilities*** [-Appreciation (Social-valuation), Inscribed] while continuing to minimize our own company's direct impacts on the planet. (Citigroup's chairman's message in 2020)

In Example 4-6, ICBC capitalizes on positive social-valuation resources "crucial", "green finance innovation" and "innovative practices" to show that all their achievements are of significant social values, intending to imply the company's excellent competence and great care for the society. However, Example 4-7 elucidates that Citigroup employs a negative evaluation of the impact of climate change, "climate risks" and "climate vulnerabilities" and introduces its measures, to show its concerns for its clients and the planet and its commitments to solve the problems.

Additionally, ICBC's more often use of composition resources lies in its emphasis on positive evaluation of the balance and stable situations, especially the harmonious condition between man and nature, as indicated in Example 4-8.

4-8 The Bank vigorously promoted green office, launched the green supplier policy, and delivered on commitments to energy conservation and emissions reduction, in an effort to build a "green bank" and promote ***harmonious coexistence*** [+Appreciation (Composition), Inscribed] between man and nature while continuing to minimize our own company's direct impacts on the planet. (ICBC's chairman's message in 2020)

4.3 Interpretation of Different Patterns from a Cross-cultural Perspective

This section deals with the explanation of different patterns of use for attitude resources from Hofstede's cultural dimensions so that potential reasons for the distinct appraisal choices could be unearthed.

4.3.1 Individualism and Collectivism

After a detailed examination of the corpus, it could be summarized that ICBC shares a collectivistic culture, yet Citigroup is more individualistic, which can be firstly proved from the appraised most frequently mentioned in these two companies' chairman's statements. For ICBC, "we" and "the Bank" are two highly appraised objects, which proves that ICBC regards its chairman, employees, and the bank as a whole, as sharing weal and wore. Although other objects like "shareholders", "customers" and "government" are mentioned, ICBC mainly conveys its commitment to serve them well for the "collective good". By contrast, Citigroup's frequently mentioned appraised objects include "Citi colleagues", "Citi volunteers", "I" and "participants" except for "we", "our firm", which reveals that its chairman underlines the importance of individual value by separating himself from the employees.

Second, as mentioned earlier, ICBC exercises much more invoked judgment resources like capacity resources to introduce copious past successful performances achieved by the company as a whole. Citigroup, however, prefers to praise the hard work and achievements devoted by its employees and volunteers more directly. In addition, ICBC also underscores the balance and stable conditions through more positive composition resources, particularly the harmonious balance between man and nature, which reflects its collectivistic values.

Third, Citigroup's chairman pays more attention to not only the feelings of victims subjected to adverse disasters through negative appreciation resources like social-valuation and negative affect resources like insecurity but also the personal development of its training programs' participants by applying positive appreciation resources like social-valuation and judgment resources like capacity.

4.3.2 Power Distance

ICBC has a larger power distance culture than Citigroup does. On one hand, by adopting inscribed positive judgment resources like capacity and affect resources like satisfaction, Citigroup directly praises its staff and volunteers' time and devotions for the company and stresses employees' participation in day-to-day management, through which their power distance could be shortened. Besides that, Citigroup largely applies more inscribed negative appreciation resources like social-valuation and affect resources like insecurity to explicitly show its sincere concerns and empathy for the victims. Hence a more friendly image would be established to narrow the power distance. On the other hand, using less negative attitude resources than Citigroup, the information disclosed in ICBC's messages is more like positive publicity for the enterprise, thus its majestic and serious image could be established among the staff.

4.3.3 Masculinity and Femininity

ICBC has shown a more masculine image while Citigroup is more feminine in their chairman's statements. Regarding their different choices of attitude resources, ICBC employs more invoked judgment resources like the capacity to introduce various past successes, for example, expressions like "We are the first bank to establish....," which shows

ICBC's intention to maintain a powerful and successful impression. In contrast, Citigroup emphasizes the feeling and values of other people, so it adopts more inscribed negative appreciation resources to show its concerns and empathy for the victims subjected to bad situations like a hurricane, the Covid-19 pandemic, the widening income divide, political turmoil, and racist acts. More specifically, 2019 and 2020 mark one of the most wide-ranging and long-lasting challenges for every part of the world with the Covid-19 pandemic, and the two companies treat it differently: ICBC prefers to mainly cite their effective actions taken to tackle the issues, portraying their tough, powerful and competent image with much more positive invoked judgment resources like capacity; whereas Citigroup is more tender and sensitive to people's feeling and emphasizes on the emotional resonance with potential readers by using inscribed negative appreciation resources more often.

What's more, ICBC is more ambitious by aiming to serve the government's policies such as green development, national reform and opening-up, "Four Major Sectors", the targeted poverty alleviation, and so forth. Thus, it utilizes more positive appreciation resources like social-valuation to show the importance of these major strategies and key projects and more invoked positive judgment resources like the capacity to imply how the company would make contributions to them. By contrast, Citigroup places more focus on the general problems pertinent to people's welfare like affordable housing, income disparity, workforce development, and gender equity. Thus, it would apply more inscribed negative affect resources and appreciation resources to express their worries about the current severe situations and make commitments to change them.

4.3.4 Uncertainty Avoidance

Respecting this dimension, ICBC pays more attention to uncertainty avoidance than Citigroup does, which is proved by the highly mentioned words like "risks prevention", "risks control", "risk management", "anti-fraud technology" and "warning plan" yet few of them are noted in Citigroup's chairman's statements. Concretely, ICBC introduces its commitments to pursue a strong and full-fledged risk control capability for wealth management, market, social, and environment risks and takes specific warning plans and anti-fraud technology to ensure the wealth safety of its customers, during which it uses more invoked positive judgment resources to achieve its purposes. All these provident actions and goals symbolize that ICBC has zero-tolerance for unknown risks and has to be well-prepared for the uncertainty.

4.3.5 Long-term vs. Short-term Orientation

ICBC underlines a more long-term-oriented culture, but Citigroup shares the opposite. The corpus demonstrates that more positive judgment resources are used by ICBC because it has prepared many concrete long-term development programs according to the government's policies, for instance, ICBC announced that it has made poverty relief efforts for 22 years and would continue to insist on the bask strategy of targeted poverty relief and elimination in its 2017 message. However, in Citigroup, more focus has been placed on the performance of the past year and the concrete goals for the following year using positive judgment resources and appreciation resources, yet with little description of a plan for the long future.

5. Conclusion

The present study has investigated how Chinese and western banks exploit attitude resources differently in their chairman's statements, taking ICBC's and Citigroup's 2015-2020 CSRRs as instances, and has provided potential reasons contributing to their different patterns of appraisal choices from Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory. It has been found that Hofstede's five dimensions would affect their emphases of evaluation respectively, contributing to their distinctive appraisal patterns. More specifically, diverse cultural dimensions have different effects on appraisal choices and the different appraisal patterns may result from the simultaneous influence of several cultural dimensions. Major research findings are summarized as follows.

In a nutshell, for the general distributions, more attitude resources are used in ICBC's chairman statements than in Citigroup's, but Citigroup adopts more affect and judgment resources while more appreciation resources are employed by ICBC. As for the explicitness and polarity, Citigroup expresses its attitude resources more explicitly and exercises more negative attitude resources than ICBC. Regarding their specific different patterns, it was found that (1) for affect resources, both companies tend to convey them directly and positively, but ICBC underlines positive satisfaction resources whereas Citigroup empathizes with negative insecurity resources; (2) for judgment resources, although both of them underscore the positive evaluation of their capacity to create a capable and professional image, ICBC prefers to do this more implicitly, like citing the facts about its copious past achievements; (3) regarding appreciation resources, both companies adopt a significantly large number of social-valuation resources, symbolizing that both attach great attention to the positive social evaluation of the entities or concepts that could benefit the public and the society, but Citigroup prefers an explicit way and conveys more negative social evaluation towards those risks and challenges the society has been facing on. Also, ICBC underlines composition resources owing to its emphasis on balance and stable situations, especially the harmonious condition between man and nature.

Moreover, the analysis according to the five dimensions shows that ICBC is embodied by a collectivistic, large power distance, masculine, high uncertainty avoidance, and long-term-oriented culture while Citigroup shares the opposite, which influences different choices of attitude resources between them to a certain degree. First, driven by a collectivistic, masculine, and large power distance culture, ICBC adopts more positive appreciation resources like social-valuation and invoked positive judgment resources like the capacity to introduce its various past successful performances achieved by the company as a whole, and its ambition to serve the government' major strategies and key projects, aiming to portray a tough, powerful and competent image. Meanwhile, ICBC applies more positive composition resources to emphasize the balance and stable conditions, especially the harmonious balance between man and nature, which reflects its consideration for the collective good. During this process, less negative attitude resources are employed for largely positive publicity, intending to extend the power distance by maintaining its majestic, serious, and successful impression. By contrast, affected by an individualistic, feminine, and low power distance culture, Citigroup capitalizes on more negative appreciation resources like social-valuation and negative affect resources like insecurity to explicitly show its sincere concerns about the current challenges and adverse disasters as well as the feelings of victims. Also, more inscribed positive judgment resources like capacity and affect resources like satisfaction are exercised to directly praise the hard work and achievements devoted by its employees and volunteers. Meanwhile, it attaches more attention to the personal development of its training programs' participants by applying positive appreciation resources like social-valuation and judgment resources such as capacity. Hence, a more tender, amiable, and friendly image would be established to narrow the power distance. Second, owing to the impact of high uncertainty avoidance and long-term-oriented culture, ICBC would apply more positive appreciation resources and invoked positive judgment resources to evaluate its provident plans for risks control as well as long-term development programs tailored to the government's policies, but Citigroup would pay more attention to the past performances and the specific goals for the next following year.

For the theoretical significance of this study, to some extent, this study could enrich the cultural contrastive analysis of CSRRs on appraisal meaning by combining the Appraisal system with the Cultural Dimensions theory. Besides, it explained the restrictive role of cultural background on appraisal choices by examining ICBC and Citigroup's application of attitude resources in the genre of CSRR, which can improve the study of the Appraisal system and eventually establish appraisal analysis frameworks for different genres and cultural backgrounds. As for its implications, this research can provide enlightenment on the composition of the chairman's statement in CSRR by improving enterprises' awareness of the interpersonal meaning and cultural differences. The findings suggest that distinct cultures would influence the writers' choices of attitude resources, hence displaying different emphasis and patterns of use. It means that companies could better achieve optimal communicative functions by making their appraisal resources properly adapt to different cultural backgrounds, thus effectively serving their ultimate communicative goals in the chairman's statement. Arguably, this kind of enlightenment could be advantageous for transnational enterprises to keep abreast with the international reporting standards of CSRR for better impression management during internationalization and the advancement of China's green finance.

However, this study still needs to be improved on an account of its contingency brought by the limited scale of the corpus, and the subjectivity generated during the manual coding process of attitude resources which should be eliminated through multiple coding by at least two persons. Also, because of the scope, the present research only deals with the attitude resources. Hence, further research with a larger corpus size, and a method of multiple coding to examine the application of the whole Appraisal system would be of value, so that the research results could be more convincing and universal. Besides that, the present study is limited to two companies, ICBC and Citigroup. Thus, the chairman's statements of more companies in the banking industry would be recommended for a contrastive analysis of the restrictive role of cultural context on appraisal resources. By doing so, the contribution could be made not only by establishing appraisal analysis frameworks suitable for CSRR, but also by analyzing the similarities and differences of language manifestations in different cultures.

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A Comparative Study of Chinese and American Pharmaceutical Corporate Profiles Based on Rhetorical Appeal

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Abstract

Rhetorical behavior refers to the behavior of actively using language resources around a specific audience, narrowing the distance between the two parties who had a strong sense of separation, and guiding the audience to cooperate. In this sense, the corporate profile for the purpose of communication and dissemination is also a rhetorical act. The differences in Chinese and Western cultural psychology, aesthetic concepts, and value concepts affect the significant differences in rhetoric between the two. With the profiles of Chinese and American pharmaceutical companies as subjects, on the basis of Aristotle′s rhetorical appeals, the paper has made a contrastive analysis of the rhetorical process of realization of ethos, pathos, and logos in corporate profiles between China and America. The study found that the main differences in the rhetoric process of Chinese and American corporate profiles are as follows: Chinese corporate profiles emphasize the nature of the company, the awards, and honors the company has won, and product safety, to highlight the status of the company in the national economy. They generally take the third person form. The U.S. corporate profiles emphasize the business scope or business objectives of the business, focus on the interests of consumers, and adopt a specific statement of facts, usually in the first-person form. Studying the profiles of Chinese and American companies from the perspective of rhetorical comparison can help people understand Western rhetorical habits, make rhetoric centered on the audience, and then more efficiently meet the needs of the audience and better enhance the competitiveness of enterprises. The study is expected to give reference to Chinese corporate international communication.

Keywords: corporate profiles, rhetorical contrast, rhetorical appeal

1. Introduction

Under the background of the trend of globalization and the ″Belt and Road″ initiative, China is actively developing economic cooperation relations with countries around the world, and major enterprises are also actively seeking foreign markets, trying to integrate with international standards. In the era of ″Internet+″, network media has obvious advantages such as wide dissemination, low cost, fast speed, diversification, and freedom from time and space constraints. Commercial promotion and introduction of products and services utilizing network carriers have become one of the preferred ways for enterprises to establish their image, demonstrate their advantages, and attract investment and cooperation. For this reason, many Chinese enterprises have opened Chinese and English websites and adopted bilingual propaganda manuals, hoping to introduce the basic situation of enterprises to the world through these external propaganda materials, to establish a good image in the world, and strive for more international business opportunities. The company′s external publicity materials include company profiles, trademarks, product introductions, manuals, advertisements, corporate culture promotion, official websites, etc. It is an important display of the company′s products and culture, and it is also an important tool to attract consumers and partners and expand its influence. With the continuous development of network technology, the profile on the company′s official website is the core part of the company′s external publicity materials. Therefore, the importance of the company′s official website profile is self-evident.

As a rhetorical discourse, the corporate profile uses language symbols to persuade the target audience to achieve its rhetorical purpose. With the increasing frequency of Sino-foreign trade exchanges, the company profile is an important platform for the company to publicize its basic information of the company. Whether its rhetorical form and rhetorical content can be recognized by the target audience plays an important role in the smooth progress of cross-cultural business communication. An appeal is a symbolic strategy whose purpose is either to evoke an emotion or to gain the audience′s loyalty or commitment. However, even though the purpose of corporate profiles is to build a good image and stimulate customers′ willingness to invest and cooperate, due to the differences in economic, political, and cultural aspects between China and America, the appeal strategies adopted in corporate profiles texts are quite different.

Rhetorical appeal theory is often used in the analysis of speeches, advertisements, academic papers, and other discourses, but its application in corporate discourse research has received relatively little attention from scholars.

Therefore, based on the previous research results, this paper attempts to use the method of parallel text analysis to compare the Chinese and English enterprise profiles with the theory of rhetorical appeal. It examines the characteristics of the textual conventions of Chinese and American pharmaceutical companies and compares how Chinese and American company profiles resort to persuasion resources. It is hoped that through the research of this paper, the differences can be understood in the textual conventions of Chinese and English enterprise profiles. Understanding these differences can reduce the communication barriers caused by cultural differences, improve the effect of cross-cultural communication, make the company profile effective in promoting, and establish a professional image of Chinese companies in the world, to obtain a broader space for development. According to the research purpose of this paper, this paper will mainly answer the following questions:

What are the differences between Chinese and American pharmaceutical company profiles in terms of ethos?
What are the differences between Chinese and American pharmaceutical company profiles in realizing pathos?
What are the differences between Chinese and American pharmaceutical company profiles in completing logos?

2. Previous research on corporate profiles

This part will review the previous research on company profile texts, comparison of Chinese and foreign corporate profile texts, and comparison of Chinese and foreign corporate profiles from the perspective of rhetorical appeal.

Many scholars are keen on the research of corporate profiles, and the research angle and application theory are also very rich. Looking at the existing research, the content mainly focuses on the discussion of the English translation of Chinese enterprise profiles, mainly from the perspectives of adaptation theory, text type theory, text grammar, etc. For example, Tang (2013), based on Vessollen′s Adaptation Theory, discussed the strategies that should be adopted in the English translation of ″China Time-honored Brands″ from the perspective of pragmatics. Chen (2013), based on Rice and Newmark′s text type theory, divides corporate profile texts into three categories: informational texts, expressive texts, and calling texts according to the different functions of language. She also analyzed the problems existing in the English translation of corporate profiles and discussed translation strategies applicable to different types of texts. The existing research results have a certain guiding significance for the practice of English translation of Chinese enterprise profiles, which is conducive to improving the external publicity effect of enterprises. It is worth noting that many scholars have explored the English translation strategies of Chinese enterprise profiles from a comparative perspective. Zhang (2013), based on the characteristics of parallel texts in English translation and guided by functional translation theory, comparatively analyzed the differences between the corporate profiles of Chinese and American corporate websites. Lu (2012) constructed a parallel text comparison mode suitable for the English translation of corporate profile texts based on Werlich text grammar, describing and analyzing the similarities and differences in textual conventions of corporate profiles on Chinese and American corporate websites. He also discusses some enlightenments obtained from the English translation of enterprise profile texts. Lu (2019) used the corpus analysis software Wmatrix to examine the semantics, grammar, and word frequency distribution characteristics of corporate profile texts on English web pages of Chinese pharmaceutical companies and compared them with data related to U.S. pharmaceutical companies′ profile texts.

As far as the comparison between English and Chinese is concerned, in addition to the enthusiasm for English translation strategies, some scholars have conducted comparative research on Chinese and foreign enterprise profiles from the characteristics and content of the text. Guided by the genre analysis theory of swales and Bhatia, Chen (2009) compares the similarities and differences between Chinese and American enterprise profiles from two aspects: genre structure and genre realization form. Yin (2014) collected 25 English profiles of Chinese and foreign shipping companies as a research corpus and selected 10 English profiles of Chinese and foreign shipping companies to manually mark and count them, and use SPSS software for data analysis. It aims to study the three thematic functions of experiential functional theme, interpersonal functional theme, and discourse functional theme. Feng (2015) reviewed the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign petrochemical enterprise profiles in terms of text structure, content innovation, and language usage. Based on the Hasan genre structure potential, Tang (2015) compares and analyzes the genre components and genre structure potential of Chinese and American business profiles. Zou (2020) used critical metaphor analysis to compare the conceptual metaphors in the English profiles of Chinese and foreign Internet companies, aiming to analyze the different practices of Chinese and foreign companies in building corporate identities and to reveal the hidden ideas of the two parties. It can be seen from the above research that scholars pay more attention to the text structure, genre, text convention, and text content of Chinese and English company profiles.

The existing research results help to improve the cross-cultural communication quality of Chinese enterprise profiles to a certain extent and enhance the effect of Chinese enterprises′ external publicity. At present, some scholars have paid attention to the rhetorical persuasion function of corporate profiles and tried to conduct comparative research on Chinese and foreign corporate profiles. For example, He (2018) tried to use rhetoric as the theoretical framework and selected nearly 30 corporate profiles of the official websites of the top 500 companies at home and abroad as the research objects, including English corporate profiles, Chinese corporate profiles, and their English translations. At last, the rhetorical differences between Chinese enterprise profiles are discussed. Zeng (2015) investigated the use of the three elements of Aristotle′s rhetoric with ten English profiles of Guangxi enterprises and ten English profiles of well-known western enterprises. Chen (2018) took the profiles of Chinese and American companies as the research object, used the rhetorical appeal theory, and comparatively analyzed the rhetorical process of the Chinese and American company profiles′ appeal to personality to build corporate credibility. Fan (2020)took the profiles of the Imperial Palace and Buckingham Palace selected from domestic and foreign tourism websites as the research objects and took Aristotle′ s three rhetorical strategies as theoretical support. From the audience′s point of view, she discussed the similarities and differences in rhetorical strategies between the two and tried to find the reasons for the differences, to provide some inspiration for improving the rhetorical persuasion effect of China′s tourism promotion texts.

As a rhetorical discourse, enterprise profile plays an important role in constructing enterprise credibility, but unfortunately, some studies still have some limitations. For example, some studies compare the profiles of enterprises in different industries without further dividing the nature of enterprises. The sources of the data they collected are rather messy, there are no various control variables, and the rhetorical function of enterprise profile has not been paid enough attention by the academic circles. This study takes the three elements of rhetorical appeal as a theoretical framework, combined with parallel text analysis methods. Combined with the current hot spots, a total of 6 well-known pharmaceutical companies in China and the United States were selected. In parallel text analysis, enterprise types correspond to each other, so the text is more comparable. Combining a theoretical perspective of rhetorical appeal with a parallel text analysis method, this study may provide a new idea for the cross-cultural communication of enterprises, which can be applied to other types of enterprise profile research.

3. Theoretical framework

The content of this part will focus on several key concepts relevant to this article, including the definition of the enterprise profile and its function and rhetorical appeal theory.

3.1 The Rhetoric of the Corporate Profile

A company profile is an explanatory text material that introduces the company′s current status, historical background, company nature, business scope, business characteristics, and corporate advertising. It is like a company′s resume, an important part of the company′s external publicity materials, the epitome of the company′s image, performance, cultural connotation, and the first window of external communication. A well-presented company profile can impress potential customer groups and partners, thereby increasing the company′s opportunities for external development.

The primary function of the company profile is to provide basic information about the company to potential customer groups and partners. Its ultimate purpose is to produce considerable publicity effects, establish a good business image of the company, arouse the interest of potential customers and partners, and gain their trust and support. It can be seen that the company profile not only has the characteristics of information text but also has the function of stimulating the audience to take a certain action. Therefore, in its essence, it is a specific form of rhetorical practice. Both rhetorical persuasion and corporate profile are aimed at specific groups of people. Rhetoricians hope to attract readers through the application of various speech and argumentation methods so that they can identify with them, achieve persuasive effects, and thus achieve the rhetorician′s communicative purpose. However, due to the difference in the use of rhetorical strategies between China and the West, if the company profile is directly translated from the Chinese version into the English version as a publicity text and presented to foreign audiences, the rhetorical strategy does not conform to Western rhetorical habits. Therefore, the English profile of Chinese enterprises cannot exert its persuasive effect to the greatest extent, and cannot make foreign customers better understand the company′s products and stimulate their psychological identity. This article will compare and analyze the profiles of Chinese and American pharmaceutical companies, explore the differences in the use of rhetorical strategies between Chinese and American companies, and provide some inspiration for improving the rhetorical persuasion effect of Chinese pharmaceutical company profiles.

3.2 Parallel text contrast mode

The concept of parallel text originated from comparative text linguistics. It originally referred to the original text and the corresponding translation that were placed side by side and compared sentence by sentence. Later, the connotation was extended to generally refer to the types of texts with similar communicative functions in different languages and cultures. Hartmann (1980), the founder of parallel texts, divides parallel texts into three categories. Category A refers to translations and original texts that are highly consistent in form and semantically equivalent. Category B refers to translations and originals that are not identical in form but functionally equivalent. Type C is the corpus corresponding to the register, which is not equivalent in terms of semantics, and only has a certain consistency in the topic, style, use occasion, and applicable object of the text. The parallel text referred to in this article refers specifically to the C-type parallel text in the Hartmann classification. Although the semantic information conveyed by the Chinese and English corporate web pages is different, the themes, usage occasions, and applicable objects of the text are similar. The purpose is to promote enterprises and stimulate the potential consumption intention of the target audience.

3.3 Rhetorical Appeals

Rhetoric is one of the oldest subjects in the West, as early as the seventh century B.C. the ancient Greeks learned how to speak skillfully to achieve the rhetorical effect. Although the practice of rhetoric had been in vogue centuries before Aristotle, rhetoric was not established as a discipline at that time. *Rhetoric* written by Aristotle (1924) is a work that played a foundational role in the development of Western rhetoric. In his view, rhetoric is the function of seeking possible means of persuasion in any given situation. If a rhetorician wants to persuade others, he first needs to speak with reason. Secondly, it is necessary to fully understand the character of the audience, understand the emotions of the audience, and the reasons for the emotion. It can be seen that rhetoric in Aristotle′s eyes not only emphasizes reason but also pays attention to emotional and ethical values, which is consistent with the three rhetorical appeals involved in this article.

There are three main means of rhetorical appeal: ethos, pathos, and logos. Ethos is a rhetorical means to persuade the audience by constructing a rhetorical personality. To construct a credible rhetorical personality, the rhetorician needs to demonstrate such personality qualities as common sense, good character or virtue, and goodwill. Ethos is the most persuasive means of persuasion in rhetorical appeals because audiences are more willing to accept the rhetorician′s point of view when they believe the rhetorician is reasonable, trustworthy, and friendly. Pathos is a rhetorical method that stimulates the audience′s emotions, makes them accept the rhetorician′s point of view, and then takes corresponding actions. Logos refers to the rhetorical means by which the subject of rhetorical discourse presents reason and facts so that the audience perceives the logic in his discourse.

4. Method

This study selects the corporate profiles of 3 Chinese pharmaceutical companies and 3 American pharmaceutical companies as research data. The six selected Chinese and American pharmaceutical enterprises are shown in Table 1. The author reviews the Chinese and English profiles of its official website and selects U.S. companies with similar business scope as parallel texts. The texts include English corporate profiles, Chinese corporate profiles, and their English translations. All the texts of these 6 companies are taken from the official websites of the companies, so the data is more authentic. They have the same topic, belong to the same genre and text type, and have similar text functions. In terms of the nature of enterprises, there are state-owned enterprises, private enterprises, and joint-stock enterprises. Most of the selected companies have a certain influence and representation in the pharmaceutical industry. Although the 6 profiles of Chinese and American companies are only a small corpus, the selected companies are highly representative.

Table 1. Selected Chinese and American Pharmaceutical Enterprises

Chinese Pharmaceutical Enterprises	American Pharmaceutical Enterprises
China National Pharmaceutical Group Co., Ltd. (Sinopharm)	Pfizer
Guangzhou Pharmaceutical Holdings	Merck (known as MSD outside the U.S. and Canada)
Kexing Biopharm	AstraZeneca

This study mainly uses qualitative methods to compare and analyze the rhetorical process of using ethos, pathos, logos, and other persuasion methods in Chinese and American pharmaceutical company profiles, which will help people to understand the discourse differences between Chinese and American company profiles. Based on fully understanding the differences, enterprises can adjust and present the profiles of Chinese enterprises in the English context in a targeted manner, to conform to the language thinking mode of the audience and effectively achieve the purpose of external publicity.

5. Differences in the three rhetorical appeals

In the practice of rhetorical discourse, a single form of appeal cannot play a decisive role in the effect of persuasion, and ethos, pathos, and logos are inseparable (Deng, 2011). Rhetorical discourse is based on logos, but logos are inseparable from pathos, and ethos plays a dominant role in persuasion. These three make the discourse reasonable, convince the audience with personal prestige, and achieve the purpose of rhetoric. This part will make a text comparison and analysis of the differences in the three principles of ethos, pathos, and logos in the profiles of Chinese and American pharmaceutical companies. Due to the limited space, this paper mainly selects representative profiles of Chinese and American pharmaceutical companies for presentation. The Chinese version and English version of the profile of Chinese pharmaceutical enterprises are selected respectively. The Chinese version is mainly used to show the original logic of the profile, while the English version is used for a more intuitive comparison. For American enterprises, only the English version of the company profile is selected for comparison.

5.1 Differences in the ethos

Ethos in rhetoric refers to the personality factors displayed by the rhetorician through the text, that is to say, the rhetorician shows the good character of the enterprise through language, to construct the rhetorical authority, obtain the affirmation of the audience, and achieve effective persuasion. By using rhetorical devices, the speaker makes the speaker appear to be a certain kind of person and makes the audience think that he has a certain attitude towards them because this will have a significant impact on persuasion (Liu, 2008). In business activities, consumers are more willing to deal with honest companies. When the audience thinks the rhetorician is trustworthy, they are more likely to accept and agree with the rhetorician′s point of view and attitude.

5.1.1 The means of building corporate image

Profiles of Chinese companies mainly use political discourse to shape the image of honest companies. American corporate profiles mainly use positive words such as ″responsibility, commitment, dependable″ and other words to convey the business philosophy of integrity to the audience. Please compare the following example:

Example 1：Excerpted from the Introduction of GPHL[2]

Source text: 诞生于广州这片中国近代与现代革命策源地的广药集团，始终与“红色血脉”紧紧相连，培育了中国共产党早期领导人、广州起义的组织发动者、中央政治局常委杨殷。红色血脉代代相传，如今广药集团每年均开展纪念革命烈士、纪念向秀丽、纪念神农诞辰等传承红色基因主题活动。（广药集团）

Target text: GPHL, with its headquarters located in the cradle of Chinese revolutions in contemporary and modern times, has been a staunch supporter of CPC. It had produced a galaxy of revolutionaries, such as Yang Yin, a leader of the CPC in early days, advocate and organizer of Guangzhou Uprising and member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee. To pass on the spirit of patriotism, GPHL organizes events in honor of revolutionary martyrs and Xiang Xiuli, and Shennong, the discoverer of medicine in the Chinese myth. (Excerpted from GPHL)

Parallel text: Consistent with our responsibility as the world's leading biopharmaceutical company, we also collaborate with health care providers, governments and local communities to support and expand access to reliable, affordable health care around the world. (Excerpted from the Introduction of Pfizer[3])

In Example 1, the discourse subject Guangzhou Pharmaceutical Holdings used revolutionary and political discourses such as ″the cradle of Chinese revolutions″, ″a galaxy of revolutionaries″, ″CPC″ and ″the spirit of patriotism″. It aims to convey to consumers that its business orientation and philosophy are positive. In the parallel text, Pfizer conveys the trustworthy quality of the enterprise through the expression ″responsibility, to support and expand access to reliable″.

5.1.2 Citing authoritative sources

Prestigious companies are more likely to win the approval of consumers. Using authoritative resources can enhance the prestige of the subject of rhetorical discourse. Authoritative resources such as officials, experts, and social elites are easily converted into ″authority″ and ″credibility″ in the minds of customers. Profiles of Chinese companies usually emphasize the nature of the company. Discourses such as ″solely state-owned company″ and ″state-owned backbone enterprise″ highlight the status of the company. Please compare the following example:

Example 2：Excerpted from the Introduction of Sinopharm[4]

Source text: 中国医药集团有限公司（以下简称“国药集团”）是由国务院国资委直接管理的唯一一家以生命健康为主业的中央企业，是国家创新型企业，是中央医药储备单位，是中国和亚洲综合实力和规模领先的综合性医药健康产业集团，拥有集科技研发、工业制造、物流分销、零售连锁、医疗健康、工程技术、专业会展、国际经营、金融投资等为一体的大健康全产业链。（医药集团）

Target text: China National Pharmaceutical Group Co., Ltd. (Sinopharm) is a large healthcare group directly under the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC) of the State Council, with 128,000 employees and a full chain in the industry covering R&D, manufacturing, logistics and distribution, retail chains, healthcare, engineering services, exhibitions and conferences, international business and financial services. (Sinopharm)

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[2] Chinese version: http://www.gpc.com.cn/aboutUs.html
English version: http://en.gpc.com.cn/aboutUs.html
[3] https://www.pfizer.com.cn/about/overview_en.aspx
[4] Chinese version: http://www.sinopharm.com/1073.html
English version: http://www.sinopharm.com/en/1398.html

Parallel text: For more than 160 years, Pfizer has worked to make a difference for all who rely on us. (Excerpted from the Introduction of Pfizer[5])

For 130 years, we've focused on not just the next quarter, but the next quarter-century. (Excerpted from the Introduction of Merck[6])

In Example 2, the discourse subject Sinopharm Group used terms such as ″the State-owned Assets Supervision″ and ″Administration Commission (SASAC) of the State Council″, focusing on publicizing the nature of the enterprise and highlighting its authority. The discourse subjects of the parallel text, Merck and Pfizer conveyed to the audience that the company occupies a pivotal position in the industry by introducing the company′s long history.

5.1.3 Ways to show strength

The credibility of an enterprise is not only reflected in the integrity of management, the sense of responsibility, and the enjoyment of a certain prestige and status, but more importantly, it has considerable strength. In the process of business communication, the strength of an enterprise is an important factor in persuading potential customers. The profiles of Chinese and American companies reflect the strength of companies in different ways. Please compare the following example:

Example 3：Excerpted from the Introduction of Sinopharm[7]

Source text: 2020 年国药集团营业收入超 5000 亿元，位列世界 500 强企业榜单第 109 位，在世界 500 强医药企业榜单中位列第 2 位。集团规模、效益和综合实力持续保持中国和亚洲医药行业领先地位，连续七年度被国务院国资委评为“中央企业负责人经营业绩考核 A 级企业”。集团入围中央电视台“2019 中国品牌强国盛典榜样 100 品牌”，在《人民日报》“中国品牌发展（企业）指数榜单”中位列医药类企业第一位。在国际权威品牌价值咨询公司 Brand Finance 发布的 2021 年全球品牌价值医药企业 25 强排名中，蝉联亚洲第一。（医药集团）

Target text: The past years witnessed Sinopharm's steady and sound development. From 2009to 2018, the CAGR of revenue and total assets reached 24.24% and 30.54% respectively. Sinopharm ranked 169th in Fortune Global 500 and the revenue of 2018 amounted to nearly 400 billion yuan. (Sinopharm)

Parallel text:

Our company by the numbers	74k employees
Research and development investment in 2020	$13.6B
Total philanthropy in 2019	$3.1B

(Excerpted from the Introduction of Merck[8])

Example 3 shows that the profile of a Chinese company mainly displays the company′s honors, awards, rankings, etc. to demonstrate the company′s strength. It is worth noting that the update of English profiles of Chinese enterprises is slow. The data for the Chinese profile has been updated to 2020, while the data for the English profile still stays in 2018. The parallel text shows that the U.S. company profile uses specific data to introduce the company′s business scope, operating income, number of employees or global business scale, etc., to objectively describe the strength of the company, and to convince the target customers. From the comparison between the English and Chinese profiles of the Sinopharm group, its English profile has deleted a considerable part of honors and awards. It can be seen that some enterprises have noticed the differences between Chinese and English rhetorical strategies and made some adjustments.

5.2 Differences in the pathos

Pathos mainly achieves the rhetorical effect of persuasion by adjusting the audience′s emotions and making the audience in a certain mood (Liu, 2018). If rhetorical discourse can arouse the emotional resonance of the audience, then the discourse is more likely to be recognized by the audience. Therefore, rhetoricians try to adjust the audience′s emotions in the rhetorical interaction, so that they are in a psychological state that is easy to accept persuasion. This does not mean that the rhetorician simply pays attention to whether the discourse is acceptable, but requires the rhetorician to pay attention to whether the judgment is correct from the moral level. Rhetoricians narrow the distance with the audience by seeking common ground. Seeking common ground is to emphasize the commonalities between

[5] https://www.pfizer.com.cn/about/overview_en.aspx
[6] https://www.merckgroup.com/en/company/history.html
[7] Chinese version: http://www.sinopharm.com/1073.html
English version: http://www.sinopharm.com/en/1398.html
[8] https://www.merckgroup.com/en/company/history.html

themselves and the audience, such as shared values, common emotional experiences, etc. They become the basis of emotional communication and help both parties build trust.

Chinese corporate profiles usually emphasize national interests and stimulate the audienceʹs emotions to achieve persuasive purposes. American business profiles appeal to pathos by emphasizing consumer interests. Please compare the following example:

Example 4：Excerpted from the Introduction of Sinopharm[9]

Source text: 中国医药集团有限公司（以下简称“国药集团”）是由国务院国资委直接管理的唯一一家以生命健康为主业的中央企业，是国家创新型企业，是中央医药储备单位，是中国和亚洲综合实力和规模领先的综合性医药健康产业集团，拥有集科技研发、工业制造、物流分销、零售连锁、医疗健康、工程技术、专业会展、国际经营、金融投资等为一体的大健康全产业链。（医药集团）

Target text: China National Pharmaceutical Group Co., Ltd. (Sinopharm) is a large healthcare group directly under the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC) of the State Council...The past years witnessed Sinopharmʹs steady and sound development. From 2009to 2018, the CAGR of revenue and total assets reached 24.24% and 30.54% respectively. Sinopharm ranked 169th in Fortune Global 500 and the revenue of 2018 amounted to nearly 400 billion yuan...Sinopharm has built up manufacturing and medicinal materials sites for biological drugs, narcotic and psychotropic drugs, anti-infectious drugs, oncology drugs, cardio-vascular drugs, and respiratory drugs. Some of the production lines have been approved by the US FDA and E.U. authorities and prequalified by WHO.

Parallel text: At Pfizer, we apply science and our global resources to improve health and well-being at every stage of life. We strive to set the standard for quality, safety, and value in the discovery, development and manufacturing of medicines for people. Our diversified global health care portfolio includes biologic and small molecule medicines and vaccines, as well as many of the world’s best-known consumer. Every day, Pfizer colleagues all over the world work to advance wellness, prevention, treatments and cures that challenge the most feared diseases of our time. Consistent with our responsibility as the world’s leading biopharmaceutical company, we also collaborate with health care providers, governments and local communities to support and expand access to reliable, affordable health care around the world.

(Excerpted from the Introduction of Pfizer[10])

Example 4 shows that the Chinese company profile is used to highlight the company itself, and strive to create an image of a powerful and attractive company in front of readers to win the trust of consumers. It is manifested in the fact that the text is enterprise-centered, frequently uses the company name, and the tone is formal, even slightly stiff. It lacks interaction with the target audience and fails to consider the psychological feelings of the target language readers as potential consumers.

American companies stand on the consumerʹs side, consider and adapt to consumersʹ psychological needs, and strive to resonate in the hearts of target audiences to achieve the purpose of persuasion. The discourse subject not only appeals to emotion by emphasizing the interests of consumers but also uses the plural form of first-person pronouns to establish emotional identity with the audience. In the practice of rhetorical discourse, the use of the plural form of first-person pronouns enhances the audienceʹs sense of identity to a certain extent, making the audience unwittingly identify with the subject of discourse. In the parallel text, the American company used the plural form of first-person pronouns such as ʺwe, us, ourʺ to give the audience a feeling of cordiality and equality, to gain the audienceʹs approval.

5.3 Differences in the logos

Logos involve consideration of the arrangement of textual structures (Ju, 2013). The discourses of Chinese and American corporate profiles seek rationality through corporate goals, corporate history, and corporate business scope, but there are differences in the order of structure construction. Chinese enterprise profiles usually start with the nature of the enterprise, then introduce the development history of the enterprise, the business scope of the enterprise, and finally put forward the enterprise goal. The American business profile starts with the business goals or founders, and then introduces the business scope and strength of the business. Chinese corporate profile discourse pays more attention

[9] Chinese version: http://www.sinopharm.com/1073.html
English version: http://www.sinopharm.com/en/1398.html
[10] https://www.pfizer.com.cn/about/overview_en.aspx

to the nature of the company, while American corporate profile discourse pays more attention to corporate goals or corporate history for rational appeal. Please compare the following example:

Example 5：Excerpted from the Introduction of Sinopharm[11]

Source text: 中国医药集团有限公司（以下简称“国药集团”）是由国务院国资委直接管理的唯一一家以生命健康为主业的中央企业，是国家创新型企业，是中央医药储备单位，是中国和亚洲综合实力和规模领先的综合性医药健康产业集团，拥有集科技研发、工业制造、物流分销、零售连锁、医疗健康、工程技术、专业会展、国际经营、金融投资等为一体的大健康全产业链。

Target text: China National Pharmaceutical Group Co., Ltd. (Sinopharm) is a large healthcare group directly under the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC) of the State Council, with 128,000 employees and a full chain in the industry covering R&D, manufacturing, logistics and distribution, retail chains, healthcare, engineering services, exhibitions and conferences, international business and financial services. (Sinopharm)

Parallel text: Our business is organized to deliver our strategic priorities sustainably, supporting continued scientific innovation and commercial success. We focus on the discovery, development, and commercialization of prescription medicines in Oncology and BioPharmaceuticals, including Cardiovascular, Renal & Metabolism, and Respiratory & Immunology. (Excerpted from the Introduction of AstraZeneca[12])

Example 5 and the parallel text are selected from the first sentence of the corporate profile texts of the Sinopharm and AstraZeneca respectively. The Chinese company first emphasizes the nature of the company, while the latter focuses on the goals of the company. Second, the Chinese and American business profiles use different discourse constructions to introduce business operations. Chinese enterprises mainly use the means of ranking to introduce their products or services. American companies introduce their business scope by constructing business facts. Appealing to facts that are relevant to peopleʹs daily lives is the rational material often used by U.S. business profiles to persuade audiences. Speaking with facts and reasoning with facts is not simply a list of facts. In the practice of rhetorical discourse, the subject of rhetorical discourse expresses its implicit views or attitudes, that is, its rhetorical purpose, through careful selection and arrangement of facts in the process of stating facts. Please compare the following example:

Example 6：Excerpted from the Introduction of Sinopharm[13]

Source text:中国医药集团有限公司（以下简称“国药集团”）是由国务院国资委直接管理的唯一一家以生命健康为主业的中央企业，是国家创新型企业，是中央医药储备单位，是中国和亚洲综合实力和规模领先的综合性医药健康产业集团，拥有集科技研发、工业制造、物流分销、零售连锁、医疗健康、工程技术、专业会展、国际经营、金融投资等为一体的大健康全产业链。（国药集团）

Target text: China National Pharmaceutical Group Co., Ltd. (Sinopharm) is a large healthcare group directly under the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC) of the State Council, with 128,000 employees and a full chain in the industry covering R&D, manufacturing, logistics and distribution, retail chains, healthcare, engineering services, exhibitions and conferences, international business and financial services. （Sinopharm）

Parallel text:

Every day, Pfizer colleagues all over the world work to advance wellness, prevention, treatments and cures that challenge the most feared diseases of our time. (Excerpted from the Introduction of Pfizer[14])

Our business is organized to deliver our strategic priorities sustainably, supporting continued scientific innovation and commercial success. We focus on the discovery, development, and commercialization of prescription medicines in Oncology and BioPharmaceuticals, including Cardiovascular, Renal & Metabolism, and Respiratory & Immunology. (Excerpted from the Introduction of AstraZeneca[15])

In Example 6, Sinopharm mainly conveys its business information and business philosophy to the audience by employing ranking and listing. In the parallel text, Pfizer communicates the importance of its products to audiences by

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[11] Chinese version: http://www.sinopharm.com/1073.html
English version: http://www.sinopharm.com/en/1398.html
[12] https://www.astrazeneca.com.cn/zh/about-us.html
[13] Chinese version: http://www.sinopharm.com/1073.html
English version: http://www.sinopharm.com/en/1398.html
[14] https://www.pfizer.com.cn/about/overview_en.aspx
[15] https://www.astrazeneca.com.cn/zh/about-us.html

stating that its products touch almost every aspect of the disease. AstraZeneca uses more disease-related and professional terms as rational material to convince the audience. The construction of business facts that are close to daily life is easy to meet the psychological needs of the audience, so it is easier to get the recognition of the target audience.

In a word, different countries have different social histories and cultural backgrounds, which has caused the difference between Chinese and Western rhetorical cultures. After conducting a parallel text comparative analysis of the profiles of Chinese and American pharmaceutical companies, it is found that there are significant differences in the appeal of rhetorical resources between the two. Therefore, appropriate rhetorical strategies should be adopted in the face of audiences from different backgrounds. Through comparative analysis to identify these differences, this study hopes to provide some inspiration on how to make Chinese pharmaceutical company profiles more suitable for foreign clients.

6. Results and Discussion

The comparison of rhetoric will examine and summarize how English and Chinese can successfully influence and persuade the intended audience in their respective native discourses with similar communicative purposes, using the overall linguistic symbolic resources including discourse content, appeal strategies, construction methods, and aesthetic figures of speech (Fan, 2014). By comparing the rhetorical differences between China and America, enterprises can understand the needs of Western audiences more clearly and intuitively, make appropriate rhetorical adjustments to the words of the company profile, and persuade the audience in a way they like to see.

In terms of ethos, Chinese enterprise profiles often contain information such as the state-owned nature of the enterprise, national political and economic policies, and leader care. They enhance the credibility of products and services through the character building of state and political authority. In order to highlight the corporate value and attract customers, Chinese corporate profiles are often stacked with data and awards. While English corporate profiles are mostly consumer-centric, they adopt an approach from the audienceʹs point of view, and rarely resort to state authority. With the help of specific descriptions of products and services, the U.S. profile texts rationally and objectively publicize their use value and give information that is most directly beneficial to customers.

In terms of pathos, Chinese corporate profiles are accustomed to highlighting national interests and strive to create an image of a powerful and appealing company in front of readers to win the trust of consumers. It is manifested in that the Chinese company profile is written in the third person, frequently uses the company name, and has a formal tone. The profile lacks engagement with the target audience. American corporate profiles put consumer interests first. Their texts are narrated from a first-person perspective, and they make extensive use of first-person pronouns such as ʺwe, us, ourʺ, thereby narrowing the sense of distance with the reader. To avoid repetition, they often use words such as ʺthe group, the companyʺ to replace the company name. This also enriches the expression.

In terms of logos, Chinese enterprise profiles usually emphasize the nature of the enterprise and national interests to enhance the corporate image. It generally has a relatively fixed format, which can be roughly summarized in the following order: company nature-establishment time-business scope-research and development strength-company performance-vision, and goals. The information is displayed in a mixed manner and is not categorized by headings or subheadings. The profile of American enterprises focuses on presenting the business scope or business goals to the audience first. It generally does not have a fixed mode, and often uses large titles and subtitles to classify and display various aspects of information to avoid information mixing. In addition, there are many parallel sentences or four-character sentences in the Chinese company profile, focusing on the beauty of the writing style. In contrast, American company profiles use more simple sentences and words.

To sum up, due to different ways of thinking and language expression habits, Chinese and American corporate discourse subjects use different discourse forms to achieve three aspects of the appeal. Through comparative analysis, the study found that there are three main differences in the rhetorical means of appealing to ethos, pathos, and logos in the profile of Chinese and American pharmaceutical companies: emphasizing different objects of interest, different subject personal forms, and different structural construction sequences. Chinese enterprise profile discourse revolves around national interests, adopts a third-person singular form, and makes rhetorical appeals with the nature of the enterprise as the core. American enterprise profile discourse revolves around consumer interests, adopts first-person pronoun plural form, and focuses on corporate goals to make rhetorical appeals.

7. Conclusion

Werlich (1982) argues that two principles affect all text construction and text analysis. One is the external constraints of the text, such as context and genre. The second is the internal composition rules of the text, and the basic text composition factors include the beginning, the order form, the text structure, the text unit, and the end. As far as the external constraints of the text are concerned, the Chinese and American corporate profiles have similar contexts and genres, and the purpose of writing is to promote and promote the company, build a good corporate image, and attract potential target customers. The text has both the function of information transmission and infection persuasion. As far as the internal composition rules of the text are concerned, the text composition elements of the Chinese and American corporate profiles are the same, but they are different in the specific beginning and end, text structure, text content, and rhetorical style. This paper helps people understand the persuasive function of corporate profiles by examining and comparing the rhetorical processes of Chinese and American corporate profiles resorting to rhetorical means such as ethos, pathos, and logos. Furthermore, it is helpful for enterprises to deeply understand the rhetorical construction of corporate profile texts from different cultural backgrounds. In the practice of Chinese enterprises′ external communication, rhetorical awareness should be strengthened. Enterprises should adjust the original text, reconstruct the discourse of the introduction text, and strive to be close to the thinking mode of the audience. This is expected to increase the audience's recognition of the enterprise profile discourse and improve the external publicity effect of the enterprise.

However, this paper still has certain limitations. First, due to space and time constraints, this paper only collects 6 representative profiles of Chinese and American pharmaceutical companies, which cannot represent all Chinese and American companies. Secondly, this study only classifies the industry of the company, comparing the profiles of Chinese pharmaceutical companies with those of the U.S. pharmaceutical companies, and does not distinguish other variables of the company, such as the size of the company, the history of the company, whether the company is state-owned or private, and so on. These variables may, to a certain extent, influence the strategic choice of corporate rhetorical appeal. Third, qualitative methods used in text analysis are inevitably subject to a certain degree. It is suggested that future research can conduct text analysis from different dimensions, such as using quantitative analysis methods to analyze which words are used for rhetorical appeals in Chinese and American business profiles, and the frequency distribution of words. At the same time, it is recommended to increase the size of the corpus in future research, and Chinese and American companies in the same industry can find more examples for comparison. In addition, future research can consider more variables when collecting corpora, such as a stratified comparison of corporate profiles of large, medium, and small pharmaceutical companies. The findings would be more convincing if these variables were taken into account.

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A Corpus-based Study on the Corporate International Publicity Translation and Semantic Construction of Corporate Image

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Abstract

The corporate image and the national image influence each other. The corporate international publicity translation is closely related to the construction of the Chinese corporate image. On the basis of defining the key concept and reviewing related literature, based on the self-built Chinese-English parallel corpus, taking 5 listed new energy companies from China as the research samples, this study uses the UCREL Semantic Annotation System (USAS) to examine the corporate image construction strategy that is hidden in the chairperson's statements of corporate social responsibility (CSR) reports. The results show that there are 10 major semantic fields and 11 sub-domains of semantics used in the chairperson's statements, and 5 types of semantics, namely evaluation semantics, business semantics, citizenship semantics, time-space semantics, quantity semantics, are strategically employed to construct a favorable and vivid corporate image. This study provides new insight into the publicity translation studies and enriches the content of China's image research to some extent. It is expected to help Chinese companies to go global, and improve their international competitiveness.

Keywords: corpus, corporate image, corporate international publicity translation, semantic construction

1. Introduction

The enterprise is a decisive factor in a national brand (Daniel, 2007). The basis for Chinese companies to "go globally" lies in the intelligibility of language, because the corporate information can only be understood and accepted by foreign stakeholders by translating it into the target language that conforms to the culture, law, and system of the destination country (Wang, 2016). Corporate international publicity translation is a topic of significance, because it aims to promote the corporate image to overseas clients, and finally, it will bring economic benefits to the enterprise (Sun & Feng, 2014).

The texts used by companies to publicize themselves to specific target groups are generally called corporate publicity texts, which include corporate profiles, brand names, advertisements, commercial specifications, annual reports, corporate social responsibility (CSR) reports, etc. (Zi, 2018). This study focuses on the chairperson's statements in CSR reports. As one of the genres of corporate public discourse, CSR reports present information about a company's social and environmental performance, give stakeholders the necessary resources to evaluate corporations' overall sustainability development (Bebbington et al., 2008; Gray et al., 2001; Milne et al., 2009), and thus have been drawing growing attention among scholars, business practitioners, and policymakers in recent years (Fuoli, 2018). Normally demonstrated at the beginning of CSR reports, the chairperson's statement is often composed and signed by the senior executive or chairperson of the board as a personal message to the public about corporate policies, achievements, and the prospect of social responsibilities. It is considered a promotional genre that employs language meanings to build and present the company's favorable image (Anderson & Imperia, 1992). Therefore, it is of great significance to investigate the semantic construction of the corporate image in the chairperson's statements within Chinese CSR reports and their English translations.

In recent years, publicity translation has gradually attracted academic attention. However, according to the existing literature, there are few studies on how to build corporate images through language semantics in Chinese CSR reports and their translations, and empirical studies are insufficient. Based on defining the concept and reviewing the relevant literature, this study builds a small-scaled Chinese-English parallel corpus of chairperson's statements of CSR reports from 5 domestic listed firms in the new energy industry to investigate the hidden corporate image construction strategies in the Chinese and its English translation of corporate publicity texts by using USAS semantic analysis system. This study not only expands the scope of translation studies but also enriches the contents of China's image research, to help Chinese enterprises “go globally” and enhance their international competitiveness. Therefore, it is of theoretical and practical significance.

2. Literature review

2.1 Corporate image

The word “image” in the Oxford English Dictionary means “a concept or impression, created in the minds of the public, of a particular person, institution, product, etc.”. The corporate image can be literally understood as “the image of the corporation”. According to Hu and Sheng (2020), the corporate image refers to the overall perception and attitude of an individual or group towards the company, and it is usually divided into the self-molded image and the other-molded one (p. 94). Self-molded image is created by the enterprise or its employees with symbols (i.e., language, pictures) or specific behaviors, while an other-molded one refers to the image created by individuals or groups outside the enterprise through symbols. Corporate image can be also understood from the substance level and the symbol level. The former means the cognition and view concerning the company formed by people due to the operation or development of the company. The latter refers to the people’s perception of the company as a result of what the company says and what others say about the company (Hu & Sheng, 2020, pp. 94–95). In a highly commercialized society, corporate image plays a critical role in the development of enterprises. Dowling (1996) claimed that a positive corporate image could reduce business costs and increase market share. With the advancement of globalization, countries continue to encourage enterprises to go global. Enterprises begin to play the role of public diplomacy and become a window for the global public to understand the image of their home country (Mou & Wu, 2021). In view of this fact, corporate image is always a heated topic in many disciplines, including business management and marketing, as well as journalism and communication.

In recent years, scholars began to analyze the corporate image at the symbol level from the linguistics perspective. Li et al. (2018) used the discourse theory to analyze the reports on Chinese enterprises in the English media from 2015 to 2017 and found that Chinese enterprises were generally described as neutral and positive images in the three years, but there were also some problems such as monotonous images and characteristics. Wang (2019) analyzed the image of Chinese enterprises by focusing on the collocation of words and modal verbs in the self-build corpus of English-language media along with the Belt and Road countries. The study found that the Chinese enterprises continuously produce beneficial products, actively assume social responsibility, and positively practice corporate citizenship duty, but there are few media reports and the public image is not prominent enough. Based on critical discourse analysis theory, Zuo (2019) extracted American media reports on Huawei during 2009–2019 from the LexisNexis database and took Huaweiʹs strategic transformation in 2016 as the cut-off point. A comparative study of reports from 2009–2016 and 2017–2019 shows that Huaweiʹs competitiveness has shifted from price advantage to technology strength, but negative reports about Huawei have also increased.

The above studies deepen the understanding of the nature and features of corporate image, yet they focus heavily on the other-molded corporate image and pay scant attention to the self-molded image. There are even fewer studies enquiring into the corporate image from the translation perspective.

2.2 Corporate international publicity translation

The Chinese expression “Xuanchuan (宣传)” can be translated into propaganda, publicity, promotion, etc. in English. The birth of “Xuanchuan (宣传)” can be traced to Rome in the 17th century, during which the Pope granted the Roman church the power to spread its teachings abroad (Vincent, 2006). The international communication scholar Lasswell (2003) claimed that “Xuanchuan (宣传)” aims to control the opinion by means of symbols of information dissemination, such as stories, pictures, and reports (p. 124). Both scholars translate the “Xuanchuan (宣传)” into “propaganda”, which usually has derogatorily political connotations in English. In the commercial context, the neutral word “publicity” seems to be more appropriate.

“Waixuan (外宣)” in Chinese is the simplified expression of “Duiwaixuanchuan (对外宣传)”, which means the publicity for the public. It can be understood from the broad and narrow sense according to the targets (Zhang, 2013). Broadly speaking, as long as it is targeted at anyone outside the organization or the region, it can be called “Waixuan (外宣)”; narrowly speaking, it is targeted at the people outside the Chinese mainland (Zhang, 2013, p. 19). Zhang (2013) further defines the “Waixuanfanyi (外宣翻译)” as the translation of publicity materials (p. 20). Huang (2004) pointed out that the primary task of publicity translation in China is to translate Chinese into other languages, and spread China’s views to the other countries through various means of communication (p. 27).

Based on the above introduction, we adopted Xu and Zi’s (2020) understanding and defined the “publicity of corporate image” as the publicity of corporate image targeting overseas stakeholders. And the “corporate international publicity translation” means interlingual translation activities for corporate publicity materials in order to publicize companies’ information, products, and services, build a favorable corporate image, and finally realize the economic and social benefits (Xu & Zi, 2020, p. 94).

2.3 Studies on corporate image and publicity translation

Previous studies that combine corporate image and publicity translation are conducted from theoretical or empirical perspectives with the theoretical research being the mainstream.

On the basis of the Skopos theory, Hong (2006) discussed the principles and strategies of the translation of commercial advertisements; and Sun and Feng (2014) analyzed the corporate profiles. Within the framework of the Appraisal system, Xu and Xia (2013) analyzed the attitude resources in Chinese corporate profiles and their English translations. Also taking corporate profiles as research objects, Guo (2013) conducted his study based on the Adaptation theory.

Some scholars made an empirical analysis to investigate the corporate image construction in publicity translation. Shi et al. (2012) analyzed the language features including lexical frequency, collocation, and translation universals in Chinese corporate profiles and their English translations by self-building a small-scaled Chinese-English parallel corpus. Lu (2012) also focused on the corporate profiles on the websites of 20 large enterprises in China and the US, based on the Werlich text grammar.

It can be summarized that scholars have been aware of the close relationship between corporate image and publicity texts, and related research broadens and deepens the comprehension of the principles, strategies, and functions of corporate international publicity translations. However, previous studies are mainly concerned with corporate profiles and are conducted simply from the theoretical level. There has been little empirical research that delves into the semantic construction of corporate images in the Chinese CSR reports and their publicity translations

3. Methods

3.1 Research questions

To enrich research in the corporate international publicity translations, this study is designed to answer the following questions:

1) What are the major semantic fields in the chairperson's statements of the Chinese CSR reports and their English translations?
2) What are the sub-domains of semantics in the chairperson's statements of the Chinese CSR reports and their English translations?
3) How is the corporate image semantically constructed in the chairperson's statements of the Chinese CSR reports and their English translations?

3.2 Corpus data

This study built a small-scaled Chinese-English parallel corpus that consists of two sub-corpora, namely the Corpus of Chinese Chairperson's Statements (CCCS) and the Corpus of English Chairperson's Statements (CECS). Each corpus contains 15 texts that are retrieved from the CSR reports of 5 Chinese new energy companies from the list of Top 500 Global Renewable Energy Companies in 2020[16]. These five companies are selected randomly on the basis that they are Chinese companies and issue both Chinese and English versions' CSR reports, and the reports can be downloaded free from the official websites. The information of the companies selected is shown in Table 1.

[16] Source: https://www.163.com/dy/article/FSFA3JDT05509P99.html

Table 1. Company information

Name	Issued year
GCL New Energy (GCL)	2016-2018
Contemporary Amperex Technology Co., Limited (CATL)	2019-2020
Everbright International (CEIL)	2016-2020
Trina Solar	2018-2019
BYD	2017-2019

The total number of words in CCCS is about 22130 and the average length is about 1475 words. The total number of words in CECS is about 13967 and the average length is about 931 words. The information of the corpus is provided in Table 2.

Table. 2 Corpus information

Sub-corpus	Total number of words	Number of texts	Average length
CCCS	22130	15	1475
CECS	13967	15	931

3.3 Corpus tools and analysis

This study firstly uses AntConc 4.0.3 (Anthony, 2022) to generate the word lists of CCCS and CECS and then chooses the top 216 words ranked by frequency in descending order in each corpus. These words in both corpora are used more than 9 times.

Secondly, it uses Wmatrix 5.0 to identify the semantic fields of those chosen words in CECS. Wmatrix offers an online interface to the UCREL Semantic Annotation System (USAS) that can be used to automatically allocate a semantic field with a semantic tag to each word or multiword expression in a dataset with an accuracy of 91%–92% (Rayson, 2008; Sun et al., 2018). Based on the Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English, the semantic tagset of USAS has a multitier structure with 21 major semantic fields and more than 232 subdivisions, as shown in Figure 1.

Thirdly, the semantic annotation of Chinese in CCCS used Chinese Semantic Tagger, the Chinese counterpart of USAS, developed by incorporating the Stanford Chinese word segmenter and the Chinese part-of-speech tagger into the USAS Java framework (Piao et al., 2016; Sun et al., 2018). The Chinese semantic tagset has been automatically generated by translating the English semantic tagset.

A general and abstract terms	**B** the body and the individual	**C** arts and crafts	**E** emotion
F food and farming	**G** government and public	**H** architecture, housing and the home	**I** money and commerce in industry
K entertainment, sports and games	**L** life and living things	**M** movement, location, travel and transport	**N** numbers and measurement
O substances, materials, objects and equipment	**P** education	**Q** language and communication	**S** social actions, states and processes
T time	**W** world and environment	**X** psychological, actions, states and processes	**Y** science and technology
Z names and grammar			

Figure 1. USAS semantic tagset

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Major semantic fields

This study uses USAS semantic analysis system to annotate the semantic fields of the top 217 words in CECS and CCCS respectively. The major semantic fields in both corpora are shown in Table 3, and the “Frequency” refers to the number of the type of words for each field.

Table 3. Major semantic fields

CCCS		CECS	
Semantic fields	Freq.	Semantic Fields	Freq.
general and abstract terms (A)	48	names and grammar (Z)	45
names and grammar (Z)	34	general and abstract terms (A)	42
social actions, states and processes (S)	27	social actions, states and processes (S)	23
numbers and measurement (N)	22	numbers and measurement (N)	17
Time (T)	15	Time (T)	13
psychological, actions, states and processes (X)	14	movement, location, travel and transport (M)	13
money and commerce in industry (I)	12	money and commerce in industry (I)	12
movement, location, travel and transport (M)	9	psychological, actions, states and processes (X)	11
substances, materials, objects and equipment (O)	9	substances, materials, objects and equipment (O)	10
world and environment (W)	9	world and environment (W)	8

Table 3 demonstrates the top 10 major semantic fields in both corpora. We can see the top 10 fields in both corpora are identical with slight differences in the order. In both corpora, the fields “general and abstract terms” and “names and grammar” are the top 2. In CCCS, the “general and abstract terms” is most frequently used while in the CECS, it is the “names and grammar” that occurred most frequently. The fields “social actions, states and processes”, “numbers and measurement”, and “time” ranked 3 to 5 in both corpora with the same order. The fields “psychological, actions, states and processes”, “money and commerce in industry”, and “movement, location, travel and transport” ranked 6 to 8 in CCCS, while they ranked 8, 7, 6 respectively in CECS. The fields “substances, materials, objects and equipment” and “world and environment” ranked 9 and 10 in both corpora.

4.2 Subdivisions of semantic fields

We further analyzed the sub-domains of semantics in the Chinese chairperson's statements and their English translations according to the subdivision of the UASA semantic tagset. We disposed of those functional words or unmatched words, and the results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Subdivisions of semantic fields

Semantic fields			**Frequency**	
Major	Sub.	Name	CCCS	CECS
A	A9	Getting and giving; possession	11	10
	A5	Evaluation	3	5
S	S8	Helping/hindering	7	5
	S5	Groups and affiliation	5	7
N	N5	Quantities	6	7
	N3	Measurement	5	5
T	T1	Time	9	4
X	X7	Wanting; planning; choosing	4	3
I	I2	Business	6	5
M	M7	Places	4	6
W	W5	Green issues	4	5

The "general and abstract terms (A)" is the most important semantic field in all texts, and it includes 15 subdivisions (A1-A15). Except for the "A1: general", the two typical sub-fields used in the chairperson's statements are "A9: getting and giving; possession" and "A5: evaluation".

As mentioned earlier, the chairperson's statement is a promotional genre, and the chairperson intends to present a favorable corporate image by introducing what it has provided for its customers, the reputation and profits it has earned, the resources and patents it has owned, and the experiences it has accumulated. Such expressions in Chinese reports include "tigong (提供)", "yongyou (拥有)", "gongxian (贡献)", "ziyuan (资源)", "zhuanli (专利)", "qude (取得)", "dailai (带来)", and in the English version they include "has/have", "achieve(d)", "provide", "resources", "patents".

Likewise, the chairpersons use many positive words to evaluate and promote the quality, standard, and capacity of production, the employees, and the ranking, like "meihao (美好)", "zhiliang (质量)", "biaozhun (标准)", "gaishan (改善)", "genghao (更好)", "cujin (促进)", "zhuoyue (卓越)" in Chinese, and "well", "better", "outstanding", "improve", "enhance", "quality", "standards" in English.

There are 9 sub-fields in the semantic "S: social actions, states and processes". For the chairperson's statements, the sub-domains "S8: helping/hindering" and "S5: groups and affiliation" are used more frequently.

By examining the words in S8, we found that the chairpersons use expressions like "fupin (扶贫)", "gongyi (公益)", "cishan (慈善)", "zhichi (支持)", "baohu (保护)" to show that the corporation actively assumes social responsibility by alleviating poverty, making donations and protecting environments. Corresponding expressions in English are "promote", "support", "protection", "charity". This finding is different from that of Xu and Zi (2020). It can be attributed to the difference in the research object. Xu and Zi (2020) investigated the semantic construction of the corporate image in the corporate profiles while this study focuses on the CSR reports. And the introduction of corporate social responsibility is one of the distinctive and important components of CSR reports.

The words in S5 in Chinese include "shehui (社会)", "jituan (集团)", "gongsi (公司)", "gongzhong (公众)", "shequ (社区)", and correspondingly include "society", "group", "public", "community" in English. These words reflect that the corporation is a part of society and has close connections with the public and the community. Therefore, the corporation cannot develop without a sound social environment and the support of the public and community.

The words in "X7: wanting, planning, choosing" include "jiang (将)", "zhanlüe (战略)", "fang'an (方案)", "guihua (规划)" in Chinese reports and "will", "strategy" in English versions. The chairperson usually states the companies' preparations for any unexpected risks, and plans for its development in the future. As a result, it enhances the confidence of stakeholders and establishes a trustworthy image.

For the semantic field "money and commerce in industry", the subdivision "I2: business" occurred frequently. An enterprise is a production unit that aims to pursue maximum economic profits (Mansfield, 1988). The chairperson's statement is also a window through which the readers can learn about the basic information of the corporation. Therefore, the introduction of the business of the corporation is an indispensable part of the CSR reports. Moreover, the business belongs to the strategic information of the corporation, which demonstrates the strategic image of the company (Hu et al., 2007, pp. 1–3). Such words include “shichang（市场）”, “qiye（企业）”, “gongsi (公司)”, “yewu (业务)” in Chinese reports and “market”, “enterprise”, “company”, “business” in English translations.

The “W5: green issues” is also a typical semantic field in the chairperson’s statements, especially for the energy industry. Energy production and use represent a sensitive industrial area, which is based on limited resources and is still a major cause of the risk of incidents and contamination (IAEA, 2005, p. 1). Energy companies have therefore felt a more urgent need to legitimize their activities and to account for their sustainability (Aiezza, 2015). In CCCS, the words belonging to W5 include “wuran (污染)”, “huanjing (环境)”, “huanbao (环保)”, “shengtai (生态)”, and in CECS, they include “conservation”, “pollution”, “ecological”, “environment”. By stating their actions and missions to environmental problems, the company develops an environment-friendly image.

4.3 Semantic construction of the corporate image

Based on the above analysis, we proposed a model of semantic construction of the corporate image in the chairperson’s statements. The corporate image in the Chinese chairperson’s statements of CSR reports and their English translations is constructed by 5 types of semantics, namely evaluation semantics, business semantics, citizenship semantics, space-time semantics, and quantity semantics, as shown in Figure 2.

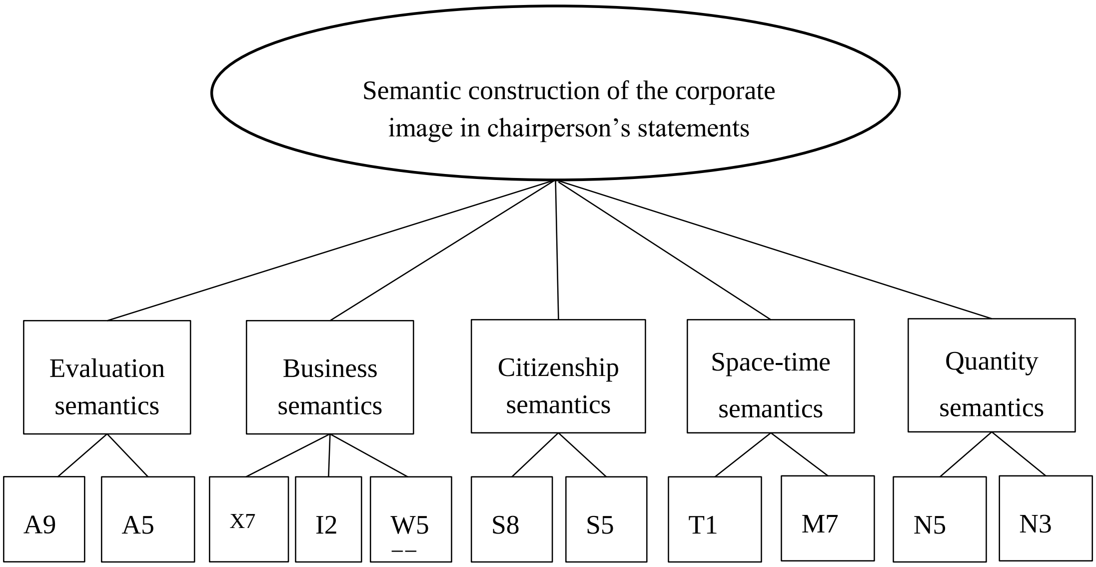

Figure 2. Semantic model of corporate image

4.3.1 Evaluation semantics

Evaluation semantics consists of words that positively evaluate the products, employees, and systems of the corporations, as well as that indicate the assets, reputations, and profits that the company has owned or earned. Extract 1 is an example.

Translation example 1.
Source text: 本公司致力为员工**提供理想的**工作环境，奉行**平等**、**非歧视**等原则，充分体现光大国际对企业责任的承担。[光大国际 2017]
Source text Romanized: Běn gōngsī zhìlì wéi yuángōng tígòng lǐxiǎng de gōngzuòhuánjìng, fèngxíng píngděng, fēiqíshì děng yuánzé, chōngfèn tǐxiàn guāngdàguójì duì qǐyè zérèn de chéngdān.[Guāngdàguójì 2017]
Target text: The Company strives to **provide** employees with an **ideal** working environment and pursue principles such as **equality** as well as **non-discrimination**, which signify Everbright International’s **commitment** to corporate responsibility. [Everbright International 2017]

This extract uses “ideal”, “equality”, “non-discrimination” to positively evaluate the company’s working environment, and uses “provide” to show its care for employees. By using evaluation semantics, the chairperson’s statements construct a favorable corporate image.

4.3.2 Business semantics

The business semantics consists of sub-fields “X7: wanting; planning; choosing”, “I2: business” and “W5: green issues”.

Translation example 2.
Source text: 我们将继续按照既定发展**战略**，加大碳达峰、碳中和的政策研究与发展创新，助力实现**绿色低碳**发展，为国家**环保事业**作出贡献。[光大国际 2020]
Source text Romanized: Wǒmen jiāng jìxù ànzhào jìdìng fāzhǎn zhànlüè, jiādà tàndáfēng, tànzhōnghé de zhèngcè yánjiū yǔ fāzhǎn chuàngxīn， zhùlì shíxiàn lǜsè dītàn fāzhǎn, wéi guójiā huánbǎo shìyè zuòchū gòngxiàn. [Guāngdàguójì 2020]
Target text: We will continue our established development **strategy**, enhancing our policy, research, development and innovation related to peak carbon emissions and carbon neutral, so as to help achieve **green** and **low-carbon** development and contributing to national **environmental protection cause**. [Everbright International 2020]

The words “strategy”, “green” and “low-carbon” demonstrate the company’s determination to protect the environment, which is the cause of the nation, as well as the business of the corporation. The business semantics shows the strategic image of the company, that is to maximize the profits in an environment-friendly way.

4.3.3 Citizenship semantics

The citizenship semantics is composed of semantic fields “S8: helping/hindering” and “S5: group and affiliation”.

Translation example 3.
Source text: 除了积极承担对经济、环境和社会**可持续发展**的责任，比亚迪始终高度关注并**积极参与各类慈善公益活动**。[比亚迪 2019]
Source text Romanized: Chúle jījí chéngdān duì jīngjì, huánjìng hé shèhuì kě chíxù fāzhǎn de zérèn，bǐyàdí shǐzhōng gāodù guānzhù bìng jījí cānyù gèlèi císhàn gōngyì huódòng. [Bǐyàdí, 2019]
Target text: On top of fulfilling our responsibilities to the **sustainable development** of the economy, environment, and society, BYD is also **an active contributor to charity**. [BYD 2019]

A corporation affiliates with the community and society. BYD fulfills its responsibility to society as it cannot develop without a settled and prosperous society. Its active contribution to the charity shows a responsible corporate citizenship image.

4.3.4 Space-time semantics

The space-time semantics consists of semantic fields “T1: time” and “M7: places”.

Translation example 4.
Source text: **2020 年**对宁德时代而言具有特殊的意义。[宁德时代 2020]
Source text Romanized: 2020 nián duì níngdéshídài éryán jùyǒu tèshū de yìyì. [Níngdéshídài, 2020]
Target text: **The year 2020** is of special significance to CATL. [CATL 2020]
Source text: 业务版图已延伸至国内 18 个**省**和**直辖市**、120 多个**地区**以至遍及**海外地区**，包括德国、波兰及越南。[光大国际 2017]
Source text Romanized: Yèwù bǎntú yǐ yánshēn zhì guónèi 18 gè shěng hé zhíxiáshì, 120 duō gè dìqū yǐzhì biànjí hǎiwài dìqū, bāokuò déguó, bōlán jí yuènán. [Guāngdàguójì 2017]
Target text: With these, the Group further expanded its presence to 18 **provinces** and **municipalities**, covering over 120 **locations** in China, as well as **overseas markets** including Germany, Poland and Vietnam. [Everbright International 2017]

The chairperson’s statement is a summary of the significant events of the corporation in the last year, as well as a narrative of the future scenario. Therefore, the statement would use many temporal expressions, like year, month, century, etc. At the same time, it would describe the landscape of its business in the domestic and international markets. As the first part of the CSR reports, using time-space semantics in the chairperson’s statements can introduce the business of the company from temporal and special dimensions, so as to leave readers with a clear outline of the performance of the company.

4.3.5 Quantity semantics

The quantity semantics combines the semantic fields “N5: quantities” and “N3: measurement”.

Translation example 5.
Source text: 2018 年，天合光能的单位组件**耗电量**和**耗水量**分别为 **134MWH/MW** 和 **1360m³/MH**，较 2014 年分别下降 **38.8%**和 **31.6%**。[天合光能 2018]
Source text Romanized: 2018 nián, tiānhéguāngnéng de dānwèi zǔjiàn hàodiànliàng hé hàoshuǐliàng fēnbié wéi 134MWH/MW hé 1360m^3/MH, jiào 2014 nián fēnbié xiàjiàng 38.8% hé 31.6%. [Tiānhéguāngnéng, 2018]

Target text: In 2018, Trina Solar's **electricity and water consumption** per MW module production were **133.6 MWH/MW** and **1360.1 m^3/MW** respectively, representing **38.8%** and **31.6%** of reduction compared to that of 2014. [Trinasolar 2018]

The numbers occur everywhere in the reports, such as the description of products and services, honors, research and development, and assets and equipment. The chairperson's statements use numbers and quantifiers to make the language more accurate, brief, and objective, in order to facilitate the reading and give readers a favorable impression.

5. Conclusion

This study analyzes the strategies of semantic construction of the corporate image in the chairperson's statements of Chinese CSR reports and their English translations. The results show that: 1) the major semantic fields in the chairperson's statements include "A: general and abstract terms", "Z: names and grammar", "S: social actions, states, and processes", "N: numbers and measurement", "T: time", "X: psychological, actions, states and processes", "I: money and commerce in industry", "M: movement, local, travel, and transport", "O: substances, materials, objects and equipment", and "W: world and environment"; 2) the major sub-domains of semantics include "A5: evaluation", "A9: getting and giving; possession", "S5: group and affiliation", "S8: helping/hindering", "N3: measurement", "N5: quantities", "T1: time", "X7: wanting, planning, choosing", "I2: business", "M7: places", and "W5: green issues"; 3) the chairperson's statement and its English translations construct the corporate image by 5 types of semantics: evaluation semantics, business semantics, citizenship semantics, time-space semantics, and quantity semantics; it uses positively evaluative expressions to develop a general favorable image, employs business semantics to build its strategic image, deploys citizenship semantics to create a responsible corporate citizenship image, and adopts time-space and quantity semantics to provide readers with a distinct and vivid impression.

The corporate image hides in the texts of the chairperson's statements of the CSR report. By using the corpus tools, we can figure out the strategies of semantic construction of the corporate image in the CSR reports. The image of the Chinese corporation is a significant part of the image of China. Therefore, the corporate international publicity translation is closely related to the construction of the Chinese corporate image. This study can expand the scope of translation studies to some extent, as well as broaden the field of the research of Chinese image. It is beneficial to Chinese enterprises to "go globally", and to improve international competitiveness. Therefore, this study has theoretical and practical implications.

This study has limitations inevitably due to the time limit. First, the corpus scale is small and all texts come from the new energy industry, and thus the results might be not representative to a sound degree. Second, the Chinese words feature polysemy, and the accurate meaning depends on the context. The USAS Chinese Tagger provides multiple semantic fields for some words and the subjectivity is involved in the manual selection of the appropriate semantics. Third, the analysis of the results is a little general, and a more in-depth discussion can be provided in the future.

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Research on Risks of Chinese Internet Enterprises' Overseas Mergers and Acquisitions Based on Tencent's Typical Case

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Abstract

Recent years have witnessed Chinese Internet companies taking positive actions in overseas mergers and acquisitions for various reasons. Grounded on the existing domestic and overseas literature as well as the specific case analysis of Tencent's acquisition of Sumo Group, this research finds out that Chinese Internet enterprises may encounter legal risk, payment method risk and integration risk, etc. in overseas M & A. Based on the identification of the risks, this research intends to put forward relevant measures to help contribute to the success of Chinese Internet enterprises' overseas M & A.

Keywords: Overseas M & A, Legal risk, Payment Method Risk, Integration Risk, The Resource-Based Theory, The Synergy Effects, The Asymmetric Information Theory

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Internet enterprises refer to those whose main business is Internet platform services supported by computer network technology. The recent 20 years have witnessed the increasing popularity of Internet technology in China, and China's Internet industry has developed by leaps and bounds. According to the report (Zheng, 2018) on Chinese enterprises' M & A in 2018 by Bain Company, Internet businesses such as Baidu, Tencent and Alibaba are active in overseas M & A.[17] Even though the world suffered the sudden attack of COVID-19 in 2020, overseas M & A of Chinese Internet companies only showed a downward trend in the first quarter, which fell back to 79, however, with the advent of vaccines and strict prevention measures, the negative impact has gradually subsided, and the volume and deal value of M & A both rose in the last three quarters of 2020.

1.2 Significance

In terms of the object of study, this paper selects the burgeoning Internet enterprises as the research object. Previous studies mostly take resource-intensive and labor-intensive enterprises as objects. However, compared with traditional enterprises, Internet businesses emphasize innovation ability, market share, and user demand, and they attach importance to digital technology, intellectual patents, and other exclusive resources in overseas M & A because of the particularity of the industry. Thus, the latent risks they experience in overseas M & A may vary from what traditional enterprises do, and this research can be an extension of the traditional overseas M & A theory.

2. Literature Review

Concerning common risks confronted by businesses in overseas M & A, there are two categories in general: internal risks and external risks. Internal risks constitute financial risks like payment method risk and integration risk, while external risks constitute political risks, legal risks, etc.

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[17] Retrieved from: Report on Chinese Enterprises' Overseas M & A in 2018.Bain Capital. https://www.bain.cn/news_info.php?id=831

2.1 Review of Domestic Literature

2.1.1 Macro and micro risks

Concerning the latent risks of Internet businesses' overseas M & A, Lin (2020), in the research on the risk identification of overseas M & A of digital economy enterprises through the case analysis method, points out that there are significant differences in the risks of overseas M & A between digital economy companies and non-digital economy companies. Digital economy concerns are confronted with macro risks like political risk, legal risk, and investment environment risk, as well as micro risks including strategic risk, implementation risk of M & A project, and integration risk.

2.1.2 Integration risks

Scholars in China studied integration risks from different perspectives. For example, Tian (2020) and Wang (2018) used information asymmetry theory to disclose integration risks lurk in the Chinese enterprises' overseas M & A, while Guo uses synergy effects theory. Li points out the specific risks at integration stage, and Guo offers some suggestions to deal with integration risks.

Tian (2020) conducts the research on information asymmetry theory to deliver the idea that it is very important to choose a reasonable time for acquisition in overseas M & A activities, but the acquirer must make a full assessment of the target company and not follow the crowd blindly. Over and above Tian's research, Wang (2018) also uses information asymmetry theory to illustrate that the M & A company will undergo huge peril if the financial standing, the operating outcome, and other key information are lacking transparency, through which appears that crisis may hide at integration stage. Guo (2020), through theoretical analysis and practical case study, builds the study on the synergy effects and points out that through full cooperation during the integration phase, the Ant Group and MoneyGram achieve mutual benefits and generate more value. Moreover, she concludes that strategic risk, political risk, legal risk, and competitor airborne risk are the risks that Chinese companies need to raise awareness of overseas M & A. Li (2021) mentions in the study that the information exchange and communication between the acquirer and the acquired company is very necessary for the process of integration. Timely communication can ease the panic mood of employees and accelerate the success of the integration of both parties. From the risk point of view, Zhang (2019) proposes that the acquirer should make careful investigations, employ a professional team, put more emphasis on the integration after M & A and use assorted financing solutions flexibly.

2.1.3 Financial risks

In terms of financial risks encountered by Chinese enterprises in overseas M & A, Lu (2020) holds the idea that the whole procedure composes of three stages, that is, the preparation stage, the implementation stage, and the integration stage. There are strategic decision risk and pricing risk at the preparation stage, financing risk and exchange rate risk at the implementation stage, and operation integration risk and profit risk at the integration stage.

2.2 Review of Foreign Literature

2.2.1 General and unique risks

Several researchers explored general and unique risks in detail. Banham and Russ (1994) summarize the general risks, and Kim divides the risks into four categories, while Mirvis (1991) analyzes the main failure reasons in overseas M & A. Banham and Russ (1994) state that in addition to the general risks that traditional enterprises are exposed to, digital economy multinationals may come across many unique risks in overseas M & A. Kim (1992) holds the idea that the risk factors of overseas M & A can be classified into four categories: host country risk, competition intensity, regional unfamiliarity, and demand uncertainty. Mirvis (1991) believes that there are two main reasons for the failure of overseas M & A: one is that if the enterprise does not pay enough attention to the risks in the process of M & A, it will increase the probability of related risks; the other is that if the target enterprise does not meet the long-term development needs of M & A enterprises, the latter integration will be very difficult.

2.2.2 Integration risk

Different aspects of integration risk have been studied in the existing literature outside China. Provost and Taylor (2013) summarize that technology companies may encounter risks caused by different regulations; Borghese (2002) emphasizes the serious influences of integration risks, and Blaszak (2015) underlines staff integration risk in overseas M & A.Provost and Taylor (2013) conducted a study on 100 large digital economy companies in the United States according to the 2013 BDO Technology Business Risk Factor Report released by US Accounting and Consulting Corporation (BDA) and concluded that 96% of the risks associated with mergers and acquisitions by technology companies are related to federal, state, or local regulations.

Blaszak (2015) believes that the risk of overseas M & A comes from the integration of staff after the acquisition. He points out that if the staff integration is not appropriate, additional costs may be increased. If companies cannot perceive and curb this problem, the long-run development of companies will be ultimately endangered. At the same time, Borghese (2002) also considers that the risk comes from the integration stage of M & A. If the two companies have difficulties in coordinating and complementing each other in management, technology, and other aspects, hardly can they generate a synergistic effect.

2.2.3 Financial risks

Hoffelder and Kathleen (2012) study M & A transaction behaviors in 32 countries from 1998 to 2004, suggesting that digital economy firms may be exposed to financial risks in overseas M & A.

Healy, Palepu, and Ruback (1992) ponder over the risks of M & A and consider that the following aspects are the main elements: the declined risk of companies' performance and the market value, the risk of overpaying for M & A, and the potential soaring management cost due to the failure of integration after M & A. In conclusion, Hoffelder and Kathleen (2012) point out that digital enconomy companies may undergo financial risks in overseas M & A, while Healy, Palepu, and Ruback (1992) analyze the three main elements that cause financial risks in overseas M & A.

2.2.4 Cultural risks

Compared to other scholars, Kenneth and Danielle et al. (2015) conducted a cultural study on the impact of factors such as hierarchy, trust, and humanism on overseas M & A. They believe that these factors affect the synergy, bidding methods, and payment methods of overseas M & A of digital economy enterprises.

2.3 Commentary of Literature

Both domestic and overseas scholars have done piles of research on the identification and prevention of overseas M & A risks and have acquired fruitful achievements. On the one hand, most scholars study the risk identification of overseas M & A of Internet enterprises from the three stages of M & A, that is, the pre-merger valuation stage, the implementation phase of M & A, and the post-merger integration stage and make analyses accordingly. And the conclusions about the potential risks of Internet enterprises' overseas M & A may be similar. On the other hand, scholars put forward different countermeasures to prevent the potential risks of Internet companies' overseas M & A, but these suggestions lead to the same result. Some scholars have done independent and detailed research on how to avoid financial risks in Internet firms' overseas M & A and put forward countermeasures and suggestions with practical guiding significance, while some scholars explore how to prevent various possible risks in Internet companies' overseas M & A from a broader field. Although scholars have gained fruitful achievements in this field, there still exist some deficiencies. The deficiencies can be largely attributed to quantitative research becoming the major focus of Internet enterprises' overseas M & A risks, and most of the research emphasizes existing model validation or expansion, while less is qualitative research. Although some experts have done certain numbers of qualitative research on the risk identification and prevention of Internet enterprises' overseas M & A, they seldom analyze real detailed cases, so the research lacks practical significance and practical guidance.

To sum up, under the premise of sorting the related theories and risks of overseas M & A, this paper will use Tencent acquiring Sumo Group as a specific case for studying the identification and prevention of the risks encountered in the process of the Chinese Internet enterprise' overseas M & A.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs the literature research method and case analysis as the major methods to conduct the research.

3.1 Literature research method

The literature research method mainly refers to the collection, identification, and collation of literature. Through the literature, scientific knowledge of facts will be built (Du, 2013). The research on Chinese enterprises' overseas M & A has gained fruitful results, but the information about Internet businesses' overseas M & A is insufficient. Since case studies need to be guided by previous experience, in order to fully understand the previous research on overseas M & A by Chinese enterprises, a large amount of reading is needed. Therefore, this paper collects related literature materials through various related books, websites, papers, newspapers, and periodicals to study research results and viewpoints of domestic and foreign scholars in this field, which helps to lay the foundation for the case analysis.

3.2 Case analysis

The case analysis method is a method that analyzes a single object on the basis of literature and data to obtain the rules of generality and universality (Li, 1999). By using the case analysis method, researchers can look at the problem in a more specific way. This research method thus combines basic theories with a specific case, so as to achieve the integration of theory and practice. In this paper, Tencent's acquisition of Sumo Group is used as a case, which is beneficial for the relevant study of potential risks and countermeasures of Chinese Internet enterprises' activities in the field of overseas mergers and acquisitions.

4. Overview of Related Theories

4.1 Overseas Mergers and Acquisitions

Overseas mergers and acquisitions are also called cross-border mergers and acquisitions, which is a strategic deployment of overseas investment. In nature, it is the transfer of the corporate right of control.

There is no unified standard as a criterion for judging the success or failure of enterprises' overseas M & A activities. The completion of the M & A does not equal success. Craig (2000) believes that the most successful M & A transactions are the appreciation of assets and the optimal allocation of resources. This paper also uses this criterion.

4.2 The Resource-Based Theory

The root of enterprises' long-term competitive advantages lies in the uniqueness and imitability of resources. These resources are immobile and unduplicable. They can be converted to a unique capability to promote companies' sustainable development and help them preserve a dominant position in the market environment and industry competition (Barney, 1991).

Resource-Based Theory can explain the motivation of Tencent's overseas M & A. One of the main reasons for Tencent's overseas M & A is that it can obtain the lacking resources for related production activities from other companies. Foreign companies have advanced techniques, professional talents, and abundant information resources, which are in an important position in the service chain of Internet enterprises. Resource-Based Theory crucially influences the valuation of the target company before M & A, the determination of financing and payment methods during the M & A, and the integration stage after the M & A. According to scholar Wernerfelt, who creates the resource-based theory, the internal factors of businesses are the fundamental factors that determine the competitiveness of businesses. Therefore, in the integration stage of technologies, talents, and information resources after M & A lurks key risks that affect Internet enterprises' overseas mergers and acquisitions.

4.3 The Synergy Effects

Synergy is the effect of "1 + 1 > 2" or "2 + 2 > 5". Andrew Campbell et al. (2000) wrote "Colloquially speaking, synergy is "hitchhiking". It occurs when the resources accumulated in one part of a company can be applied simultaneously and cost-free to the rest of the company."

The synergy effects that enterprises can obtain through overseas M & A include operation synergy, management synergy, and financial synergy. Business synergy refers to the synergy that can improve the operation of the M & A enterprises, so that the mergers and acquisitions enterprises in the scale economy, resources, and complementary advantages, cost savings, market monopoly and provide better comprehensive services to achieve progress; Management synergy refers to the synergy can improve the management efficiency of low-efficiency enterprises, save management costs, improve operational efficiency and improve resource utilization. Financial synergy refers to the synergy that can bring financial benefits to the enterprise, which can make the M & A enterprise have more cash flow, and make the enterprise's capital investment income increase, so as to reduce the risk of bankruptcy.

The synergy effects theory is an important reference for enterprises to carry out M & A activities. The theory points out that after the company's M & A, the company can increase benefits because it realizes the synergy effects to some extent. After M & A, the synergy effects can be realized in the following three parts: operating synergies, the operation of the M & A enterprise can be improved, so that the M & A enterprise can make progress in economies of scale, complementary resources, and advantages, cost savings, market monopoly and providing better and comprehensive service; management synergies, enterprise's management efficiency, operational efficiency, and resource utilization can be optimized; financial synergies, bring benefits to the enterprise in the financial aspect, equip enterprise with more sufficient cash flow to reduce the risk of bankruptcy. By acquiring Sumo Group, Tencent will be able to open up new markets in the UK and gain access to the technical talents and accumulated game users of Sumo Group. Sumo Group will also be able to obtain sufficient funds to invest in game development and visual design. Tencent's overseas M & A can bring operational synergies to Tencent as well as financial synergies to the Sumo Group. Another example is Tencent acquiring Supercell. Supercell is another game company; after the acquisition of Supercell, Tencent has expanded the American market and accelerated its globalization and internationalization process, while Supercell further developed new games without worrying about investment.

4.4 The Asymmetric Information Theory

The definition of asymmetric information theory is that in the market economic activities, the information transmission is delayed and unevenly distributed on account of time differences and distance matters (Zhou, Lin & Li, 2014). Generally, the sellers grasp more information and occupy the relative advantage in the relationship between buyer and seller. Information asymmetry will abase buyers' confidence and passion in the transaction and expose them to more risks. The impact of Information asymmetry on overseas M & A is prominent, mainly reflected in the valuation bias of the target company to cause premium risk, and finally, it can affect financial aspects of M & A enterprise. Therefore, in overseas M & A activities, the acquirer should fully understand the information of the target company, comprehensively analyze the internal and external environment of M & A activities, precisely seize the opportunity of M & A and heighten the efficiency of capital utilization.

Combined with the above theories and the following case, on the basis of the resource-based theory, enterprises should pay attention to internal factors and guard against possible risks in the integration stage; via the synergy effects, the acquirer and the acquiree can maximize each other's benefits in operation, management, and finance through complementary cooperation; according to the asymmetric information theory, Internet enterprises should pay attention to the risk of information dissymmetry and overcome it at the preparation stage.

5. Case Description

5.1 Introduction of the Acquirer and the Acquired Party

Shenzhen Tencent Computer System Co., Ltd was founded in November 1998. As one of the Big Three in the Internet industry, Tencent was listed on the main board of the Hong Kong Stock Exchange in 2004. In September 2021, it was listed in the "Top 500 Private Enterprises in 2021 in China," ranking sixth.[18] Founded in 2003, Tencent Games is a leading global game developer and operator, and the largest online game community in China, connecting more than 1 billion users worldwide. Tencent Games has formed a professional layout in numerous market segments online games and creates a variety of games.[19]

Concerning the acquired party, Sumo Group is a British game developer once owned by an American company. In 2014, Sumo Group officially separated from the parent company and began to set up its own business—a total of more than 60 games, including "Killer 2" and other well-known games. Sumo Group also owns Atomhawk, a British visual design firm, in addition to the eight studios. Atomhawk is a world-class digital art and design service studio, which has provided design services for many blockbusters, PC, console, VR, and other game platforms.[20]

5.2 The Acquisition Background

Sumo Group was listed on the London Stock Exchange in 2017 at 100 pence.[21] As early as 2019, Tencent acquired an 8.75 per cent stake in Sumo Group through the purchase of shares, making itself the second-largest shareholder of Sumo Group. This is not the first time Tencent has invested in the UK Tencent has been investing in Britain since 2017 in order to acquire more advanced technologies.

Britain has placed emphasis on the development of science and technology. Even after Brexit and the epidemic, Britain's investment in technology was the third-largest in the world in 2020, at a record of 15 billion dollars. As one of the world's most valuable tech ecosystems, the influx of powerful companies and talent has kept Tencent investing in the UK.

5.3 Overview of Acquisition Process

The process and results of Tencent's acquisition of Sumo Group are shown in the table below. From the table, the concise process of Tencent acquiring Sumo Group can be seen. The deal is recently settled, and although the amount involved is not the largest, this acquisition still has its sparkles.

Tencent first announced the acquisition in July 2021, planning to acquire Sumo Group for $1.27 billion. According to the plan, Sumo Group shareholders would receive 513 pence in cash per share, a 43.3% increase from the previous acquisition plan. This is Tencent's largest overseas deal in Britain, the first wholly-owned acquisition of a listed company, and also Tencent's biggest global investment since 2021.[22]

[18] Retrieved from: https://www.tencent.com/zh-cn/about.html#about-con-3
[19] Retrieved from: https://game.qq.com/web202112/#/
[20] Retrieved from: Sumo Group https://www.sumogroupltd.com/
[21] Retrieved from: https://xueqiu.com/1487374026/191133622
[22]Retrieved from: https://xueqiu.com/1487374026/191133622

Table 1 The process and results of Tencent's acquisition of Sumo Group[23]

	M&A Schedule	Related Issues
Before the acquisition	11.15.2019	Tencent bought about 8.75% shares of the company with 208 million yuan
During the acquisition	7.2021	Tencent has announced the acquisition for the first time
During the acquisition	7.19.2021	Sixjoy (Hong Kong), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Tencent Holdings, will acquire British game developer Sumo Group fully in pure cash.
During the acquisition	10.29.2021	Sumo and Tencent are in contact with CFIUS to obtain acquisition licenses by the end of the year.
During the acquisition	1.13.2022	The High Court of England and Wales approved Tencent's acquisition
After the acquisition	1.17.2022	Tencent finished the acquisition with the price of 1.27 billion dollars

Tencent's acquisition of Sumo Group is a success today. On the one hand, Sumo Group is a strong game production company, which has participated in the production of more than 60 well-known games so far. Sumo Group has many innovative techniques and talents, and the accumulated experiences can also help Tencent improve the level of game research and development to strengthen the capability of making a blockbuster game. On the other hand, Sumo Group also owns the world-class visual design company Atomhawk, which has provided services for many Hollywood movies and games. It is conducive to optimizing Tencent games' art design and game animation to attract more players, and also is propitious to Tencent's further development in the production of TV dramas and films.

6. Risks and Countermeasures of Tencent Group's Acquisition of Sumo Group

According to the literature review mentioned above, during overseas M&A, enterprises generally encounter four types of common risks: political risks, legal risks, financial risks, integration risks, etc. However, since Chinese Internet enterprises have their characteristics, even though they may face common risks as other enterprises, there are still some special features of the relevant risks. Based on Tencent's M & A of Sumo Group and the existing literature, it is shown that the legal risk, payment method risk, and integration risk lurk in M & A.

6.1 Legal Risk

Through the research of the background information of Tencent's M & A of Sumo Group, it is shown that there are legal risks that cannot be ignored in the M & A process. The legal risk that Tencent faces are reflected in the obstacles caused by laws and regulations of other countries on data security, data protection, and data flow. In 2018, the UK government successively issued amendments to the *Enterprise Act 2002* and the White Paper on *National Security Investment*. There are clearer and more specific regulations on foreign M & A, which increase scrutiny on overseas M & A cases that may relate to international security. With the development of the digital economy and the update of Internet technology, various countries have adopted assorted legal provisions to protect their own digital economy achievements and form barriers to other countries. For Tencent, overseas M & A must be conducted grounded on the obedience to British laws and regulations on the digital economy. If Tencent lacks the awareness and understanding of the laws and regulations in this field, it is easy to violate the relevant laws due to improper activities in the process of M & A, which may result in litigation, and thus lead to the failure of M & A.

Due to the particularity of Chinese Internet enterprises, the characteristics of legal risk that they may encounter in M & A are shown as follows:

(1). Based on the resource-based theory, Chinese Internet enterprises tends to obtain more advanced information technology and more professional talents from developed countries, which have more improved legal systems of the digital economy. Since China's relevant laws are not mature, Chinese Internet companies may be stymied by those protection laws and regulations.

(2). Due to the spread of COVID-19, many countries set trade barriers against China.[24] Chinese Internet companies should pay more attention to the changes in relevant laws and regulations during overseas M & A.

[23]Retrieved from: https://xueqiu.com/1487374026/191133622
[24]Retrieved from: http://www.jccief.org.cn/v-1-15597.aspx

6.2 Risk of the Choice of Payment Methods

The method that Tencent used to acquire Sumo Group is the pure cash payment method. Among cash payment, equity payment, and merger payment, cash payment affects business operation and financial situation to a large extent. Since the amount of the overseas M & A is as high as 1.27 billion US dollars25, using a cash payment method may cause rather great pressure on Tencent's cash reserves and cash flow, in the meanwhile, Tencent may be subject to foreign exchange outflow control, which will delay the acquisition time. The cash payment method may also leave Tencent with a heavy risk burden. While this method may be more popular with Sumo Group shareholders and executives, the fixed income may cause them to care less about the company's operation as the merger proceeds.

6.3 Risk of Integration

According to the research result of Lin (2020), integration risk can be categorized as cultural integration risk and digital technology integration risk. It is said that China and Britain are two countries with different religions and beliefs, and national culture and regional characteristics make it possible that the biggest impediment of M & A is the cultural difference. In accordance with the research of Du and Liu (2012), they propose that cultural risk mainly affects M & A based on the grounded theory. Different cultural backgrounds lead to different management styles. For instance, in Sumo Group individualism is admired, while in Tencent, collectivism is praised as an important spirit. Therefore, it may curb the integration by stimulating strikes if M & A company imposes its corporate culture and management style upon the acquired company obstinately. Worse still, if leaders of two parties have fierce contradiction towards the operation and development plan, the synergy effects will be unable to achieve, and it may even result in a huge loss of M & A because of capital chain rupture.

The other risk is digital technology integration risk. One of the main motives of Chinese Internet enterprises' overseas M & A is to obtain the lacking technologies and data resources. The acquisition of Sumo Group is no exception. What Tencent attaches importance to is the continuous innovation ability. However, owing to the different geographical locations, the time difference, the different digital technology processing habits, and other factors, there are plenty of blocks at the integration stage. Consequently, the acquirer may be unable to achieve the appreciation of assets and the optimal allocation of resources through overseas M & A, which can be seen as a failure of M & A activity. In addition, on the ground of information asymmetry theory, since the inequity existed in the two parties' status and relation, a thorough survey of all the technologies and digital resources cannot be guaranteed if the acquired party conceals parts of the resources deliberately. Hence, digital technology integration risk may cause a waste of money.

6.4 Countermeasures

6.4.1 Countermeasures of Legal Risk

As for the legal risk that may exist in M & A, Tencent conducts a thorough investigation of the relevant laws, rules, and regulations of Internet companies' M & A domestically and internationally at the early stage of M & A. For some existing legal difficulties, it seeks the assistance of professional legal teams. Internet companies may confront hinders in intellectual property rights, digital technology patents, and legal differences between China and foreign countries in overseas M & A. If there are knowledge gaps and understanding deviations on some legal provisions, it is likely to result in legal risk in M & A. Therefore, Yin (2021) makes a recommendation that Internet companies should focus on distinguishing intellectual property law, data technology law and intelligent manufacturing law, and fully understand the law of M & A in order to avoid legal risks in the transaction process to the greatest extent. To be more specific, M & A companies can hire professional lawyers to minimize and avoid the legal risks in overseas M & A or establish a legal department like Tencent. Besides, maintaining cooperation with famous law offices is a good choice.

6.4.2 Countermeasures of Risk of the Choice of Payment Methods

To elude the payment method risk in overseas M & A, regarding the study of Si (2020), Internet companies can imitate Tencent's method of building an indirect financing structure—to adopt investment—intermediate controlling shareholder—physical operating method. By this means, Tencent controls the consortium company with majority shares, and the consortium uses majority shares to control the acquired party; thus, Tencent achieves the goal of indirectly controlling the target company by spending less money. Internet enterprises should adopt various ways to prevent paying off the bill in cash at once, since cash payments may add pressure to businesses' cash flow. Instead, Internet firms can choose the installment method to leave sufficient time for step-by-step financing. In accordance with the thoughts of Si (2020), multiple payment methods should be combined instead of using the cash payment method only to realize the diversification of risk.

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[25]Retrieved from: https://xueqiu.com/1487374026/191133622

6.4.3 Countermeasures of Risk of the Integration

First, for reducing cultural integration risk, in terms study of Lin (2020), Tencent makes generalization and summarization of the corporate value of the acquired company and represent the respect towards it at work. To prevent risks, Internet companies ought to actively integrate corporate culture by seeking commonness while reserving discrepancies. Since many foreign employees advocate a free working style, which they believe can inspire their creativity; however, diligence and assiduity are Chinese traditional virtues. Thus, Chinese Internet companies should be aware of the differences between the two cultures. The M & A enterprise can remove unnecessary management positions and divide the employees into small development teams. In addition, a flexible working system can be applied to ignite staff's working passion and efficiency.

Second, concerning digital technology integration risk, Lin (2020) delivers her idea that the digital technology, data resources, and data algorithms of two enterprises should be integrated in a reasonable way, so as to promote the further upgrading of M & A company's digital technology. To raise the efficiency of integration, a technical committee can be established to coordinate the cooperation of related departments. Besides, to accelerate integration progress, Chinese Internet firms can dispatch their technical staff to the acquired company to learn advanced and core technologies that are inconvenient and difficult to learn through communication online.

7. Conclusion and Expectation

7.1 Conclusion

With the high-speed advancement of the Internet, Internet businesses have become an increasingly important group in economic society. In order to expedite self-growth, many powerful Internet businesses choose overseas M & A to obtain core digital technology resources. However, owing to many complex factors, the overseas M & A are full of risks. This paper expounds on Chinese Internet enterprises' overseas M & A risk identification, risk prevention, and related theories through the analysis of Tencent's M & A of Sumo Group. The conclusions of this case study are as follows:

Internet firms may undergo legal risk, payment risk and integration risk in the overseas M & A. Integration risk can be subdivided into digital technology integration risk and cultural integration risk. Although there are many hidden risks in the process of overseas M & A, Internet enterprises should treat them dialectically, because the development opportunities are often hidden behind the risks. Therefore, Internet companies should not only scientifically and comprehensively identify the risks with a sober mind, but also should embrace future challenges from overseas M & A with full confidence, vigorous appearance, and pressure resistance ability.

7.2 Limitations and Future Research

The deficiencies of this paper are reflected in two aspects. On the one hand, data collection and collation on overseas M & A of Internet enterprises at home and abroad are not yet perfect, and the related official data disclosure is insufficient. Therefore, it is difficult to make quantitative research on the risks of Chinese Internet companies' overseas M & A from the perspective of empirical analysis. On the other hand, the real overseas M & A activity is more complex, changeable, and filled with a lot of unpredictable risks. In the meanwhile, the risks faced by large-, small- and medium-sized Internet enterprises in overseas M & A are not the same. However, this paper is only based upon a typical case of Tencent to study and analyze the risks that Internet enterprises may confront in overseas M & A and the corresponding countermeasures. Therefore, it may be a lack of specific and targeted guidance for different sized Internet enterprises to identify and prevent risks in overseas M & A. With the continuous development of the Internet economy, perhaps in the near future, more detailed and improved laws and regulations of this field will be promulgated to set guidelines for Chinese Internet companies to effectively avoid the risks in overseas M & A process. In addition, the growing scale of the Internet industry can accumulate valuable data, in order to help scholars better identify risks in Internet enterprises' overseas M & A from a qualitative and quantitative perspective and provide effective countermeasures to prevent them.

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A Scale Analysis of the Intercultural Competence Development of Chinese Business College Students in the Greater Bay Area: based on the ICCSRS Model

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Abstract: This research, based on the ICCSRS evaluation scale model proposed by Zhong Hua *et al*., takes business college students in the Greater Bay Area as the survey object and conducts an empirical survey on their intercultural competence dimensions and evaluation scale. This research investigates the level and current situation of college and university students' intercultural competence from four factors of the intercultural competence scale (intercultural consciousness, intercultural attitude, intercultural knowledge and intercultural skills). In addition, descriptive mean statistics, correlation coefficient analysis and reliability analysis of the scale are carried out to comprehensively understand the development status of the intercultural ability of business college and university students， to provide theoretical basis and data support for intercultural talent training program design and teaching reform of business college and university under the background of "Greater Bay Area."

Keywords: ICCSRS model; business college students; intercultural ability; the Greater Bay Area

1. Research background

On February 18, 2010, The State Council issued *the Outline of the Development Plan for the Greater Bay Area*. The key to the construction of the Greater Bay Area is to cultivate more talents for intercultural exchange who are familiar with international rules, convey China's voice to the world, and promote mutual understanding and cooperation between China and other countries. In view of this, the cultivation of intercultural ability is not only an important part of the quality construction of commercial colleges and universities, but also an important way for commercial colleges and universities to serve the development of the "Greater Bay Area." At present, with the continuous development and progress of society, the country's demand for talents has undergone some changes, and our talent training must meet the needs of national development. Colleges and universities are the main body of intercultural talent training, which must meet the needs of national development and be based on the construction of an international talent system of intercultural communication.

According to the Educational Plan for Business English Majors issued by the Ministry of Education in 2020, the aim of Business English majors is to develop application-oriented, compound business English professional talents who have basic English skills, broad international perspective, specialized international business knowledge and skills, master applied linguistics, applied economics, business management and international commercial law and other related disciplines knowledge and theory, understand the rules of the international business activities with the strong ability of intercultural communication and the humanities and can participate in international business competition and cooperation. In view of this, this research conducted an empirical investigation and ICCSRS model analysis on the development of the intercultural ability of students in business colleges and universities in the Greater Bay Area, providing theoretical reference and data support for intercultural talent training programs and teaching design in business colleges and universities.

2. The connotation, dimension and evaluation of Intercultural competence

The concept of intercultural competence was introduced in the 1970s by Hymes, Ruben, Hammer et al. and other scholars. Since the concept of intercultural competence was put forward, scholars have been trying to construct the theory of intercultural competence from anthropology, linguistics, education, sociology, communication, management and psychology, which has greatly improved our cognition of it.

2.1 In terms of the connotation of intercultural competence.

Ruben (1976) analyzed intercultural ability from the perspective of behaviorism and held that intercultural ability Competence includes attitude, role, empathy, interaction, respect, etc., and illustrated in detail the importance of effective and appropriate communication of these elements in intercultural communication. Ting-toomey (1993) proposed that intercultural competence is the ability of communicators to carry out effective negotiations with members from other cultures and obtain satisfactory results. Chen & Starosta (1996) understood intercultural competence as the ability of communicators to discuss meaning, differentiate cultural identity and communicate effectively and appropriately in a specific context. Kim (2001a) believes that intercultural competence is the inherent ability of communicators to make psychological adjustments and adapt to new environments. Arasaratnam & Doerfel (2005) proposed that intercultural competence is the ability perceived by both sides of communication to achieve desirable results. Dai & Chen (2015) defined intercultural competence as the ability to establish intercultural connections, develop harmonious and mutually beneficial relationships and grow together.

2.2 In terms of intercultural competence.

The most influential dimension of intercultural competence is represented by Byram (1997). According to the European Union model, intercultural competence is divided into four competency dimensions: knowledge, skills, attitude and consciousness. The attitude dimension includes respect, openness, curiosity, optimistic acceptance and tolerance, etc. Hammer divided the effectiveness of intercultural communication into three dimensions, namely three ways to deal with stress, communicate effectively and build relationships. The early studies of the above three scholars provided preliminary research data for the connotation and constituent elements of intercultural competence, and provided a theoretical basis for the further development of the concept of intercultural competence. Spitzberg (1997) believes that intercultural competence includes three basic elements, emotion, cognition and behavior, which influence and depend on each other. Fanti (2000) proposed a four-dimensional intercultural communicative competence model including knowledge, skills, attitudes and consciousness, emphasizing the validity of personal competence and the appropriateness of receivers' perception of personal competence. He argues that the effectiveness of behavior is related to communicative competence, while appropriateness is related to cognitive competence. Yang & Zhuang (2007) proposed a four-level model of intercultural competence centered on teaching. They believe that intercultural competence consists of global awareness, intercultural adaptation, knowledge and communicative practice. Gao (2014) proposed the intercultural competence model of "integration of knowledge and action." The knowledge system includes cultural knowledge, consciousness and speculation. Behavioral systems include attitudes, skills and strategies. At present, most intercultural research experts also generally agree that knowledge, skills, consciousness, attitude and other ability dimensions are essential in the dimension of intercultural ability.

2.3 Intercultural ability evaluation

Studies on intercultural competence evaluation in Western countries started earlier. Sinicrope (2007) comprehensively summarized the intercultural evaluation tools proposed and used in recent years, and distinguished between direct and indirect evaluation tools. In recent years, the main evaluation methods used in intercultural competence research at home and abroad can be summarized into the following three categories: indirect evaluation, direct evaluation and mixed evaluation. Brislin & Yoshida (1994) classified competencies according to the main areas of intercultural competencies and constructed various evaluation models of intercultural competencies.

However, most scales have some defects such as difficult operation and vague investigation content. In China, the research on intercultural competence started relatively late, and gradually increased in the last two decades. However, most of the research on intercultural competence evaluation consists of intercultural competence survey and capacity scale construction. Specifically, the intercultural competence survey mainly targets students (Hu 2011; Gao 2016) and teachers (Gu 2016; Han, 2014) two groups, the purpose of which is to understand the current situation of intercultural ability of teachers and students, and to provide reference for intercultural teaching and evaluation. In terms of the development of intercultural competence scale, Wu (2013), Zhong (2013), Gao (2014) and other scholars have constructed models and scales of intercultural competence with localized characteristics, enriching the research on intercultural competence in China.

3 Research design

3.1 Research samples

The sample for this Research was 540 students from the first year to the fourth year (grades 17, 18, 19, and 20) of business English majors from the business colleges and universities in the Greater Bay Area.

3.2 Survey tools

The evaluation scale of this research is designed mainly based on the multidimensional model of ICCSRS (knowledge, skills, consciousness, and attitude) proposed by Zhong et al. (2013). By referring to ICC prepared by Byram (1997) and combining scholars' research on intercultural competence and the actual situation of students in business-oriented colleges and universities, the intercultural competence assessment scale of business-oriented colleges and universities is designed. The content of the scale includes: (1) the knowledge dimension includes the cultural knowledge of the country and the cultural knowledge of other countries (such as social politics, religion, history, social etiquette, norms of behavior, living customs and values, etc.); (2) attitude dimension includes respect, tolerance, etc. (willing to try to tolerate foreigners' different values, eating habits, taboos, etc.); (3) skill dimension (when they have language communication obstacles, they use body language or nonverbal language to help them communicate; when communicating with foreigners, they try to avoid bias and prejudice to foreigners and avoid the topics of privacy; they have the sensitivity of intercultural differences and the ability to see things from different cultures and multiple perspectives; (4) Consciousness dimension includes critical cultural awareness, self-awareness, sociolinguistic awareness, etc. (awareness of the differences between one's own cultural identity and the other's cultural identity when communicating with foreigners). Based on the analysis above, we can see the common empathy, adaptation, tolerance, emotion and interpersonal relationship of business college students in intercultural communication.

3.3 Research methods

This questionnaire survey was made, distributed and collected on the platform of Wenjuanxing. A total of 540 valid questionnaires were collected, each questionnaire was completed fully. The questionnaire includes four parts (intercultural awareness, intercultural attitude or emotion, intercultural knowledge and intercultural skills) and 35 items. Among them, intercultural awareness and intercultural attitude are graded and scored by the Lecter scale, from “A” to “E,” “A” representing none, “B” representing slight, “C” representing low, “D” representing average, and “E” representing high.

The questionnaire data were statistically analyzed by SPSS. First of all, descriptive mean statistics of questionnaire data are conducted to find out the development status of various dimensions of the intercultural ability of Business English students. Then, the correlation coefficient of the questionnaire scale is analyzed to find the positive correlation between each dimension. Finally, the reliability of the questionnaire scale was analyzed to test the internal consistency of the scale.

4. Data collection and analysis

4.1. Intercultural awareness

Table 1 The development of intercultural consciousness of Business English students

Item	Sample size	Min. Value	Max. Value	Mean	Standard Deviation
Intercultural Awareness	540	1	5	4.06	0.767
The awareness of cultural differences when communicating with people from different cultures	540	1	5	3.97	1.108
The cultural identity in intercultural communication	540	1	5	3.99	0.978
Each culture has its own advantages and disadvantages	540	1	5	4.38	0.995
When communicating with foreigners, you know that you are also limited by your own culture	540	1	5	4.03	1.011
You can objectively evaluate the behavior of foreigners	540	1	5	3.91	0.917

As can be seen from Table 1, the dimension of intercultural awareness is 4.06, greater than 4, indicating that intercultural awareness is at a high level. Among all the questions, the average value of “each culture has its advantages and disadvantages” reached 4.38, indicating that each culture has advantages and disadvantages, which is in line with the current people’s awareness and cognition. The second is “when communicating with foreigners, they know that they are also limited by their own culture,” with an average value of 4.03, indicating that they are also limited by their own culture in the communication process. For the other items, the average value is less than 4, indicating that the recognition degree is relatively low compared to these two items.

4.2. Intercultural attitude

Table 2 The development of intercultural attitudes of Business English students

Item	Sample size	Min. Value	Max. Value	Mean	Standard Deviation
Intercultural attitude	540	1	5	4.24	0.760
The willingness to communicate with people from different cultures	540	1	5	4.28	0.950
The willingness to learn English well	540	1	5	4.43	0.889
The willingness to understand the culture of English-speaking countries	540	1	5	4.44	0.890
The willingness not to give up and shrink back when encountering setbacks when communicating with people from different cultures	540	1	5	4.01	1.004
The willingness to tolerate cultural differences such as different values, eating habits, taboos	540	1	5	4.03	0.913

As can be seen from Table 2, the dimension of intercultural attitude is 4.24, greater than 4, indicating that intercultural attitude is at a high level and positive towards intercultural attitude. For each item of each intercultural attitude, they are all greater than 4, indicating that the cognitive level of each item of intercultural attitude is very high. The highest item is "willing to learn from people from different cultures in intercultural communication," with an average value of 4.44, indicating that intercultural learning and communication are the most recognized. The second is "hope to learn English well and understand the culture of English-speaking countries," with an average of 4.43, which also reflects the content of intercultural English learning.

4.3. Intercultural knowledge

Table 3 Development of intercultural knowledge of Business English students

Items	Number of students who are correct	Rate of accuracy
Q11	281	52.04%
Q12	333	61.67%
Q13	257	47.59%
Q14	404	74.81%
Q15	388	71.85%
Q16	430	79.63%
Q17	168	31.11%
Q18	433	80.19%
Q19	195	36.11%
Q20	392	72.59%

As can be seen from Table 3, for question Q17 about calling teachers or parents by their first names and Q19 (how you will answer questions in foreign teachers' class), the lowest accuracy rates are only 31.11% and 36.11% respectively. For Q13 (where should the host say goodbye to the guest), the accuracy rate is 47.59%, less than 50%, and the accuracy rate of other questions was above 50%.

Table 4 Descriptive statistics of intercultural knowledge

Dimension	Sample size	Minimum value	Maximum Value	Mean	Standard Deviation
Intercultural Knowledge	540	0	10	6.08	1.762

According to the score statistics, it can be seen that the understanding degree of intercultural knowledge is not evenly distributed. For some samples, none of the items were answered correctly; and for some samples, all these items were answered correctly, with an average score of 6.08 and a standard deviation of 1.762, indicating that the overall data accuracy of intercultural knowledge fluctuates to some extent.

4.4. Intercultural skills

Table 5 Development status of intercultural skills of Business English students

Items	Number of students who are correct	The Rate of accuracy
Q21	421	77.96%
Q22	341	63.15%
Q23	178	32.96%
Q24	375	69.44%
Q25	177	32.78%
Q26	434	80.37%
Q27	221	40.93%
Q28	32	5.93%
Q29	180	33.33%
Q30	46	8.52%
Q31	106	19.63%
Q32	286	52.96%
Q33	451	83.52%
Q34	46	8.52%

Q35	269	49.81%

The questions under intercultural skills can be divided into three levels according to the correct answer rate. The first level is the questions with high accuracy, and the questions with high accuracy are Q21, Q22, Q24, Q26 and Q33 respectively. The accuracy rate of these questions is above 60%, above the pass line. The second level is the questions with low accuracy, which are Q23, Q25, Q27, Q29, Q32 and Q35 respectively, with accuracy between 30% and 60%. The third level is the questions with low accuracy, and the questions with low accuracy are Q28, Q30, Q31 and Q34. The accuracy rate is lower than 20%, which is a very low standard.

Table 6 Descriptive statistics of intercultural skills

Dimension	Sample Size	Minimum Value	Maximum Value	Mean	Standard Deviation
Intercultural skills	540	2	12	6.60	1.714

According to the score statistics, it can be seen that the accuracy of intercultural knowledge and skills is not evenly distributed. At least 2 questions are answered correctly, and at most 12 questions are answered correctly. The average score is 6.60 points, the standard deviation is 1.714, and the full score is 15 points, indicating that the overall situation of intercultural skills is not good, and it is at the failing level. It can be known that the overall data accuracy of intercultural skills fluctuates to a certain extent.

4.5. Overall evaluation of each dimension

After standardizing the mean value of the questionnaire data and the score of the test paper, the following results are obtained:

Table 7 The mean values of each dimension inter cultures

Dimensions	Scores
Intercultural knowledge	60.76
Intercultural skills	43.99
Intercultural awareness	76.38
Intercultural attitude	80.96

According to the statistical results and on the standard of 100 points, it can be known that intercultural skills belong to the dimension of deficiency, and his score was 43.99, below 60, which is considered a failing grade. This indicates that the intercultural skills of the respondents need to be strengthened. The score of intercultural knowledge is 60.76, just above 60, high above the pass line, which needs to be further strengthened. The score of intercultural attitudes is the highest, reaching 80.96, which is a high level. The score of intercultural consciousness is the second, with 76.38, which is above the middle level. To sum up, it can be seen that the intercultural awareness and attitude of the respondents are at a high standard, but the actual intercultural knowledge and skills are lacking.

4.6. Correlation analysis

Correlation analysis is a statistical method to study the closeness of the relationship between variables. It mainly reflects whether there is a correlation between two types of variables or two phenomena in the direction and size of development and change, but it cannot reflect whether there is a causal relationship between two types of phenomena. According to the statistical results, it can be seen that the correlation coefficient between intercultural consciousness and intercultural attitude, intercultural knowledge and intercultural skills is 0.674, 0.166 and 0.199 respectively, and the significance is 0.000, less than 0.05, indicating that there is a significant positive correlation between intercultural consciousness and intercultural attitude, intercultural knowledge and intercultural skills. Intercultural awareness can improve intercultural attitude, intercultural knowledge and intercultural skills.

The correlation coefficients of intercultural attitude, intercultural knowledge and intercultural skills are 0.150 and 0.190 respectively, and the significance is 0.000, less than 0.05, indicating that there is a significant positive correlation between intercultural attitude, intercultural knowledge and intercultural skills, and intercultural attitude can improve intercultural knowledge and skills.

The correlation coefficient between intercultural knowledge and intercultural skills is 0.172 respectively, and the significance is 0.000, less than 0.05, indicating that there is a significant positive correlation between intercultural knowledge and intercultural skills, and intercultural knowledge can improve intercultural skills.

Table 8 Correlation coefficients

		Intercultural awareness	Intercultural attitude	Intercultural knowledge	Intercultural skills
Intercultural awareness	Pearson correlation	1	.674**	.166**	.199**
	significance (two-tailed test)		.000	.000	.000
	N	540	540	540	540
Intercultural attitude	Pearson correlation	.674**	1	.150**	.190**
	significance (two-tailed test)	.000		.000	.000
	N	540	540	540	540
Intercultural knowledge	Pearson correlation	.166**	.150**	1	.172**
	significance (two-tailed test)	.000	.000		.000
	N	540	540	540	540
Intercultural skills	Pearson correlation	.199**	.190**	.172**	1
	significance (two-tailed test)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	540	540	540	540

As the confidence level is 0.01, the correlation was significant.

4.7. Reliability test

In reliability test, Cronbach α coefficient is mainly used in this study, which is also known as *The Cronbach Coefficient,* the intrinsic reliability coefficient, the consistency coefficient, and the average value of the halved reliability coefficient obtained by all possible item division methods of the scale, which is the most commonly used reliability coefficient at present.

The Cronbach α coefficient is usually between 0 and 1. If the coefficient does not exceed 0.6, it is generally considered that the internal reliability is insufficient. When it reaches 0.7-0.8, the scale has considerable reliability; when it exceeds 0.8, its reliability index is excellent and can be considered to have passed the test.

Dimensions	items	Cronbach's Alpha
Intercultural awareness	5	0.821
Intercultural attitude	5	0.876

Through the reliability analysis of the sample data by SPSS23.0, it can be known that the reliability values of intercultural awareness and intercultural attitude are 0.821 and 0.876 respectively, greater than 0.8, indicating that the data are of high reliability and quality, proving the authenticity and applicability of the survey results. Part of the questionnaire has passed the reliability test.

5. Conclusion

In combination with the actual situation of students in business colleges and universities, this research adopts Zhong Hua's localization ICCSRS evaluation scale, and uses descriptive mean statistics and correlation coefficient analysis, which are widely accepted by international statisticians as statistical tools to evaluate the current situation of intercultural ability of college students in business colleges and universities. The research results show that the overall level of intercultural ability of business English majors in the Greater Bay area is not high, between low and average level. First of all, college students have strong intercultural awareness. For example, they believe that each culture has its advantages and disadvantages, are willing to communicate and learn from foreigners from different cultures, and will not give up or shrink back when they encounter setbacks in communication with people from different cultures. However, when communicating with people from different social and cultural backgrounds and fields, they are not quite clear about their own cultural identity and whether they can objectively evaluate the behavior of foreigners. Secondly, college students lack the ability to master certain local cultural knowledge and need to improve it. Therefore, this research is of great significance. It can help students to better realize the strength of their own intercultural ability, or help them to have a self-awareness of their intercultural ability (that is, many scholars pay attention to factors in the study of intercultural ability). At the same time, it provides strong data support for talent cultivation plan and curriculum setting of business colleges in the Great Bay Area, provides theoretical basis and experience reference for intercultural teaching reform, and provides meaningful empirical data for subsequent related studies.

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Appendix 1: Survey

Questionnaire on Cross-cultural Communication
(Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Questionnaire)

I. Intercultural awareness
1. The awareness of cultural differences when communicating with people from different cultures.
A. No
B. General
C. Higher
2. One’s cultural identity in cross-cultural communication.
A. No
B. General
C. Higher
3. Each culture has its advantages and disadvantages.
A. No
B. General
C. Higher
4. Know that you are also limited by your own culture when communicating with foreigners.
A. No
B. General
C. Higher
5. I can objectively evaluate the behavior of foreigners.
A. No
B. General
C. Higher
II. Second, cross-cultural attitude
6. Willingness to communicate with people from different cultures
A. No
B. General
C. Higher
7. I hope to learn English well and understand the culture of English-speaking countries
A. No
B. General
C. Higher
8. Willingness to learn from people from different cultures in cross-cultural communication
A. No
B. General
C. Higher
9. Never give up or shrink back when encountering setbacks when communicating with people from different cultures
A. No
B. General
C. Higher
10. I can Can tolerate cultural differences such as different values, eating habits and taboos
A. No
B. General
C. Higher
III. Three, cross-cultural knowledge
11. If you are invited to a 6 o ‘clock dinner party at an American friend’s home, what time is appropriate for you to go?
A. 5:30 p.m.
B. 6:00 p.m.
C. 7:00 p.m.
12. A Western friend has invited you to his home. When is the proper time for you to leave when the party is coming to an end?
A. twenty minutes after you have informed the host and the hostess about your leaving
B. immediately after you informed the host and the hostess
C. anytime when you plan to leave
13. In the West, where should the guests go when they say goodbye? Do you think so?
A. The door
B. Outside the door
C. Can be
14. What does an American mean when he shrugs?
A. I’ll think about it
B. Sorry, I don’t know
C. I’m not feeling well
15. Do you think it is ok to cross your legs while sitting and talking to British people?
A. Absolutely not
B. can
C. I don’t know
16. What do you mean by nodding your head and shaking hands in different countries?
A. The same
B. Different
C. Similar
17. In British and American countries, can students call their teachers or children call their parents by their first names?
A. Yes.
B. No.
C. Yes, but it’s not polite
18. What do westerners usually bring when they are ill in hospital?
A. Flowers
B. Nourishment or money
C. Anything
19. When you answer a question in diplomacy class, what do you do?
A. Sitting
B. Stand up immediately
C. Hesitate before you stand up
20. When an English friend gives you a present, what do you do?
A. Say thank you and put the gift aside
B. Say thank you and open your gift right away
C. Don’t know how to express your feelings

IV. Cross-cultural skills

21. "Thank you so much for everything you've done for me in the last few days," says a foreign client expressing gratitude to your Chinese boss. Your boss politely replies in Chinese, "It's our duty." As the boss's interpreter, how will you translate what the boss says?
A. It's our duty to help you.
B. It is our pleasure
C. It is our job to do so.
22. If an American complimented you on your beautiful dress, what would you say?
A: I'm glad you like it and you can take it if you want to.
B. Oh, it's cheap.
C. Thank you. I like it too.
23. You and some American colleagues are waiting for the elevator. When the elevator comes, you want them to get in first. How would you put it?
A. Go ahead
B. Please
C. After you
24. If two Americans were speaking in front of you and you wanted to go around them, what would you do or say to them?
A. Sorry. Would you let me pass?
B. Excuse me.
C. I am sorry.
25. In western countries, when a friend asks you, "Can you come to my birthday party? You're not sure if you can go, you say,
A.I am not sure.
B. May I let you know this evening?
C.I don't know.
26. When you are invited to your best friend Amy's birthday party, but you have a lot of homework to do, what will you say?
A. I'm sorry. I have to do lots of homework then.
B. Oh! I'm sorry. I'm afraid I can't come because I've something else to do and I can hardly postpone it.
C. I can't accept your invitation because I've lots of homework to do.
27. When you meet your foreign teacher Peter, how do you greet him?
A. Hello, Peter
B. Hi, teacher.
C. Hi, Peter, where do you want to go?
28. What will you do if you are late for a social event?
A. Apologize to those who have already been there
B. Say nothing at all
C. Be seated directly and forget it
29. What will you do when your British foreign teacher explains something in class but you don't understand it?
A. Nod your head and smile.
B. look at them blankly.
C. Say "I am sorry. I don't understand. Could you please give an example?"
30. When you visit a Westerner's home and the host wants to hang up your coat, what will you do?
A. No, thank you.
B. Yes, please, thank you.
C. Don't bother yourself to hang my coat, let me do it.
31. In the West, what should the guest do when the host brings him a cup of tea?
A. Stand up and say "thank you"
B. Remain seated and say nothing
C. Remain seated and receive it with a smile and say thank you
32. If you're eating with a foreigner and want something from the other side of the table. What would you say?
A. Stand up and stretch out your hand to it yourself.
B. Say, "Excuse me, could you pass the X, please?"
C. Say, "Sorry, could you pass the X, please?"
33. I'd like to say goodbye to you.
A. You can stay a little longer
B. Say hello to your parents for me
C. You walk slowly
34. Are you sick? Are you sick? You will say:
A. Are you sick?
B. You seem rather tired, are you ok?
C. You seem ill. You should see a doctor.
35. What will you do if you are late for a Western social event?
A. Apologize to those who have already been here
B. Say nothing at all
C. Be seated directly and forget it

Complaints and Linguistic (In)Directness in BELF Emails

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Abstract

In line with the argument that linguistic (in)directness must be differentiated from perceived face-threat (Decock & Depraetere 2018), this paper explores linguistic (in)directness of complaints in 200 BELF emails which have been coded in terms of the presence of four constitutive complaint components: the complainable, the negative evaluation of the complainable, the person/company responsible for the complainable, and a wish for compensation. Positioned within both discursive and diachronic pragmatics, this article probes into formal realizations of each component and deploys the concept 'diachronicity' to capture the dynamics of escalatory explicitness (or linguistic (in)directness) in authentic business emails. Data analysis reveals that the complaint speech act in BELF emails is explicit (or linguistically direct) not only in terms of the overall number of constitutive components that are realized but also by virtue of the preferred component combinations in which three or four components are often (para)-linguistically expressed. Based on the above investigations, the significant pattern can be described as that the complainer goes to the point that what is not up to his expectation, then explicitly addresses the complainee to take actions for remedy, and often also vents his negative emotions, suggesting the fact that BELF emails can be both goal-oriented and emotion-loaded. The findings shed some light on speech acts research in both CMC, emails more specifically, and BELF contexts.

Key Words: Complaints, linguistic (in)directness, BELF emails, pragmatics

1. Introduction

Complaining is not uncommon in daily, institutional, and business communications (Liu & Liu, 2021). Studies of CMC complaints are burgeoning and mainly analyze the genre of negative online customer reviews on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, TripAdvisor, or eBay (Depraetere et al., 2021; Hassouneh & Zibin, 2021; Meinl, 2010; Vásquez, 2011). Among various forms of CMC, the use of email for organizational communication has become a daily practice that is inevitable, especially when organizations establish partnerships with international bodies or institutions (AlAfnan, 2014). In global email communications, among many other languages, English has increasingly become the most recognized common language, functioning as a default means of communication among people who do not share a common language and culture (Kankaanranta & Lu, 2013). The role of English as an international business lingua franca (BELF) is now beyond dispute (Gerritsen & Nickerson, 2009), realized mainly by email (Li, 2016).

Complaints are viewed as instinctively face-threatening that jeopardize the interlocutors' both positive and negative face (Brown & Levinson 1987), in which the speaker can express his dissatisfaction and annoyance towards the past or ongoing state of affairs either directly or indirectly (Trosborg 1995). Performing different types of FTAs (e.g., disagreement, refusal, or complaint) in BELF emails is of vital significance to the success of the international business since it can affect corporate reputation, client base, competitive advantage, growth, profit, and other critical factors (Brandt, 2005). Although there is an absence of a single standard version of BELF discourse due to its very nature of variation, hybridity, dynamism, context-dependency, and individual idiosyncrasies (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013), successful BELF communication enjoys four discourse strategies: clarity, brevity, directness, and politeness (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010) and the goal of the use of English is to "simply work"—to get the job done (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010).

Therefore, scholars are concerned with the realization of different speech acts in BELF contexts relating to (im)politeness and (in)directness aspects, with a particular interest in requests (Ho, 2010; Park et al., 2021; Richard & McFadden, 2016; Zhu, 2012). Taxonomies of speech acts are often based on the binary distinction between direct and indirect strategies, represented by the large project of cross-cultural speech-act realization patterns (CCSARP) (Blum-kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper 1989). These levels of indirectness are often divided into three broad categories: direct, conventionally indirect, and very indirect (hints). However, the notions of directness and indirectness applied to requests in this project were re-examined, and the results showed that perceptions of directness of their given request patterns did not always confirm the psycholinguistic validity of the postulated scale across different languages (Ogiermann, 2009; Yu, 2011; Tawalbeh & Al-oqaily, 2012).

Through critical evaluation of previous conceptualizations and applications of (in)directness, Decock & Depraetere

(2018) propose a new taxonomy of complaints that allows for systematic cross-linguistic analysis of (in)directness in different speech acts, further proven valid in Depraetere et al., (2021). They conceptualize linguistic (in)directness in terms of the number of constitutive components of a complaint situation that are (para-)linguistically realized. A complaint situation consists of four constitutive components which can be made explicit, derived from House and Kasper's (1981) and Trosborg's (1995) work on complaints:

- Component A refers to the situation or event about which the customer is complaining ("complainable").
- Component B is the expression by the complaining customer (henceforth the "complainer") of some degree of dissatisfaction.
- Component C refers to the person or institution that is considered by the complainer to be responsible for the complainable.
- Component D concerns the complainer's wish for the complainable to be

While there is a substantial collection of literature on the realization of complaint speech act in (intercultural and interlanguage) pragmatics based on elicited data (e.g., Chen et al., 2011; Kreishan, 2018), there is still a paucity of studies that work with natural data, especially in professional communication. Recent investigations of linguistic (in)directness in complaints resorting to this new taxonomy only target such social media contexts as Twitter (Depraetere et al., 2021) and ELF contexts (Min, 2021). However, in fact, until now, studies on this new strand of research of complaints in BELF emails are virtually non-existent. This is quite surprising given that international trade can never be a smooth process, during which undesirable outcomes affecting either exporters or importers always emerge. B2B written complaints are both a relatively common and a highly sensitive genre that requires a delicate balance between problem-oriented and people-oriented communication by business traders (De Clerck et al., 2019). Since more than capable of conveying rich information, BELF email communication is also expected for reaching interaction goals and building long-term business relationships (Jensen, 2009). Therefore, it is both inevitable and challenging for BELF email communicators to conduct complaints.

Against such background, this present paper hopes to be the leading research to examine (in)directness in BELF email complaints by applying the new and adapted taxonomy of complaints outlined in Depraetere et al., (2021), which is based on the identification of the constitutive components of a complaint situation and the extent to which the four components are explicitly realized, paying heed to the ways in which they are (para-)linguistically expressed. And our data corpus consists of 200 BELF emails collected from a company operating in the auto parts industry in Guangzhou, China.

The asynchronous character (Knaś, 2010) featuring computer-mediated communication (CMC) provides insights into exploring how speech acts unfold and evolve over time. Hence, the present paper's explorations of escalatory explicitness (linguistic directness) as sequences of asynchronous emails also fit into the strand of diachronic pragmatics research. The notion of diachronicity refers to the Heideggerian concept that historically situating a discourse increases its power (Kádár, 2019). In the case of a complaint in business emails, diachronicity operates in the form of claims that the email receiver who is held accountable for the issue that causes the complaint has not made any attempt to remove the complainable (Vladimirou et al., 2021).

Therefore, based on the above rationale, this paper is designed to answer the following research questions:

1) Which and how many constitutive components of complaint situations are realized and what are the preferred component combinations in the 200 BELF emails?
2) How are the four constitutive components linguistically realized in the 200 BELF emails?
3) How does the escalatory explicitness (or linguistic directness) in complaint chains unfold in BELF emails?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Complaint Speech Act

Complaints in linguistics have been mainly studied through the lens of discourse-pragmatic and conversational-analytic (CA) perspectives, both of which provide illuminating insights into the linguistic realizations of complaints and interactional dynamics of complaint interactions (Trosborg, 1995; Heinemann, 2009; Chen et al., 2011; Depraetere et al., 2021). Running contrary to the agreement maxim (Leech, 1983) regardless of the extent of its indirectness, performing complaints against different cultural backgrounds grabs the attention of both cross-cultural researchers and interlanguage researchers, who analyze and compare how complaints (and other face-threatening speech acts) are performed by speakers in different languages, with comparisons mainly made between native English speakers and non-native speakers or ELF learners (Astia, 2020; Chen et al., 2011; Masjedi & Paramasivam, 2018). The DCT was employed as the principal instrument in Chen et al. (2011), and the quantitative results indicated that the American and the Chinese participants shared similar distributions in overall and combined strategy use, while their choices of linguistic forms and expression of semantic content were different.

Compared to more formulaic speech acts such as requests, greetings, and apologies, a complaint does not easily lend itself to any predetermined form due to its complexity (Chen et al., 2011) thus a complaint is not necessarily expressed in a single sentence while often performed by a set of speech acts (Cohen & Olshtain, 1993), giving chances to different taxonomies of this speech act. The two highly influential taxonomies of complaint strategies by means of a directness scale were developed by House and Kasper (1981) and Trosborg (1995), both of which are not immune from equating a higher degree of directness to a higher degree of face-threat (Depraetere et al., 2021). Trosborg (1995) set up four main categories : (1) no explicit reproach; (2) irritation or disapprobation expression; (3) allegation; (4) blame, then further classified into eight sub-categories known as strategies, varying in the weight of directness from hints and mild disapprovals to severe blame (see in Trosborg, 1995:315). Later, Decock & Depraetere (2018) pave the way for a more accurate and replicable method that serves as a helpful instrument allowing this present paper to analyze (in)directness in BELF email complaints systematically and unambiguously.

In the business setting, complaints always link to another term, "customer complaint behavior" (CCB) which deals with the identification and evaluation of all aspects involved in the customer's reaction to service failure and consequent dissatisfaction (Singh & Widing, 1991). The compelling need to gain insights into how consumers use this particular speech act and how relevant organizations or corporations respond and handle it cultivates the field of service recovery research (Gelbrich & Roschk, 2011; Orsingher et al., 2010; Van Herck et al., 2021; Yang & Liu, 2020), among which the genre of CMC target mainly on social media such as Twitter, Facebook, TripAdvisor, or eBay (Meinl, 2010; Vásquez, 2011; Depraetere et al., 2021; Hassouneh & Zibin, 2021; Vladimirou et al., 2021).

2.2 BELF Emails

Piles of literature on BELF emails have been immersed in investigating the structural patterns, linguistic and stylistic features, and discourse strategies of emails through genre, move, or discursive analysis. (e.g., Nickerson, 2000; Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005; Kankaanranta, 2006; Incelli, 2013). BELF discourse is acknowledged as a "hybrid" form of communication (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010) since it is not only a mixture of different styles and registers but also integrates the features of both interlocutors' mother tongue practices. The hybrid phenomena are associated with directness versus indirectness talk and politeness-related aspects (Roshid et al., 2018).

By applying speech act theory to determine whether a letter is direct or indirect, Beamer (2003) demonstrated that the overwhelming preference for directness in 19th-century business letters signals strong proximity, especially where power differentials are great. Louhiala-Salminen et al. (2005) found that Finnish BELF users were more direct and straightforward than Swedish BELF users in spoken communication, with directness meaning using fewer words and going immediately to the point of the message and indirectness meaning the opposite. More evidence also is presented in the email performance, revealing that Finnish writers favored more direct requests, whereas Swedish writers used more indirect alternatives. Yao et al., (2021) explored the preferred move structures in the performance of FTAs in Chinese and Japanese BELF emails and emphasized the influence of national culture on English lingua franca communication so as to raise our awareness of certain taken-for-granted patterns in email interactions between two seemingly similar cultures to avoid possible communicative breakdown. Decock & Spiessens (2017), most relevant to this current study, probed into authentic business complaints and disagreements through a discourse analysis of complaint negotiation e-mails written in French- and German-language. The study demonstrated that, in reactions to complaint refusals, the customer's discourse evolved from more neutral, problem-oriented, routinized formulations to more confrontational, person-oriented, ad-hoc formulations.

To sum up, while there is a substantial collection of literature on the realization of speech acts in (intercultural and interlanguage) pragmatics based on elicited data, there is still a paucity of studies that work with natural data, especially in business professional communication. In fact, until now, studies on the topic of complaints in the context of actual CMC (computer-mediated communication) in business settings are still few and mainly analyze the genre of negative online customer reviews on platforms such as TripAdvisor or eBay. To our knowledge, published research on B2B written complaints in BELF emails is nearly non-existent.

3. Method

3.1 Data Collecting

In terms of data collection, there are three major methods in pragmatic studies: discourse completion tasks (DCT) ((Blum-kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Chen et al., 2011), role-plays (Kreishan, 2018); and ethnographic observation (Graham, 2007). Our data can be considered as naturally occurring discourse with higher observational and reliable insights into investigating complaints' linguistic realizations within the exchanges of BELF emails. The data, consisting of 200 BELF emails, are selected from 1200 emails provided by a company operating in the auto parts industry in Guangzhou, China. The 200 emails, spanning a period from 2006 to 2018, contain at least one constitutive component of an explicit complaint. As the company provides international products and services, the employees working in sales departments are required to write emails in English, though they are all native Chinese. While the mother tongue of their business partners cannot be determined, most of them are Non-Native English speakers (NNS) judging from the information in business emails (e.g., the name of email writers and the reference to the writers' countries or cities), which means emails examined in this study belong to BELF interaction. These overseas business customers or trade partners come from Spain, Syria, Nigeria, and many other Middle East and African countries, among whom BELF email communication is the most important way to conduct daily business affairs. All the names of email writers, companies, locations, and sensitive information (e.g., quotations) are pseudonymous. Moreover, all lexical or grammatical errors will not be amended to preserve the authenticity of the data.

3.2 Data Coding

This paper adopts the coding scheme outlined in Depraetere et al. (2021). The taxonomy of complaints is distinguished into five subtypes of explicit complaints (Decock & Depraetere 2018). However, an explicit reference to the speech act of complaint is no longer taken as a separate subtype within the category of explicit complaints in Depraetere et al. (2021). So compared to the 2018 paper, the number of categories has been adjusted: there are now four (rather than five) subtypes of explicit complaints (see categories 2,3,4,5).

Examples below are used to flesh out different complaint categories that feature in the taxonomy (Note that component combinations including but not limited to these illustrated below and that the order in which the components occur (e.g., AC or CA) is not relevant to the taxonomy.) This study refers to the constitutive components of a complaint situation by means of A (complainable), B (dissatisfaction), C (person/institution responsible for the complainable), and D (wish for the complainable to be remedied).

Imagine Kris, an employee of a foreign trade company WELL, is bothered by the situation in which he already has sent several emails to ask one of his overseas customers, Devin, to revise the mistakes found in the documents. But Kris still hasn't received the correct one:

- Implicit complaint

1. None of the constitutive components is explicitly expressed: Next time maybe I'd better ask someone else to fill these documents.

- Explicit complaint:

2. One constitutive component is explicitly expressed: There are some mistakes in the documents. (A)
3. Two constitutive components are explicitly expressed: There are some mistakes in the documents, please revise and resend the correct one to me. (A and D)
4. Three constitutive components are explicitly expressed: I am annoyed because I keep finding mistakes in your documents. (A, B, and C)
5. Four constitutive components are explicitly expressed: I am annoyed because you still don't correct the mistakes I mentioned, please revise, and take it seriously. (A, B, C, and D)

Decock and Depraetere's (2018) conceptualization of linguistic (in)directness allows for a distinction between implicit and explicit complaints. In this paper, since implicit complaints are extremely rare in our corpus data, the focus is exclusively on explicit complaints. An example of the most direct (four constitutive components are expressed) is given in (1) below.

(1) Explicit complaint: four constitutive components (in the email below: ABCD)

Hello Kris,
[ABCD]National holidays are something we can hardly do anything about.
However, is a national holiday a surprise for WELL? It is about planning.
These parts are super late, please accelerate your deliveries.
Best regards,
[A] These parts are super late
[B] However, is a national holiday a surprise for WELL?
[C] you; WELL
[D] please accelerate your deliveries.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedure

This thesis adopts a method of qualitative-and-quantitative analysis of complaints in terms of linguistic (in)directness in BELF emails. In a first step, we check if constitutive components A, B, C, and D of a complaint situation are realized in the emails and code them accordingly. Once the components realized in the BELF emails are identified, the researcher examines and calculates the preferred component combinations (see section 4.1) as well as the different formal means used to realize the constitutive components (see section 4.2). In other words, in addition to looking for potential patterns in the use of complaint speech act in business emails, this study also offers a very detailed characterization of how the different components can be formally realized. Therefore, the qualitative analysis, which results in a descriptive overview of possible realizations of complaints, will be complemented with quantitative analysis to identify significant patterns.

4. Linguistic (In)Directness in BELF Emails: Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Explicit Realization of A, B, C, and D

This section will present the number, types, preferred combinations, and formal realizations of the four constitutive components made explicit in these 200 BELF emails.

The 200 BELF emails, in which at least one constitutive component of a complaint situation is explicitly realized, are selected from 1200 emails mainly concerning such business affairs as documents issues, delivery issues, products issues relating to quality, quantity, price, and the way of handling issues, etc. Different from briefer twitter complaints which usually present as one tweet one complainable due to Twitter's technical affordance (Depraetere et al., 2021), an email can convey two or more. Out of the 200 emails, 186 emails contain only one complaint situation, 13 emails are identified to hold two complaint situations and one email even conveys three complaint situations, thus resulting in 215 situations in total. Table 1 presents a snapshot of the overall number of each component made explicit in the 200 emails.

Table 1 Frequency of realization of A, B, C, D (A: complainable, B: dissatisfaction, C: person/institution held responsible for the complainable, D: wish for the complainable to be remedied)

Component	**Frequency**
A	215
B	106
C	181
D	170
	672

And table 2 reveals the number of the four component combinations realized in the 215 complaint situations.

Table 2 Frequency of one-, two-, three-, and four-component combinations

Component combinations	Frequency	%
One component	7	3%
Two components	33	15%
Three components	101	47%
Four components	74	34%
	215	100%

Table 3 displays the preferred component combinations adopted by BELF email communicators in our data. The top 3 in descending order are ACD, ABCD, and ABC, together making up a whopping 77% of the total. The most two frequently adopted combinations, ACD and ABCD, account for more than half of the total.

Table 3 Frequency of component combinations

Component combinations	Frequency	%
ACD	78	36%
ABCD	74	34%
ABC	16	7%
AC	13	6%
AD	11	5%
AB	9	4%
ABD	7	3%
A	7	3%
	215	100%

The overviews show that the complaint speech act in BELF emails is explicit (or linguistically direct) not only in terms of the overall number of constitutive components that are realized but also in terms of the preferred component combinations, characterized by three or four components (para)linguistically realized. Therefore, such quantified results allow us to look for the typical performance of complaints in our data which can be described as follows: the complainer goes to the point what affair is not up to his expectation (A), then explicitly addresses the complainee (C) to take actions for remedy(D), and often also vents his satisfaction or disappointment (B). To capture a more detailed discerption of complaints in business emails, the next section looks closer to the formal realization of each component, where examples will be presented and analyzed.

4.2 Formal Realization of A, B, C, and D

4.2.1 Component A

Component A (the content of the complainable and/or its consequences) is realized most commonly as one of the standard sentence types (declarative, exclamative, imperative, interrogative) with a specific illocutionary force (assertion, expressive, request, rhetorical question) (Depraetere et al., 2021:222). Furthermore, the 215 complaint situations in our data can be summarized in three categories: complaining about non-action(s), complaining about wrong action(s), and complaining about undesirable action(s). From the seller's standing point, choosing to explicitly point out the buyer's non-action is always triggered by the fact that the buyer fails to confirm quoted items, pay the balance, or take delivery of goods in a timely manner. Meanwhile, resulting from the seller's inability to accomplish production, ship goods, and provide information on time has been the statement of non-action as a realization of component A adopted by buyers. And a shared non-action from both sides is a reply delay or no reply. Pointing out errors or problems found with or undesirable action taken by the complainee also frequently leads to the explicit realization of component A, sometimes coupled with a statement of consequence. Requests for information about the complainable range from general questions to specific inquiries into the why, when, how, etc., of the complainable, in which, the complainable is realized as a presupposition.

Note that component A may be realized in different ways within one email (Example 5): for instance, the complainer can use both declarative and interrogative sentences to clarify the complainable. This explains why the sum of the different formal realizations in table 4 is higher than the number of emails in which A is realized (see table 1). Table 4 gives an overview of the frequency of the different types of formal realizations of component A.

Table 4 Formal realizations of component A

Formal realizations	Frequency	%
Assertion-declarative	197	88%
Rhetorical question(why)	12	5%
Rhetorical question(what)	6	3%
Rhetorical question(other)	6	3%
Expressive-exclamative	2	1%
Performative-request	2	1%
Total number of realizations of A	225	

The following examples illustrate typical types of formal realization of component A:

(1) Assertion-declarative _ (complaining about wrong action)

Dear Devin:
Please find in the attachment the CI and PL.
<u>The CI is wrong.</u> You must change to EUROS. As in the attachment, please amend the values and send us the agreed price in EURO.

(2) Expressive-exclamative _ (complaining about undesirable action)

Dear Kris:
Many thanks for your e-mail.
<u>I don't know how our customers could check your quality just by pictures!</u>
I know sample sending is costly, but I think you should pay some costs to find new customers and new markets.
I'm waiting for your reply.

(3) Rhetorical question(other) _ (complaining about undesirable action)

Dear sir:
Have a nice day.
<u>Are you still refuse to give me your sample for this item?</u>
I cannot buy till see your sample.
Waiting for your fast answer

Best regards
Devin

(4) Rhetorical question-(what) (complaining about undesirable action)

Dear Jhon,
What did happen with our goods you have a delay of 3 months....?
Thank You and Best Wishes

(5) Assertion-declarative &Rhetorical question(why) _ (complaining about undesirable action)

Dear Brother Kris,
Thanks very much for the bill of landing and invoice.
Please, we can use this B/L for inspection purposes, but we can not use it to please the goods. Why is it that you can not send us the original?
Kindly do your best to send it this week.
Best regards

(6) Rhetorical question(why) _ (complaining about non-action)

Hi Eva
Can you update the QS amount according as discussed before?
Best regards

In all the interrogatives, the complainable is triggered either by the use of a change-of-state proposition (see (6)), wh-word (see (4)(5)), or by the use of the verb *refuse* (see (3)) associated with an existential presupposition.

4.2.2 Component B

There is a large range of different formal realizations of Component B in BELF emails, which can be mainly summarized into seven types in table 5. The dissatisfaction of the complainable (B) can be expressed via negative evaluative adjectives/adverbs, *unfortunately, costly, disturbing*; negative verbs, *failed, delay*; negative evaluative expressions, *what's the problem with you? You made a big problem for me.* Compared to oral complaints, negative emotions can be well manifested in the employment of such para-verbal tools as capitalized letters, and the repetitive and successive use of the question, exclamation, or colon marks. Rhetorical questions, which are interpreted as a mark of annoyance, disliking, disapproval, or disagreement, also serve as available formal realizations of component B.

Table 5 Formal realizations of component B

Formal realizations	Frequency	%
Negative evaluative adj./adv.	25	18%
Negative verb	11	8%
Negative non	11	8%
Negative attitudinal expression	64	47%
Rhetorical question	4	3%
Punctuation	10	7%
Capitalized letters	12	9%
Total number of realizations of B	137	

(7) Punctuation & Capitalized letters & Negative attitudinal expression

Dear Mrs.
Just reply what we ask **. . .** (WE DON'T WANT TO COMMUNICATE AS YOU ARE DOING. WE ASK SOMETHING AND YOU ASK OTHER THING AND YOU DON'T REPLY WHAT WE ASKED FOR YOU)
We have already sent an email about this subject. Please let me know if you received it.
Thank You and Best Wishes

(8) Negative attitudinal expression & negative evaluative adjective

Dear Ms. Jack,
You can find the reports regarding the IHC Liners attached.
We are trying to find a solution to use some rejected qty from 9011XXX. There are too many rejected pcs. Most of our shipments are delayed. We are not happy with this situation. We can't make a plan in this way. What would you suggest to us now?
Best Regards

(9) Rhetorical question

Hello Kris,
National holidays are something we can hardly do anything about.
However, is a national holiday a surprise for WELL?
It is about planning. You should have known far in advance that there is a holiday coming so adjust your work according to.
These parts are super late, please accelerate your deliveries.

In example (7), the complainer expresses disapproval (B) of the complainable (A) both verbally (WE DON'T WANT TO COMMUNICATE AS YOU ARE DOING) and para-verbally, through the repetitive full stops and capitalized letters. Furthermore, the importer vents his dissatisfaction with the goods through the negative evaluative expression (We are not happy with this situation) as well as negative adjectives (rejected) in example (8). The rhetorical question adopted in example (9) can be interpreted as a mark of annoyance triggered by the company's (WELL) inability to arrange goods delivery before the holiday, which thus leads to delivery delay. As in the case of component A, component B can also be realized in different ways within one email. Hence the total number of B-realizations is higher than the number of emails in which B is identified.

4.2.3 Component C

Table 6 presents the overview of formal realizations of component C. The second personal pronoun *you* as a lexical marker that explicitly identifies the receiver as the responsible party for the complainable reaches the top order of frequency. What's worth mentioning is that addressing business partner *brother* is not a lonely case in our data. Nevertheless, such addressivity tends to be used in a few solid relationships, judged from their more than three years of business relationships.

Table 6 Formal realizations of component C

Formal realizations	Examples	Frequency
you	Also, send my letter of Invitation because I am planning to come over there next month, but you are the one delaying me.	139
your	Your sample has been delayed long	50
NP	The receiver's name, company's name, brother, etc.	19
Total number of realizations of C		208

4.2.4 Component D

Component D (wish for the complainable to be remedied) is realized most often through requests in the form of imperative with politeness marker, *please*. While Depraetere et al. (2021)'s categorization of requests is particularly useful to categorize the realizations of D, there are further formal realizations of D in the emails that do not feature in their taxonomy, namely reference to standards that function as correction and the request for remedy by means of a warning (see (10)).

Table 7 Formal realizations of component D

Formal realizations	Frequency	%
Imperative	89	38%
Want Statement	48	20%
Query Preparatory	22	9%
Interrogative	20	8%
Obligation Statement	16	7%
warning/threat	12	5%
Suggestory Formulae	11	5%
correction	10	4%
(Hedged)Performative	9	4%
Total number of realizations of D	237	

(10) Imperatives & Obligation Statement & warning & Correction

Dear Season
Thank you for your e-mail and thanks for sending the information about our balance. Unfortunately, this value cannot be informed in the Invoice. It is forbidden by Brazilian Customs. Otherwise, the bank will not accept for doing your payment and We will not be able to release the goods at the Customs.
You must deduct our balance from the other Invoice items. Please deduct the above GP balance from the values of other Invoice items and the total Invoice should be USD 51, XXX.
Please let me know if still remains any questions about this issue.

This email is chosen as an excellent example to illustrate how component D (wish for the complainable to be remedied) is realized through four different formal realizations within one email, namely imperative, correction (*the total Invoice should be USD 51, XXX*), obligation statement and warning(*Otherwise the bank will not accept for doing your payment and We will not be able to release the goods at the Customs)*, which likewise increases the degree of linguistic directness (Depraetere et al., 2021).

4.3 Escalation of Linguistic Directness in Complaints

This section will present two authentic complaint chains to display different ways available for email communicators to realize the escalation of linguistic directness. In addition to increasing new types of components (example (11)), the complainer can employ more various formal realizations of the four components (e.g., component B in example (12)), or take both paths simultaneously.

(11a) Component combination: AC

Date: 2015/11/11
Dear Eric
I just received the following e-mail informed that WELL had not paid yet the WELL brand Brazilian registration.

(11b) Component combination: ABCD

Date: 2015/12/18
Dear Eric
I received a phone call today from Mr. Jorge, the owner of ATHXX. They told me that till now your company had not paid the attached Invoice with regard to WELL (C) Brazilian brand registration. (A)
Please let me know what it's happening (D) because it has passed many days since this debt expired without any procedure on your part. We are worried about it. (B)
Thank you in advance & Best Regards.

Compared to example (11a) that contains the component A (WELL had not paid yet the WELL brand Brazilian registration.) and component C (WELL), the performance of complaining is more direct in the second email by virtue of another two components made explicit, which can be reasoned by the fact that the company (WELL), who was held accountable for the issue that caused the complaint, had still not made any attempt to remove the complainable after the appearance of the first complaint more than one month ago.

The following example illustrates the dynamics of escalation through the employment of increasingly various B-realizations in three successive emails during six months. Kris, the complainer, initiated a complaint email as he was annoyed by the situation where Devin not only failed to take the delivery of goods as his promise but also did not fulfill the obligation of payment.

(12a) Date:2007/7/22

Dear Mr. Devin:
How are you? I sent many emails to you. But I didn't receive your reply. What is the problem?
Your piston pins are already one month before. The goods keep in our warehouse long time. But you didn't transfer the balance to us. I don't know why. I want to send goods to you as soon as possible.
Pls, transfer your balance to us soon. Then I can arrange shipment.
Waiting for your urgent reply
Best regard
Kris

(12b) Date:2008/1/16

My Brother Devin:
I don't know why you didn't contact me? I am disappointed.
Your goods are still kept in our warehouse. It stays in our warehouse for more than half a year. Every time you told me you will transfer the balance, but every time we are disappointed.
Brother, you make a big problem for me. I holp you can understand me and pay the balance to us soon.

Our bank account is XXX
Waiting for your urgent reply
Best regard
Kris

(12c) Date:2008/2/23

Devin:
How are you?
<u>What is the problem with you? You disappoint me. I think you tell me too much lie every time. How can I believe you again?</u>
<u>If you do not need the goods, pls tell me as soon as possible!</u>
<u>We are not happy about your doing.</u>
Kris

Kris employed an aggressive interrogative to explicitly express his disappointment of not receiving a reply after making great efforts to contact Devin, then stated the difficulty of understanding Devin's non-action, thus the negative evaluative expression as a means of B-realization was adopted twice by Kris in the first email (see (12a)). Since there was still no balance transformation from Devin's side, Kris wrote the second email (see (12b)), in which negative evaluative expression was presented four times. Without any conventional salutation, the third email was opened with direct interrogative blaming Devon's inappropriate behavior immediately followed by a negative attitudinal expression towards it. Then, Kris showed again his disappointment about the complainable that Devin kept breaking his promise to transfer balance causing problems to his side. Devin's delay in replying and failure to fulfill the payment obligation completely irritated Kris, which can be traced in the rest of the email. An aggressive interrogative combined with a direct negative attitude still cannot fully vent annoyance and disappointment held by Kris; therefore, he continued to accuse Devin as a compulsive liar who can't be trusted anymore. Moreover, at the end of the email, Kris expressed that he was nursing a grievance against Devin once again. What's more, the escalation of annoyance caused by Devin can also be manifested by a shift in addressivity within the above complaint sequences, ranging from the first official and conventional one calling Devin *Mr*, to the second one *my brother,* which implies a close relationship in Chinese culture to call for understanding from the side of Devin, and then to the third only addressing his name.

As can be seen in the above three emails, component B can be realized in different ways, and the same type of B-realization can be presented more than once within one email, both of which are subject to a certain sense of escalation. Moreover, time is a critical issue in the business world, which again showcases the importance of diachronicity in e-complaints (Vladimirou et al., 2021). Diachronicity is evoked with the aid of verbal message such as *it has passed many days since this debt expired without any procedure from your part* (11b); *The goods keep in our warehouse long time* (12a); *Your piston pins are already one month before* (12b); *It stays in our warehouse more than half year* (12c), which constitute solid evidence for the failure of the responsible side to act, hence upgrading the complaint. The asynchronous character of emails brings a sense of 'diachronicity' (Kadar, 2019) into the center of language use which accelerates the pragmatic power of complaining (Vladimirou et al., 2021).

5. Conclusion

This present paper examines how the speech act of complaint operates in BELF emails with the application of the new and adapted taxonomy that allows for a distinction between implicit and explicit complaints (Depraetere et al., 2021). And our study focuses exclusively on the latter one. Decock and Depraetere (2018) argue that a complaint situation consists of four constitutive components: the complainable (A), the negative evaluation of the complainable (B), the person/company responsible for the complainable (C), and a wish for compensation(D). This study probes into the preferred combinations of the constitutive components and the extent to which these components are explicitly realized in 200 BELF emails, with attention to the ways in which they are (para-)linguistically expressed in 215 complaint situations.

The most common situations triggering complaints in international trade under study are concerned with quality issues, delivery problems, price negations, and delayed or wrong actions. Data analysis reveals that the complaint speech act in BELF emails is explicit (or linguistically direct) not only by virtue of the overall number of constitutive components that are realized but also in terms of the preferred component combinations, characterized by three or four components (para)linguistically expressed. The most two frequently employed combinations of complaints are ACD and ABCD, indicating that the typical performance of complaints in our BELF emails can be described as follows: the complainer goes to the point what affair is not up to his expectation (A) and then explicitly addresses the complainee (C) to take actions for remedy (D), and often also vents his negative emotions (B). The results based on the above investigations echo previous research that clear, on-record communication is often asserted to be the norm in business environments in order to accommodate the transactional goals of this type of communication (De Clerck et al., 2019; Meinl, 2010).

The online context influences the ways in which complaint chains unfold and evolve over time (Vladimirou et al., 2021). We have explored the concept of diachronicity by focusing on the asynchronous nature of emails in our corpus. Asynchronicity is a characteristic of many CMC contexts, which often triggers escalatory aggression (Vladimirou et al., 2021). In various emails where diachronicity becomes essential, the email writers deploy such pragmatic devices as unconventional punctuation alongside ellipsis to indicate frustration and anger (see example (4)). Section 4.3 presents two authentic complaint chains to display different ways for email communicators to realize the escalation of linguistic directness. Apart from increasing new types of components (example (10)), the complainer can employ more different formal realizations of the four components or take both paths simultaneously. Just as Kris (see example (12)), the complainer, resorted to negative evaluative expression, aggressive interrogative as well as punctuation (exclamative mark) to vent his annoyance, and at the same time, employed negative evaluative expressions more than once in all the three successive emails. It should be noted that different formal realizations of B within one email were coded separately, but the different instantiations of the same type of B-realization (e.g., two negative evaluative expressions) were counted as one realization of B. So from this perspective, the total number of B-realization is likely to be a bit higher in actual fact (Depraetere et al., 2021). Therefore, we can suggest the fact that BELF emails can be both goal-oriented and emotion-loaded.

This study also shows that the operationalization of linguistic (in) directness of complaints in terms of constitutive components is valid. By investigating complaint speech events in a large corpus of workplace emails, the present study hopes to provide valuable and innovative contributions to the study of speech acts in BELF communication. Moreover, the present study also aims at showing the benefits of combining qualitative analyses with quantification. That is why this paper used a bottom-up approach in the categorization process of the linguistic strategies found in the emails. However, we also made recourse to existing analytical categories of previous research on complaints. They were only included if they fit the data and were complemented by strategies found in the present data corpus. Nevertheless, our data is limited and collected only from a company. Moreover, in line with the argument that linguistic (in)directness must be differentiated from perceived face-threat (Decock & Depraetere 2018), future studies are needed to explore what extent of (in)directness scale in complaints or what formal realization of complaints is perceived as (im)polite or face-threatened by business email communicators, which has not addressed in this paper.

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