

EuroXPrag Short Visit Report

Grant 4826: ‘Why imply something when you could say it explicitly?’

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The following report outlines the purpose and outcome of my visit with Dr Marina Terkourafi. I spent ten days (22 August through 31 August 2012) at her institution, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the United States, as part of an ongoing collaboration entitled ‘Why imply something when you could say it explicitly?’ The collaborative project is a theoretical and experimental analysis of the cultural and linguistic motivations for off-record indirect speech.

Summary of collaboration to date

The collaboration between Dr Terkourafi, my supervisor Dr Napoleon Katsos, and me, has developed via email and Skype over the course of the past academic year. Most notably, Dr Terkourafi has contributed to the project through the continued development of a theoretical motivation for off-record indirectness laid out in her previously published work, referred to within the project as ‘Intimacy’. Dr Terkourafi has also made valuable contributions to the development of a broader theoretical foundation, recommending relevant literature and providing feedback on questions related to said literature.

Dr Terkourafi and I met in person at the Oslo EuroXPrag workshop in June, at which point we jointly built and presented a presentation outlining our research aims and early theoretical foundations. During the same workshop, we discussed the possibility of translating my research materials into Spanish. We also discussed, and laid the groundwork for, an empirical model intended to aid in the development of theoretical and empirical materials.

Purpose and outcomes of the visit

The primary purpose of the visit was to discuss our current ongoing project, the theoretical foundation of which forms the basis for the PhD project I intent to carry out independently over the course of the following two years.

My visit coincided with the third series of a conference entitled 'Experimental and Empirical Approaches to Politeness and Impoliteness' (LIAR III). The conference was held at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (the host institution) and organised primarily by my collaborator Dr Marina Terkourafi.

Prior to be being selected for the EuroXPrag collaborative grant, I applied to present at the LIAR III conference. My abstract was chosen and, for practical travel reasons, my collaborators and I agreed it best to organise the short visit around the conference.

I met with Dr Terkourafi, in Illinois, in advance of the conference. I presented my prepared PowerPoint presentation to her and she provided feedback on the content and format. I agreed to include an additional theoretical motivation proposed by Dr Terkourafi (referred to in the presentation as 'Need Statements') and cited her as the source of said motivation. We also discussed the additional motivations that my supervisor and I had prepared since my last meeting with Dr Terkourafi in Oslo (namely, a more thoroughly developed account of the 'Urgency' motivation and the addition of the 'Impoliteness' motivation). Dr Terkourafi suggested relevant theoretical literature related to the impoliteness motivation and we discussed a series of speech utterances from Brown and Levinson's work that would appropriately fit with either the impoliteness motivation or the urgency one.

During the same meeting, I shared the data I'd collected with Dr Terkourafi. We discussed interesting trends to arise from the statistical analysis I'd completed so far, most notably by comparing the bribery and favour scenarios and reviewing the difference in participants' sensitivity to manipulations to authority and imposition. Dr Terkourafi noted that, whilst the participants' sensitivity to the manipulations was statistically significant in both scenarios, there appeared to be a greater sensitivity to these factors in the favour scenarios.

She suggested that the bribery scenario may be unique in that participants seem to associate relatively high degrees of authority and imposition with the scenario (which involves bribing a police officer to avoid a traffic ticket), regardless of manipulations to these factors. She noted that such associations may be culture specific.

I also shared the coding scheme I'd developed in order to analyse qualitative data. Dr Terkourafi noted the importance of ensuring inter-rater agreement in the qualitative analysis phase. She mentioned that she may have funds available to pay for a second rater. One part of my coding scheme deals with utterance length and Dr Terkourafi suggested that I consider a more appropriate means of coding length than word count. Among her suggestions were counting morphemes and focusing on the length of the critical item (here, the utterance containing the speech act at play). Her suggestions should prove useful in improving upon this aspect of the coding scheme.

We also discussed which types of data to include in the conference presentation. Dr Terkourafi suggested that I include the statistical analysis completed to date, along with a few representative utterances from the qualitative data set, without specific mention of the coding scheme in development. I appreciated her suggestions and took them on board in my presentation.

I presented the PowerPoint at the conference, ensuring to give credit to Dr Terkourafi where due. She and I jointly answered audience questions at the conclusion of the presentation and spoke with other attendees after the talk to gather feedback and impressions.

Whilst in Illinois, I met with postdoc based at Dr Terkourafi's institution. The postdoc is a native Spanish speaker recommended by Dr Terkourafi, who arranged for us to meet. The postdoc shared translations she had prepared for me and we carefully read through the translations to discuss the ways in which we could ensure pragmatic similarity between the English and Spanish versions of the materials, whilst preserving appropriate grammatical and cultural elements necessary in each language.

Projected publications

Dr Terkourafi and I are hoping to prepare conference proceedings based upon the presentation delivered at the LIAR III conference. These proceedings will be published in a special edition of a journal, along with papers based upon other presentations from the conference.

Future collaborative plans

Dr Terkourafi is planning on visiting me and my supervisor in Cambridge in mid-November. At that point, we will discuss the model developed in the days up to and during the Oslo workshop. We'll decide on the content and format of the conference proceedings we intend to publish. Further, we will discuss if, and how, we will proceed with the collaboration beyond the time specified by the EuroXPrag grant.