Interpreting impoliteness and over-politeness: An investigation into interpreters' cognitive effort, coping strategies and their effects

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Abstract: This paper investigates how politeness is treated in interpreter-mediated events and how the treatment is related to interpreters' pragmatic competence. An empirical study was conducted for this purpose, in which over 20 professional and student interpreters were asked to work in a liaison interpreting mode. An analysis of the interpreters' cognitive effort involved (ie. the interpreting process) and the coping strategies employed (ie.the interpreting product) in dealing with impolite and over-polite utterances, together with their retrospections, produced three findings: 1) Impolite and over-polite utterances slowed down the processing speed of interpreting, indicating that more cognitive effort was necessary. Professionals were particularly affected when interpreting from English to Chinese, students the opposite direction. 2) Various coping strategies beyond literal interpreting were adopted, at both lexical and syntactic levels. Professionals used coping strategies more liberally and intentionally than students, especially syntactic strategies and omission. 3) The overriding majority of the coping strategies used by both groups succeeded in mitigating the face-threatening force implied in the utterances. The differences between the two groups can be best explained by their different levels of intercultural pragmatic competence. By relating the interpreters' treatment of face-threatening utterances to their pragmatic competence, this study contributes to the interlingual and cross-cultural study of politeness, and also to the exploration of the complexity of the interpreter's role.

Keywords: liaison interpreting, impoliteness, over-politeness, cognitive effort, coping strategies and effects, intercultural pragmatic competence

1. Introduction

Over the last three decades, 'politeness' has been a key notion in pragmatics. Various theoretical models have been proposed (e.g., Leech, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Ide, 1989; Watts, 2003) in which politeness has generally been defined as static, fixed and pre-given (Chan et al., 2018), usually in a monolingual setting. However, cross-cultural work in a wide range of languages and cultures has highlighted the socio-cultural variations in the interpretations of the notion and has begun to conceptualize politeness as a relational and interactional phenomenon which is discursively co-constructed and negotiated among interlocutors (e. g., Locher, 2004; Arundale 2006; Vilkki, 2006; Geyer, 2008; Haugh & Chang, 2015; Chan et al., 2018). In line with this approach, we conducted an empirical study into politeness in interpreter-mediated events. As a fairly recent topic in interpreting research, politeness has not yet received the attention it deserves: the few studies that have been conducted have focused primarily on conference and court interpreting, and resorted to conversation analysis as the sole research methodology (e.g., Mason & Stewart, 2001; Jacobsen, 2008; Magnifico & Defrancq, 2016). The qualitative and product-oriented approaches adopted in these case studies, however, may not be adequate to reveal how interpreters perceive their pragmatic roles in balancing their translational and non-translational interventions when dealing with politeness, or to a larger extent, how they participate in the "complex co-construction of interaction" (e.g., Wadensjö, 1998; Angelelli, 2003; Mason, 2004, 2008; Hale, 2007).

In our study, liaison interpreting[1] was chosen as a representative interpreting mode which "has the most observable and apparent contexts of the dynamics of participants' interactions among all forms of translation and interpretation" (Hsieh, 2003: 303). We took impoliteness and over-politeness as two forms of politeness-related evaluations that may arise as challenges in the communicative events being interpreted (Kádár & Haugh, 2013), since both are regarded as negative behaviour, creating affective reactions in co-participants (Watts, 2003; House, 2012). By examining these two sub-branches of politeness, we aim to contribute to a dynamic understanding of how interpreters perceive and deal with linguistic politeness in multilingual and intercultural events and propose an interpreters' perspective of politeness

In the following paragraphs, we first explain how impolite and over-polite utterances (hereinafter as I&Os) were selected and investigated in the present study. We then analyse the interpreters' treatment of the I&Os by interweaving the product and the process-based approaches. By relating the findings to the interpreters' pragmatic competence[2], or to be more exact, their intercultural pragmatic competence (McConachy, 2019), the study is supposed to act as a showcase for interdisciplinary explorations of pragmatics and interpreting studies, a combination which has up until now been explored rarely, and also as a call for including this competence as part of an interpreter's skill set.

2. Research background
2.1 Politeness, impoliteness and over-politeness in pragmatics

Most of the research into politeness over the last few decades is in some way related to Brown and Levinson's (1987) study, which argued that positive face (the want to be desirable) and negative face (the want to maintain freedom of action) exist universally in all types of human culture, and that politeness[3] is a means of mitigating threats to face and of maintaining face in everyday interactions. This perspective, while rightly acknowledging face as a key concept in defining politeness-related concepts, has been challenged by

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[1] Liaison interpreting is classified as an interpreting activity different from conference interpreting, which features communicative events where two or more interlocutors do not share a language and where the interpreter must be present and perform interpreting in both language directions (Stanislav, 1997).

[2] "Pragmatic competence" is defined in contrast to "grammatical competence", referring to the ability to use language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context (Thomas, 1983; Fraser, 2010).

[3] This includes positive politeness construed as appreciation and approval, and negative politeness as non-imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

numerous researchers as "depersonalized and decontextualized" (Alan, 2015: 397). Fraser and Nolan (1981), Watts (2003) and Locher (2004) have argued convincingly that politeness is a socially-oriented judgment: that no linguistic structure is inherently polite or impolite, and that linguistic (im)politeness needs to be studied within the social psychological context in which it occurs. The inconsideration of the cultural context implied by Brown and Levinson's (1987) claim to the universality of politeness has also been the target of critique. Matsumoto (1988), Ide (1989), Gu (1990), Mao (1994), Spencer-Oatey (2000), to name a few, argued that the notion of negative politeness derives directly from the individuality of the western culture where individual wants and autonomy strongly dominate; however, it is inapplicable to non-western societies, Japan and China for instance, where there prevails the need to heed social hierarchy and moral/ethical values. This debate over politeness between western and non-western cultures may find its explanation in the fundamental dialectic in interpersonal relationship, namely, connectedness with others and separatedness from them (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Arundale, 2006, 2010). Connectedness, for instance, can be conceptualized as chengyi ('sincerity') for Mandarine Chinese but presumed social similarity and equality for westerners, while separatedness understood as encompassing keqi ('restraint') for Chinese but one's own 'space' for westerners (Haugh & Chang, 2015). Hence, in cross-cultural situations, the relational and interactional approach of politeness is "not only interested in the understandings of subjects themselves in actual situated contexts vis-à-vis politeness, but also in the contrast between emic and etic understandings of politeness more generally" (Haugh & Chang, 2015). Situation-constrained and culture-specific, politeness includes three key elements, namely, behavioural expectations, face sensitivities and interactional wants (Spencer-Oatey, 2005: 96), which in itself obliges interlocutors constantly to consider the situational and cultural contexts of the speech acts.

Impoliteness, the opposite of politeness or the absence of politeness where it is expected (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Eelen, 2001), has been researched to a lesser extent. The emerging body of research has demonstrated that, although sometimes presented as a conscious strategy designed to cause social disruption (Bousfield, 2008), impoliteness usually results from a mismatch between the speaker's intentions and the hearers' expectations (House, 2012), especially in the case of cross-cultural communication (e.g., Culpeper et al., 2010). For instance, Brown and Levinson's (1987) inclusion of speech acts such as offers and requests in the category of negative-face-threatening acts (FTAs) has been challenged by researchers in Japan and China (e.g., Matsumoto, 1988; Gu, 1990; Gao, 1996), as it ignores the interpersonal or social perspective on face, which is of paramount concern to a Japanese or a Chinese.

The most under-researched notion, over-politeness can be defined as a type of behaviour which is evaluated as too polite for the context (Izadi, 2016). It is labelled as a negative aspect of interactions (Watts, 2003; Locher, 2004), akin to impoliteness, as both "exceed the boundary between appropriateness and inappropriateness" (Locher, 2004: 90). This argument was supported by Izadi (2016), whose study of "Taarof", an Iranian form of overpoliteness emphasizing both deference and social rank, revealed that paying too much attention to relational bonding could be evaluated as irrevelant and create more separatedness. However, what is considered in/appropriate in a particular situation depends on the evaluations of the social behaviour by the participants and meta-participants (Kádár & Haugh, 2013; Izadi 2015). Culpeper (2009), for instance, observed from multi-media data that in Britain over-politeness is rarely taken offensively, but usually as a matter of miscommunication. Gu (1990) concluded that a successful performance of inviting usually takes several talk exchanges in China, a phenomenon described as "battles for politeness" by Leech (2005), yet to a cultural outsider, the inviter might appear imposing/overpolite and the invitee hypocritically making fake refusals.

2.2 Politeness, impoliteness and over-politeness in interpreting

Before proceeding to the liaison interpreter' treatment of politeness, we may need to recognize and address the complexity of his/her role, "one of the most prominent topics in interpreting studies" (Pöchhacker, 2004: 147). Though the interpreter has long been prescribed as an invisible translating machine by professional codes of ethics

(Pöchhacker, 2004), recent observational studies and survey research revealed that there exists a discrepancy between the prescribed role and the actual one: more and more interpreters perceived, enacted and described their role as visible agents, or 'powerful figures', 'essential partners', 'co-constructors to the interaction',who actively intervene, assuming a coordinating role at the same time as transmitting the message (e.g. Anderson 1976/2002; Wadensjö, 1998; Roy, 2000; Angelelli, 2003; Drugan, 2017). Along with the role perceptions of interpreters, the expectations from their clients have evolved, though more hesitantly. Surveys with healthcare social workers and judicial officers unraveled that a majority of them welcomed the added assistance from interpreters and supported the framing of interpreters as active co-participants (Pöchhacker, 2000; Hale, 2014; Drugan, 2017).

If the practioners and users of interpreting have agreed to include the coordinating function into the interpreter's role, it's not surprising that interpreters feel empowered to coordinate face-work in the communcation events. What might be a surprise is that though politeness is a ubiqutous and prominent phenomenon in interpreter-mediated events, there is an obvious paucity of studies focusing exclusively on politeness-related issues in interpreting. Rather, they have surfaced in works primarily concerned with other issues. The early studies (Harris & Sherwood, 1978; Knapp-Potthof & Knapp, 1986) focused on untrained interpreters and revealed that they were intuitively aware of the need to pay attention to the issue of face, especially their own faces, by clearly dissociating themselves from FTAs. Mason and Stewart (2001), Jacobsen (2008) and Monacelli (2009) drew a similar conclusion from their observation that professional interpreters also performed face work by neutralizing speech acts threatening to the face of the speakers or themselves. A survey-based study by Ren (2010) concluded that the majority of professional interpreters might 'downtone' or omit FTAs in business scenarios. Palazzi (2014), however, reported that interpreting students tended to strengthen or even add FTAs by downtoning the politeness markers expressed by the speaker.

Modification of the politeness degree of an utterance may have consequences for the communicative event. Berk-Seligson (2002) observed that (mock) jurors were influenced by the omission or addition of politeness items in the interpreter's rendition of the source speech. Savvalidou (2011) showed that some sign interpreters' strategies resulted in undermining (im)polite statements by a speaker, thus giving the audience an inaccurate impression of the speech. Hu's (2016) case study on two business conferences revealed that the liaison interpreter tended to omit FTAs in his attempt to safeguard the face of the interlocutors, which unfortunately had the effect of heightening misunderstanding and tension.

The third stream of research approached this topic with an eye on the gender of interpreters. Nakane (2008) and Mason (2008), interestingly, revealed contrastive findings: the former observed that female interpreters used more politeness markers and honorific expressions than male interpreters, while the latter found, quite counter-intuitively, that they omitted more. Mason (2008) was in a way echoed by Magnifico and Defrancq (2016), which concluded that female interpreters downtoned less than male interpreters at political conferences.

The first two batches of studies discussed interpreters' politeness strategies as well as the effects they had. Most of them were based on case studies, observing the performance of either professionals or student interpreters. We believe, however, that it would be more interesting and revealing to conduct an empirical study in which the two groups were compared with and contrasted against each other. The mode of interpreting in our study is business liaison interpreting, "the least covered or researched among all specific fields of interpreting" (Ozolins, 2014: 30), protected by "considerations of commercial confidentiality" (Ozolins, 2015: 327). The scant literature on the role of liaison interpreters in sensitive business domains revealed that the interpreters are often expected to play a multiplicity of roles over and above simply transmitting the message (Takimoto, 2006; Gavioli & Maxwell, 2007; Dodds, 2011; Zheng & Xiang, 2018), which means that politeness issues feature more prominently in this field (Mason & Stewart, 2001).

The present study attempted an in-depth exploration of the relational and interactional view of politeness by investigating interpreters' processing time and the coping strategies

they used with I&Os. The following research questions would be addressed: 1) Does the processing of I&Os require extra cognitive effort by professional and student interpreters? 2) What kind of strategies do they respectively employ to cope with I&Os? and 3) What effects do the strategies exert? It was hoped that, by seeking answers to these questions, the study would give rise to a new perspective on politeness: the interpreters' perspective, so that politeness could be discussed from a broader multilingual and intercultural context.

3. Research design

3.1 Subjects

Twelve professional interpreters (hereinafter as Professionals) and thirteen student interpreters (Students) were recruited as subjects on a voluntary basis. Professionals were active as freelance interpreters in Yangtze River Delta, China and were recruited through two translation agencies. They had an average age of 36.18 years (range 30-45, SD=5.06 years), with more than eight years' professional interpreting experience in business settings and over 60 paid interpreting services. Students were Year 3 undergraduates specializing in translation and interpreting from a Chinese university, with an average age of 21.73 years (range 21-23, SD=0.65 years). All subjects had Mandarin Chinese as their A language and English as their B language. Prior to the experiment, they were informed that anonymity and confidentiality would be ensured and asked to sign a consent form. The experiment was approved by the research ethics committee of the university and each subject was rewarded with a book voucher. After the experiment, one professional and one student reported having had some acquaintance with the interpreting materials (the unadapted version being available online), and another student failed to finish the task owing to her language incompetence; consequently, these three samples were removed from our analysis and the remaining 22 subjects were labeled as P_1-P_{11} (Professionals) and S_1-S_{11} (Students) for further analysis.

3.2 Materials

All the subjects were asked to interpret in turn in two events between two role-played businessmen. The first event featured an initial negotiation on the discount on an order, the second a farewell talk after they had closed a deal, in which the British businessman expressed his appreciation of a painting, and the Chinese insisted on presenting it as a gift. The scenarios were adapted from interpreting samples in *Interpreting Asia, Interpreting Europe* (Xiao & Yang, 2006) in which both I&Os were used. The role play was performed using scripts (minor ad-hoc adjustments were allowed in response to the interpreters' work), to ensure that each subject was presented with the same material for interpreting. The scripts are composed of 116 Chinese words (13 turns) and 108 English words (12 turns).

3.3 Identification of I&Os

The identification of I&Os played a key role in this study. Our first step was to identify all the speech acts that conflicted with the target listeners' expectations, sensitivities to do with face and the interactional wants of both sides (Spencer-Oatey, 2005). Then, after taking 'Western' and 'non-Western' cultural elements into consideration (Gu, 1990; Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2000), we dealt solely with positive face-threatening utterances, such as potential insults or the refusal of an offer; offers, compliments, formality and ceremony were categorized as examples of 'politeness'; while repetitive offers, urging invitations and exaggerated courtesy were categorized as 'over-politeness' (see Izadi 2016). We then invited 10 Chinese-English bilingual linguists to act as a judging panel to rate the 11 identified I&Os using a 1-9 Likert scale (1 for extreme impoliteness and 9 for extreme over-politeness). The rating scale agreed with our identification: six over-polite utterances (all in Chinese, average score=7.82, range=7-8.5, SD=0.63) and five impolite ones (two in Chinese and three in English, average score=2.22, range=1.3-2.7, SD=0.55) were identified in this study.

Table 1. Impolite (I_1-I_5) and over-polite (O_1-O_6) utterances

Categories	Code	Source Utterances (Gloss translation [GT] if in Chinese)	Mean

			Score
Impolite utterances	I_1	这老外鬼精鬼精的。(The foreigner is so cunning.)	1.3
	I_2	我得留一点讨价还价的余地。 (I need some wiggle room for further negotiation.)	2.2
	I_3	I can't possibly accept such a gift.	2.7
	I_4	But there is no way that I will take such a gift.	2.6
	I_5	I feel very awkward about taking this painting.	2.3
Over-polite utterances	O_1	您老一定累坏了吧？(You, at such a senior age, must be exhausted.)	8.3
	O_2	既然您太太喜欢，那就收下吧。(Since your wife is fond of it, take it.)	7.1
	O_3	我马上派人送到您的酒店去。(I'll have it sent to your hotel immediately.)	8.1
	O_4	宝物赠知己。(Treasures shall be presented to bosom friends as gifts.)	7
	O_5	我觉得这幅画也算是找到伯乐了。(I feel that the painting has found its Bole, a horse connoisseur during the Spring and Autumn Period.)	7.9
	O_6	不行，您一定要收下。(I will not accept a "No". You must accept it.)	8.5

3.4 Experimental procedures and data collection

The procedures for the experiment were set as follows: 1) each subject was introduced to the interlocutors (role-played by two English lecturers, one Chinese native and the other English native), and briefed about the tasks before the experiment; 2) the subjects interpreted for each interlocutor in turn as the dialogue developed; 3) after the liaison interpreting task, the examiners conducted a one-to-one interview with the subjects, asking them to report retrospectively on their processing of I&Os. The whole experiment lasted for around 10 minutes for each subject (approximately six for the interpreting, and four for the retrospective interviews) and was recorded and later transcribed. The recordings of the interpreting were analysed digitally to calculate I&Os processing time (the measurement being introduced in the next paragraphs); the transcriptions were used to identify coping strategies and their effects; and the qualitative data obtained from the interviews were used to explain how and why decisions were made during interpreting.

The measurement of I&Os processing time is by no means clear-cut. Since the I&Os were scattered throughout the source texts, we had to determine the beginning and ending of the processing of each instance. Due to the general existence of ear-voice span in interpreting, we decided to include the pause time immediately before delivery and the time taken to deliver the target text in our calculation of processing time (cf. Jakobsen et al., 2007; Zheng & Xiang, 2013), since pauses are usually seen as a "run-up" to production (Dragsted & Hansen, 2008: 25), signaling the cognitive effort required "to activate the mental structure underlying the subsequent speaking increment" (Schilperoord, 1996: 11). This rough measure, however, would probably not pass a psycholinguistics examination board. Without the reinforcement that eye movement and neuro activity data might supply, we could not know for certain how much time was spent on planning the production of the I&O segment and how much was spent on monitoring the previous production segment. With the method used here, we could only hope that, when measurements were averaged, the signal from I&Os processing would be stronger than the noise from uncontrolled variability.

We then imported all the recorded interpreting materials by the 22 subjects into *Audacity 2.0.3* so that they would be represented as oscillograms. Figure 1 represents S_3's processing of I_1 (Chinese-to-English, C-E) in Example 1. We started counting immediately after 'percent' (1:57.6) was pronounced and stopped at the last sound of 'tricky' (2:01.5); therefore, the processing time for I_1 was 3.9 seconds (2:01.5-1:57.6 = 3.9).

Example 1. (with I/O in bold)
ST: *九折？这老外鬼精鬼精的。好吧。*
[GT: Ten percent off? The foreigner is so cunning. Fine.]
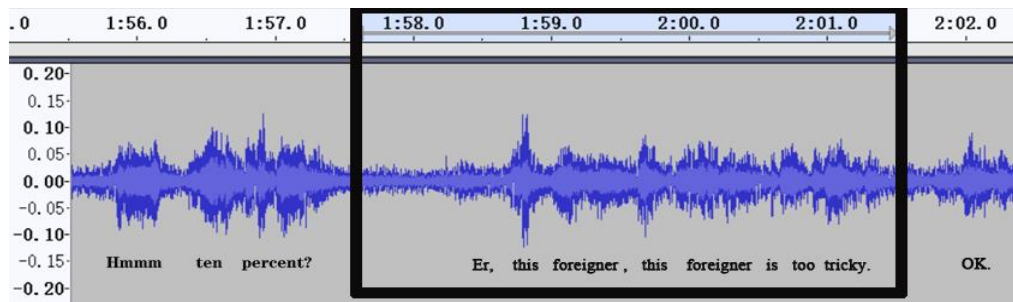TT: Hmmm ten percent? **Er, this foreigner, this foreigner is too tricky.** OK.

Figure 1. Oscillographic representation of the interpretation of I_1(C-E)

Figure 2 represents the English-to-Chinese (E-C) interpreting of I_4 in Example 2. The processing time was calculated from the end of '好 (pinyin: hao)' (4:27.6) to that of '画 (pinyin: hua)' (4:30.2), a total of 2.6 seconds (4:30.2- 4:27.6 = 2.6).

Example 2. (with I/O in bold)
ST: It's very kind of you. **But there is no way that I will take such a gift.**
TT: *你真好，但是我还是不能够收下这幅画。*
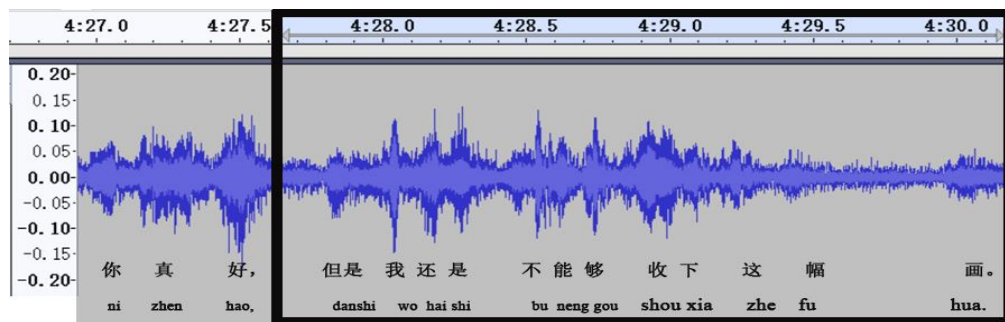[GT: You are so kind, but I still cannot take this painting.]

Figure 2. Oscillographic representation of the interpretation of I_4 (E-C)

4. Results

In our analysis of the interpreter's treatment of I&Os, process and product-oriented approaches were integrated, for both of which two sets of variables were investigated, namely, the translation directionality (C-E VS. E-C), and the two extremes of politeness (impoliteness VS. over-politeness). As Table 1 reveals, there are two utterances in Chinese and three in English labeled as impoliteness, all six in Chinese as over-politeness. Thus, the processing speed for impolitess and overpoliteness would not be exactly comparable as there is no English counterpart in overpolite utterances. Accordingly, we focused on the directionality in the first part. For the product-based analysis, however, our focus shifted to the comparison between impoliteness and over-politeness, as the impact of directionality was automatically encompassed in the discussion over impoliteness.

4.1 Cognitive effort involved in the treatment of I&Os
Our investigation of the cognitive effort involved in interpreting I&Os was based on an analysis of processing time, which has been commonly considered as a window on the cognitive activity intrinsic to speech production (Goldman-Eisler, 1967; Erman, 2007), and has been adopted by several scholars as the primary measure of the cognitive effort made for translation and interpreting (McDonald & Carpenter, 1981; Jakobsen et al., 2007). It might be argued that this is no longer the most advanced measurement of cognitive effort; however, it is difficult to apply more precise neurocognitive methods, such as eye-tracking, EEG and fMRI, in liaison interpreting without reducing the ecological validity of the research design.

Table 2 is based on our calculation of the **P**rocessing **T**ime spent on interpreting **P**er **W**ord (PTPW), with the word count based on the transcription of the oral outputs. For example, in I_1 above, the PTPW=3.9sec/8words=0.49 sec/word. For E-C interpreting as in Example 2, the platform of THULAC (http://thulac.thunlp.org) was chosen for counting the word number of the Chinese transcription: for "但是我还是不能够收下这幅画[4]" the PTPW was 2.6 sec/9 words=0.29 sec/word.

With the aim of exploring whether the inclusion of I&Os had an impact on the subjects' processing time we conducted a paired t-test to compare the PTPW of I&Os with that of the whole text (i.e. the accumulated turns) in the same direction of interpreting.

Table 2. A comparative PTPW analysis between I&Os and the whole texts

	Chinese-to-English	English-to-Chinese
PTPW_ I&Os	0.54	0.54
PTPW_text	0.47	0.53
t-test, p=	0.02*	0.36

PTPW_I&Os: the mean value of PTPW in interpreting I&Os
PTPW_text: the mean value of PTPW in interpreting the whole text
(* $p<.05$)

As Table 2 shows, in C-E interpreting, the interpreters spent significantly more time on interpreting I&Os than on interpreting the whole text (0.54 vs 0.47, $p<.05$), indicating that more complex cognitive activities were herein involved; however, no significant difference was found for English to Chinese interpreting (0.54 vs 0.53, $p>.05$).

Another paired t-test was performed to distinguish between the two groups involved.

Table 3. PTPW analysis of Students and Professionals

	Chinese-to-English		English-to-Chinese	
	PTPW_I&Os	PTPW_text	PTPW_I&Os	PTPW_text
Students	0.62	0.48	0.54	0.59
Professionals	0.46	0.45	0.54	0.46
t-test, p=	0.00**	0.18	0.48	0.00**

(* $p<.05$; **$p<.01$)

A closer examination of Table 2 and Table 3 reveals more interesting findings: 1) During C-E interpreting, Students were actually the only group whose processing was hindered: their PTPW of the whole text was 0.48, while that for I&Os was prolonged to 0.62. The result was supported by their retrospections: for example, "some of them were really tricky, and I was at a loss how to convey the subtle tone into English" (S_3); "I found it particularly challenging to put the Chinese one into English, maybe because English is not my mother tongue" (S_6). The performance of Professionals, by contrast, was barely affected at all, as shown by the ratio of 0.45 to 0.46. When compared vertically, Professionals processed significantly faster than Students (0.46 vs 0.62). 2) In E-C interpreting, Students exhibited an opposite trend: their processing of I&Os was faster than that for the whole text (0.54 vs 0.59); Professionals, however, were slower in this respect (0.54 vs 0.46). When compared vertically with Students, they achieved the same PTPW for I&Os (0.54); however, considering that their E-C PTPW of the whole text was significantly faster (0.46 vs 0.59), they had obviously experienced some difficult choices herein. Their retrospective reports were then referred to for possible explanations; the following extracts are typical examples

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[4] This sentence is counted as 9 words: '但是' '我' '还是' '不' '能够' '收下' '这' '幅' '画' [GT: But / I / still / not / can / take / this / piece of / painting].

"these expressions might be regarded as inappropriate by the Chinese side" (P₁); "I had to weigh whether they are acceptable in the target language while interpreting, and if not, how to make them better received"(P₉). From the above, it is safe to draw the conclusion that while Students were more concerned with the linguistic level, and thus found the C-E interpreting of I&Os more challenging and requiring more effort, Professionals were much more sensitive to the potential pragmatic effects of politeness, and spontaneously shouldered responsibility for coordinating and facilitating the interaction. Also, compared with Students, Professionals in this study seemed more careful with their Chinese employer's face.

The analysis on the processing time would not be complete without considering the cases where no processing time was invested: zero interpreting (the whole I/O being omitted), a solution frequently resorted to by all subjects (22.1% by Students and 30.5% by Professionals). A Mann-Whiney test indicated that the number of zero interpreting of I/Os was greater for Professionals (Median=3) than for Students (Median=2), however, the difference is not significant, with U=35, p=.087. Its generous use triggered our interest, which would lead to a discussion over whether it's an intentional strategy in Section 4.2.

4.2 Coping strategies applied in the treatment of I&Os

In the second part of our study we compared the different coping strategies employed by Students and Professionals in interpreting I&Os. We deliberately use the term "coping strategies" rather than "interpreting strategies", since the subjects did not "just interpret", but simultaneously shouldered the task of coordinating face-work by employing strategies beyond interpreting. Hence, in the following analysis, the term "coping strategies" does not include "literal interpreting", i.e., linguistic transcodification (Molina & Albir, 2002) with its "mandatory shifts and word-order changes" (Newmark, 1988: 31).

Coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, Felberg & Šarić, 2017) are not an entirely new concept in interpreting studies. In Metzger's (1999) corpus-based study, the interpreters were found to influence the interactive discourse by interruptions, clarifications, and taking the initiative to answer questions from each party themselves. Other strategies observed by previous researchers included: the control of turn-taking (Roy, 2000), borrowing, substitution, addition, omission (Ivir, 1998), paraphrasing (Savvalidou, 2011), translation style (Napier 2016), the use of honorifics (Nakane, 2008), politeness markers (Mason, 2008; Palazzi, 2014), modality, register (Mason & Stewart, 2001) and hedges (Magnifico & Defrancq, 2017).

In our study, we first excluded five incomplete interpretations, such as S_2O_5 ("if you like it, I'll…"). The remaining 237 instances of I&O (117 for Students and 120 for Professionals) were then compared one-by-one with the source texts to examine their closeness or deviation, and this formed the basis for our categorization of the coping strategies. Not surprisingly, when confronted with such potentially FTAs, the subjects spontaneously adopted a multitude of strategies (sometimes two or three at one go) and actively coordinated the face-work.

Our first interest lay in the subjects' frequent use of the controversial strategy of omission. Having been traditionally defined as an error of performance (Barik, 1975), it has recently been argued from a pragmatic perspective that omissions are a conscious decision and positive coping strategy to ensure effective interpretations (Wadensjö, 1998; Napier, 2016). We held that they could be both, and felt that the most reasonable way to distinguish between errors and strategies would be to dig into the subjects' retrospective reports. Table 4 lists the four categories of the groups' omissions based on Napier's (2016: 64) omission taxonomy[5].

Table 4. Categorization of omissions by Students and Professionals

Omission types	Operational Definition	Students	Quotes from retrospections	Profes sionals	Quotes from retrospections

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[5] One of Napier's five categories, "Conscious receptive" which occurs when the interpreter fails to decipher what was heard owing to reported poor sound quality, was not identified from our subjectsubjects' retrospections.

Conscious strategic	made consciously to enhance the effectiveness of the interpretation, or to coordinate the face-work in this case.	6 (23.1%)	"may sound impolite if translated"; "rude"; "too straightforward"	29 (76.3%)	"unnecessary to be heard"; "may offend the other side"; "couldn't facilitate the communication if translated"
Conscious intentional	caused by a lack of understanding of a particular lexical item or an inability to think of an appropriate equivalence in the target language.	15 (57.7%)	"didn't know how to translate '鬼精'"; "didn't how to deal with '伯乐 as it's culture-embedded"	2 (5.3%)	"couldn't at that time come up with an equivalent for '鬼精"
Conscious unintentional	caused by memory lapses and failure to choose the optimal moment for interpreting.	4 (15.4%)	"was about to translate but then forgot it", "more words poured in before I could react"	4 (10.5%)	"missed it because of the lag time"; "waited for more contextual information and then forgot about it"
Unconscious	happens when the interpreter is unaware of the omission and does not recall hearing the particular lexical item.	1 (3.8%)	"didn't notice it"	3 (7.9%)	"cannot recall hearing it"
Total		26		38	

Overall, Professionals used omission much more liberally than Students (38: 26). As shown by Table 4, the overriding majority of Professionals (76.3%) resorted to omission as a conscious strategy in their attempt to protect the interlocutors' faces and facilitate the communication, while most of Students' omissions fell into the conscious intentional category (57.7%), being hasty options in the face of a cognitive overload, caused by their vain attempts to deliver appropriate equivalences in the target language on the spot.

Besides omission, various coping strategies were employed, which we grouped into lexical and syntactic strategies (Trosborg, 1995: 209). Lexical strategies include politeness markers—such as 'please', 'sorry'; lexical hedges—such as 'seem', 'perhaps', '有点 (kinda)' etc.; avoidance—the non-treatment of certain sensitive words as '您老 (you at such a senior age'); negative-positive shift of lexical meaning—such as reversing'鬼精鬼精 (cunning)' into 'a smart businessman/wise'. Syntactic strategies, on the other hand, include question forms, conditional clauses, modals, the subjunctive mood, epistemic hedges—such as 'I think', 'we assume'. Examples of various coping strategies are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Interpreting versions and strategies adopted in the case of O_1

	Interpreting versions: 您老一定累坏了吧？ (GT: You, at such a senior age, must be exhausted?)	**Strategies applied** (L) for lexical strategy (S) for Syntactic strategy	**Representative Subjects**
V1	You must be very tired.	(L) avoidance	P_2, S_4
V2	Do you feel tired? / Are you tired?	(S) modality, (L) downgrader,	S_{11}, P_1
V3	I think you must be tired.	(S) hedge, (L) downgrader	P_2
V4	I feel, I hope you've enjoyed your trip.	(S) hedge, (S) adoption of greetings (or expressions) accustomed to the target culture	P_{10}

The number of the two streams of coping strategies, together with that of literal interpreting used by both groups is presented in Table 6, with a follow-up Mann-Whitney test presented in Table 7.

Table 6. Number of literal interpreting and coping strategies by Students and Professionals

Strategies	Students	Professionals	Top 5 strategies
Literal Interpreting	**36**	**12**	
Lexical Coping Strategies	**63**	**82**	
addition	7	7	
avoidance	21	8	ST1
downgrader	9	18	ST4, PT3
lexical hedges	10	27	ST2, PT1
negative-positive shift of meaning	9	1	ST4
politeness marker	1	20	PT2
upgrader	6	1	
Syntactic Coping Strategies	**29**	**72**	
addition	1	5	
adoption of greetings accustomed to the target culture	0	11	PT5
change from statements to questions	3	1	
change of subject from sb. to sth./it/there	2	3	
change of subject from 'you' to 'I/we'	6	3	
conditional clause	4	8	
distancing	0	7	
epistemic hedges	1	14	PT4
explanation of cultural differences	0	5	
modals	10	7	ST2
unsolicited suggestion	0	3	
subjunctive mood	2	5	

*ST1-ST5 stands for Students' Top 5 strategies; PT1-PT5 for Professionals' Top 5 strategies.

Table 7. Median and Mann Whitney test on the three streams of strategies used by Students and Professionals

	Literal interpreting	Lexical coping strategies	Syntactic coping strategies
Students	3	5	2
Professionals	1	7	6
Mann Whitney test	U=3, p=.000	U=33, p=.068	U=12.5, p=.001

It is evident that both Students and Professionals were conscious of politeness-related issues and adopted active intervention strategies. Only 28.1% (36/128) of the strategies used by Students in their treatment of I&Os came into the category of "literal interpreting", and the percentage was even lower for Professionals: a mere 7.2% (12/166). Considering that literal interpreting is the only option in line with the norms governing the interpreting profession, the scant use of it in our study is clear evidence that the interpreters (Professionals in particular) were sensitive to the face needs of the interlocutors and themselves and at times switched to a mediator's role, negotiating face during the event.

We were more interested in the divergences between the two groups, however. To start with, Professionals appeared to be more sensitive to face-work than Students and more prepared to shoulder the responsibility for coordinating, since they employed significantly more non-interpreting strategies, especially at the syntactic level. As revealed by Table 7, Professionals (median=1) applied significantly less literal interpreting strategies than Students (median=3) (p= .000); but significantly more syntactic coping strategies (U=12.5, p=.001). Regarding the lexical coping strategies, Professionals had a greater number (median=7) than Students (median=5), while the difference is not significant (p=.068). On the whole, they were bolder and less constrained by sentence structures than Students, probably as a result of their better command of the languages. Students, by contrast, seemed more comfortable with minor adjustments than with structural reconstructing, given the limited time and resources.

The Top 5 strategies used by each group intrigued us as well. Apart from the preference for lexical hedges and lexical downgraders common to both groups, their Top 5 lists took on wholly different looks. Professionals' PT2, PT4 and PT5 strategies, namely, politeness

markers, epistemic hedges and adoption of greetings accustomed to the target culture, were used hardly at all by Students. In the same vein, Students' ST4 strategy, namely the negative-positive shift of meaning, which was used in extreme cases where the face-threatening tone was thinly veiled, was seldom used by Professionals.

The last observation worthy of attention is that Professionals, interestingly, showed more concern about their own face than Students, as evidenced in their treatment of O_6, I_4 and I_5: when the Chinese businessman repeatedly urged his guest to take the gift, the strategy of "distancing" was consciously employed. By adopting frame devices such as "but he insists that…", "he says…", Professionals made explicit their non-responsibility for the potentially face-threatening request/refusal; this was confirmed in the rationales given in their retrospective reports, such as "I don't want to offend the client myself" (P_8), and "I don't want to sound pushy or imposing" (P_6).

4.3 The effects of coping strategies
To evaluate the effects of these non-interpreting interventions, we invited the judging panel who had rated the 11 I&Os in the source text to rate the 237 pieces of target text using the same 1-9 Likert scale. The ratings were then compared one-by-one with those for the source text, to find out whether they were increased or decreased. If increased, the target text of I&Os was labelled "Aggravating"; if decreased, "Mitigating"; if remaining unchanged, "Retaining"; or, if judged by more than half of the panel as having failed to fulfil the communicative goal of the original text, it was labelled "Deviating". Examples of all these classifications are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Coping strategies used in the case of I_5 interpreting and their effects

Subjects	ST: I feel very awkward taking this painting.	Strategies applied (L) for lexical strategy (S) for syntactic strategy	Effects of the strategies
P_2	*这老外可能真的不要。可能你还是不要勉强他。我看，咱们的中国礼仪在很多地方老外还说不一定能接受的。我告诉你。你看吧。* (GT: The foreigner may not want it. I don't think it's a good idea to push him. You know, not all our Chinese customs are necessarily accepted by the Westerns. You have my word here. See by yourself.)	(S) distancing, (S) unsolicited suggestion, (S) explanation of cultural differences, (S) imperative sentence	Retaining Aggravating Mitigating Aggravating
P_{11}	*我觉得收下这个礼物有点，呃…不好意思。* (GT: Well, I feel a bit, er…a bit uneasy taking this painting.)	(S) hedge, (L) hedge, (L) downgrader	Mitigating Mitigating Mitigating
S_1	*如果我收下的话，我真是太坏了。* (GT: If I take it, it will be too bad of me.)	(S) conditional clause, (L) upgrader	Mitigating Aggravating
S_2	*嗯，我感到很荣幸收下这幅画。* (GT: It's my great honour taking this painting.)	(L) negative-positive shift of lexical meaning	Deviating

All the strategies used to treat the 237 instances of I&O were then assessed for their effects, the results being presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Effects of the coping strategies employed by Students and Professionals

	Students		Professionals	
	Impolite utterances	Over-polite utterances	Impolite utterances	Over-polite utterances
Retaining	2 (3.4%)	1(2.9%)	2 (2.6%)	1 (1.3%)
Mitigating	44 (75.9%)	26 (76.3%)	72 (92.3%)	73 (96.1%)
Aggravating	6 (10.3%)	3 (8.8%)	3 (3.8%)	2 (2.6%)
Deviating	6 (10.3%)	4 (11.8%)	1 (1.3%)	0
Total	**58**	**34**	**78**	**76**

Two points stand out. Firstly, Students adopted fewer coping strategies than Professionals (92 vs. 154), especially when dealing with over-polite utterances (34 vs. 76). Besides the self-evident fact that Professionals were more conscious of and certain about their own role of coordinating the face-work, we may also safely conclude that, while Professionals

were equally concerned with impolite and over-polite utterances, Students were more sensitive towards impolite utterances than over-polite ones, which may indicate that the latter sound less offending to their ears.

Secondly, the majority of the coping strategies (75.9%-96.1%) employed by both groups succeeded in mitigating the face-threatening force of the utterances, with the percentage for Professionals being higher than 90%, showing that they were aware of the strategies and their intentions, and able to navigate towards the intentions. The other three effects were rare; however, the "Deviating" and "Aggravating" effects aroused our curiosity, since they seemed to run counter to instinct. Students were found to be more likely to deviate from or even go against the interlocutors' intention in extreme cases in their eagerness to erase the face-threatening tone (I_5 as mentioned above). The examination of "Aggravating" also uncovered differences between the two groups: In the Student group, the aggravating effect was achieved in most cases by the use of lexical upgraders ('cannot' altered to 'must not', for instance), and their retrospective reports revealed that they had not deliberately tried to attenuate the face-threatening force but rather, had simply failed to come up with an accurate equivalence or even had not noticed the subtle differences. The five aggravating strategies used by Professionals, interestingly, were all employed by the same subject (P_2) and were regarded by the judging panel as a deliberate choice. Despite his good intentions, the strategies he employed in his attempt to explain cultural differences – imperative sentences, and unsolicited suggestions - risked threatening the Chinese businessman's positive face, as they might be taken as implying the businessman's ignorance of Western etiquette.

5. Discussion

Our analysis of the professional and student interpreters' handling of I&Os shows that the differences were caused more by the extent to which the interpreters related to the situational and cultural contexts (Feng 2019) and made on-the-spot interpretations of the interlocutors' message, than by how well they understood the literal meaning of the SL and recoded it into the TL. As rightly claimed by Halliday (1981: 48), languages do not function outside cultural and situational contexts, and interpreters have to constantly consider the pragmatic implications of their work (Krouglov, 1999). By relating the interpreters' pragmatic competence to their cognitive effort and coping strategies, we suppose to raise an interpreter's perspective of politeness in Section 5.1 and 5.2.

5.1 Cognitive effort in the treatment of I&Os

Levy (1988) compared translation and interpreting as a decision process, in which the translator / interpreter is forced to choose among a certain number of alternatives, and pointed out that the decision process is influenced by factors that are highly pragmatic under the guidance of the so-called "minimax strategy", i.e. choice for the one of the possible alternatives that yields maximum effect with minimum effort (1988: 48).

In the cases of I&Os, It is to be expected that they require from the interpreter a higher level of pragmatic competence in the decision-making process than other expressions, as they tend to contradict the expectation of the hearer and put the interpersonal relationship at risk. Departing from Levy's minimax strategy, in this section it is construed as higher efficiency/less processing time with better effects.

One proof of the interpreters' balancing between effort and effects lies in their strategic use of omission. Professionals were found to omit I&Os much more liberally (with evidence from the quantitative data) and intentionally (with evidence from retrospective reports) than Students. This finding is partly compatible with Felberg and Šarić (2017), who concluded through an online survey of public service interpreters that omission is used infrequently, but when it is used, it is assumed to be a conscious strategy or even a "technical necessity". Using the notion of 'moral order', Felberg and Šarić (2017) explained that professional interpreters' deliberate choice of omission was owing to the priority they gave to the

broader moral order of being polite and positive over the moral order of fidelity as prescribed by ethical guidelines. By omitting the I&Os and thus exerting minimal effort, Professionals in our study achieved maximum effect, as they protected the hearer from statements that may have had potentially undesirable effects.

In the instances where omission was not used, the processing speed for both groups was slowed, which is a strong indicator that more cognitive effort was then required in the treatment of I&Os. This result confirms our assumption that I&Os are more cognitively demanding in interpreter-mediated events, and at the same time reveals that both Professionals and Students had some pragmatic awareness that these utterances needed to be treated more carefully. The results also show that Professionals were mainly slowed down in E-C interpreting, caused by their concern over the interlocutors' face, especially that of the Chinese employer, while Students were mainly hindered in C-E interpreting, mostly due to their inability to come up with equivalences for particular Chinese terms. Hence, we can safely conclude that Professionals had more pragmatic awareness and competence than Students when interpreting I&Os. Our findings regarding omission and processing time complement Rafieyan's (2016) findings, which stated that translators who have a higher ability to comprehend and interpret the pragmatic perspectives of the SL are equally well equipped with the ability required to present these pragmatic perspectives in the TL, which goes a long way towards minimizing the processing effort by the target readers/hearers. Our study moves one step further by revealing that Professionals, as the group with the higher pragmatic competence, were able to minimize their own processing effort in their simultaneous analysis of the source text message and the communicative situation of the target language and their constant balancing between the cost in time and the effect achieved.

5.2 Coping strategies and their effects

Angelelli (2003: 17) proposed that "the interpreter is visible with all the social and cultural factors that allow him/her to co-construct the interaction", which implies that an interpreter cannot perform adequately without some knowledge of the pragmatic conventions for performing language functions appropriately in a given context (Canale, 1998: 90). In the cases of FTAs, the interpreter is obliged to exercise latitude and modify originals by paraphrasing, explaining or simplifying in order to achieve the communicative effect desired by the interlocutors (Pöchhacker, 2004: 57).

Both groups of interpreters in this study were obviously endowed with this type of pragmatic competence, in that they did not act as invisible agents, but deliberately assumed a more expanded role and employed various pragmatic strategies other than literal interpreting when dealing with the I&Os. There were still differences between the groups in this respect, however. In general, Professionals exhibited a greater freedom in their choice of coping strategies, especially syntactic strategies and the use of omission, showing that they were more confident and willing to shoulder the responsibility for negotiating face issues. Students, however, used significantly more literal interpreting and fewer coping strategies, especially at the syntactic level. This divergence may again find its explanation in the conflict between moral orders and norms. In the cases of FTAs such as I&Os, the requirement to translate literally conflicts with the fact that languages do not encode politeness in strictly equivalent ways (Mason & Stewart, 2001). Whether an interpreter should give priority to the professional norm of faithfulness or to the social norm of politeness in the target culture is determined by the interpreter's on-the-spot assessment of the linguistic, situational and cultural elements and the communicative goals of the interactional occasion. With more experience and higher levels of pragmatic awareness/competence derived from that experience, Professionals were able to be more flexible in their use of strategies to reduce the intensity of impoliteness and over-politeness and to negotiate the face-work.

Another interesting finding is that two of Professionals' Top 5 strategies, politeness makers and the adoption of greetings accustomed to the target culture, were used hardly by Students. The frequent spontaneous addition of politeness markers such as 'please', 'I'm sorry' speaks for itself, indicating that Professionals assumed English speakers to be

generally 'more polite' based on sets of rules of conduct elaborated by English society (Krouglov, 1999), and were willing to make adjustments accordingly in their concern over the interlocutors' face needs. The replacement of greetings accustomed in the source culture with those in the target culture was also a behaviour peculiar to Professionals. Conscious of the discrepancies between Chinese and English conventions (e.g., in declining gifts, cf. Wang, 2001), they jumped out of the role of interpreter and chose a more acceptable way to convey the greetings (in some other cases, they added cultural explanations to the interlocutors for the same purpose). These two strategies confirmed our observation that Professionals, with their higher pragmatic competence, were more aware that politeness might be perceived differently in different cultures than Students (Culpeper et al., 2010). They were better able to understand the original text and the cultural elements embedded in it, and spontaneously mediated in a way that would provide the target text with sufficient contextual support to facilitate communication.

The interpreters' interventions yielded expected results: the overriding majority of their coping strategies succeeded in mitigating the face-threatening force implied in the utterances, with only a few exceptions when they aggravated or retained the force or deviated from the purpose of the communication. This observation runs counter to Krouglov's (1999) finding that the addition of particles or polite forms by police interpreters can lead to an inaccurate perception and possibly even the loss of important information in police investigations. The discrepancy between the two studies may be caused by the nature of the interaction being interpreted and by the clients' expectations in a particular setting (Ciordia, 2016). Besides the fact that Professionals had a higher ratio of effective coping strategies, they were also found to have a deeper, wider awareness of the contextual constraints. In other words, they attached equal importance to situational and cultural constraints and were willing and competent to intervene under them. Students, by contrast, seemed to consider the situational context more than the cultural context, or, as suggested by some of their retrospections, did notice the cultural elements but could not spare the effort to make necessary coordination owing to the limits of time and their cognitive resources.

6. Conclusion

The study investigtes how impolite and over-politeness utterances were interpreted and coordinated by professional and student interpreters. The findings may be summarized as follows: Firstly, impolite and over-polite utterances did slow down the interpreters' processing speed, which in turn suggests that more cognitive effort was entailed in dealing with them than with the rest of the dialogue. Professionals were mainly affected in the E-C direction due to their concern over the Chinese employer's face, while Students were more affected when interpreting from Chinese to English due to their lower command of the English language. This divergence, together with Professionals' more liberal and strategic use of omission, was caused by Professionals' higher level of pragmatic competence in constantly balancing between the cost in processing time and the effects achieved. Secondly, various coping strategies beyond the scope of literal interpreting were adopted by both groups. Professionals tended to use strategies more generously and intentionally, especially syntactic ones. Based on their criteria of what was appropriate after considering the situational and cultural contexts in which the I&Os were occurring, Professionals tended to give priority to the social norm of politeness over the professional norm of fidelity. Thirdly, the coping strategies used by the interpreters, especially Professionals, yielded positive outcomes: the face-threatening tone was successfully mitigated in most cases. Professionals, with their higher level of pragmatic competence, obviously had a better control of their intentions and the strategies required to fulfill them.

As an attempt to integrate pragmatics into the analysis of interpreters' treatment of I&Os, this study sheds new lights on interlingal politeness and interpreter's role. First, in the field of pragmatics, this study challenges the static and pre-defined notion of politeness and offers new possibilities for looking at politeness as dynamically co-constructed from an interlingual and cross-cultural perspective; second, by introducing the concept of "intercultural pragmatic competence" into interpreting studies, this study highlights the complexity of the interpreter's dual role of interpreting and coordinating. We hope that the

analytical tools we have described here and the interpretations of our observations of the pragmatic approach interpreters adopt in treating I&Os, will contribute to the debate currently taking place in politeness research. One of the crucial implications of raising an interpreter's perspective of politeness is how developments in this field can be used to help reconstitute interpreter training as an intercultural endeavour. The comparison between Professionals and Students' performance suggests the necessity for cultivating interpreters' pragmatic awareness and competence as part of interpreters' skill set, which would contribute to the professionalization of liaison interpreters so as to better satisfy the clients' expectations.

There are a few caveats that we feel obliged to make. Firstly, the rough measurement of processing time may not be an adequate indicator of cognitive load. While ackowledging the "overall methodogical weakness in translation studies" (Gile, 2004: 29), like a lot of other scholars conducting experimental work in our field, we are still searching for a good point of balance between experimental control and ecological validity. Secondly, this empirical study was relatively limited in scope, with only 11 I&O sentences from two interpreting samples being analysed. However, it is clear that there is a need for a greater synthesis between pragmatics and interpreting studies. Corroborating studies need to be carried out on a larger scale and supported by broader streams of data.

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