Making incongruent requests: discourse analysis of conversations between American and Chinese speakers of English in international student advising sessions

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Making incongruent requests:
Discourse analysis of conversations between American and Chinese
speakers of English in international student advising sessions

by

Wenqin Shen

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English (Teaching English as a Second Language/Applied Linguistics)
Major Professor: Roberta Vann

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
1998
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Graduate College
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This is to certify that the Master’s thesis of

Wenqin Shen

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy
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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a discourse analysis of conversations between American and Chinese speakers of English in international student advising sessions at a large midwestern university in the US. The study was a partial replication of Bardovi-Harlig's (1990) study of congruence in academic advising interviews. The major goal was to investigate how the notion of congruence was realized in international student advising interviews, how incongruent requests were negotiated, and how the use of status-preserving strategies (SPS) and politeness strategies affected such negotiations.

This thesis project was based on the observation of 20 international student advising sessions involving 3 American advisors (NSEs) and 23 international students (NNSEs) in the pilot study and on the analyses of 15 audiotaped advising sessions between one American advisor and 16 Chinese students in the principal study. The study showed that whether a request was congruent or not was constrained by institutional rules as well as the student's awareness of these rules. A request which violated a policy, of which the student was aware beforehand was deemed incongruent; continuing to pursue an issue after being rejected by the advisor was also considered incongruent.

The use of SPS and politeness strategies testifies to the students' pragmatic competence. Students who used such strategies as downgraders, small talk, laughter, query preparatory, hints, and suggestions turned out to be able to maintain a good conversation climate and mitigate the potential face threat of their requests. In contrast, students who failed to use these strategies and utilized upgraders, rejection and instructive statements, lost not only the approval for their requests, but also a good rapport with the advisor, and risked face for both themselves and the advisor.

The thesis expanded the research of counseling interviews and pragmatics, provided instances of cross-cultural communication, and offered pedagogical implications for EFL instruction in China.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Job or counseling interviews are ubiquitous in modern societies. From time to time one finds oneself talking face-to-face with a person in power. The interview conversation as a special genre of discourse has interested researchers from diverse academic disciplines. Kress and Fowler (1979) examined one commercial employment interview and one university admission interview, and outlined the structure of the latter. They revealed the dual role the student plays in an academic interview. On the one hand, as a status subordinate, the student needs to be "polite, unrebellious, modest" (75). On the other, as a prospective student, he has to present himself as a worthy potential member of the intellectual community. Erickson and Schultz (1982) studied counseling interviews in two junior colleges and recognized four sequential components within a 10-minute interview: "greeting routine," identification, advising, and "closing routine" (22). They also addressed the power relationship between the interviewer and interviewee. Moreover, they gave prominence to the conflicting role the counselor plays -- gatekeeper of college institutions and "advocate" and "sponsor" of the student’s interests (19).

Based on Agar (1985), Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1992) identified four steps in an academic advising interview and examined the last step -- closing. Several studies have been conducted by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1990, 1993, 1996) to compare the performance of students who were non-native speakers of English (NNSE) with that of students who were native speakers of English (NSE) and to investigate the status balance and comembership between the student and advisor in each dyadic conversation, the students’ pragmatic

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1 The interview structure outlined by Kress and Fowler (1979) is slightly adapted as follows:
   i. An opening sequence in which participant roles are established;
   ii. Getting down to business, addressing the substance of the interview;
   iii. A sequence of questions and responses on predictable subjects;
   iv. An invitation to the candidate to ask a few token questions;
   v. A dismissal sequence. (79)
In 1990, Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford inspected congruence — "the match of a speaker's status and the appropriateness of speech acts given that status" as a factor in determining the success of NSE and NNSE interaction in academic advising sessions (473). An incongruent speech act is therefore one not in accord with one's status. An example of a congruent speech act for students in academic advising sessions is requesting advice for scheduling; in contrast, an incongruent one is rejecting the advisor's advice. The maxim of congruence is "Make your contribution congruent with your status" (477). When congruence is impossible, incongruence should be mitigated by using a status-preserving strategy (SPS). Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford claimed that because of the high proficiency level of their NNSE participants, whether they could use SPSs was not determined by their linguistic competence but rather by their pragmatic competence.

Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford's series of studies of academic advising sessions, especially their notion of congruence interested me and I decided to build upon their work in a different context: that of international student advising sessions. Not only had I been a participant in such sessions, but as a member of a community of about 600 Chinese students at a large university, I was interested in identifying and probing some communication problems between Chinese speakers of English and native speakers of English.

In the summer of 1997, I conducted a month-long study in which I observed 20 advising sessions, intending to identify speech acts violating the maxim of congruence as defined by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1990) and to compare these speech acts with Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford's findings in academic advising sessions. I recognized two types of incongruent speech acts, directives and petitions, which were missing in Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford's study, and learned that compliments could be classified as congruent speech acts, which contradicts Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford's categorization of them as incongruent ones. Moreover, I noticed that making a request is an omnipresent theme throughout almost all advising interviews. Students come to request information, advice, permission, and help.
The many reasons that students have for coming to the international student office can essentially be summarized as requests.

The congruence of a request is situationally contingent and hence relative. First of all, an incongruent request is an inappropriate request that does not match the speaker’s status and role in specific situations. In an international student advising context, whether a request is appropriate is constrained by institutional policies as well as students’ awareness of these policies. In this sense, a request which violates a policy, of which the student is aware beforehand is deemed incongruent. Continuing to pursue an issue after the student has been explained that such matters are inappropriate is also seen as incongruent. An example of an incongruent request about the visa issue is when students ask to reduce the living expenses on the I-20 form after they are told by the advisor that they have to meet university standards.

Through the examination of prior investigations and my own pilot study, I realized that although much work has been done to date, more studies are needed to investigate the mechanism of interview conversations for the following reasons:

1. Previous researchers have investigated academic advising interviews, but no research has been done on international students' advising interviews, between advisors as NSEs, and advisees as NNSEs. Nonetheless, international students form an important part of the student community at American universities, and for these international students, advising interviews and the discourse framed by such interviews are an inalienable part of their lives and education in the US. Attending the advising sessions helps maintain their status and a pleasant studying experience in the sense that it prevents them from making decisions that will make them fall out of status. So a study which investigates the dynamics of such encounters will help reveal which interactional skills the students need to improve.

2. The notion of congruence has been applied to academic advising interviews but not yet to international student advising interviews.

3. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1990) did not identify the contexts surrounding incongruent requests in their studies.
4. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1990) recognized six status-preserving strategies, both linguistic and non-linguistic, but they did not explain how their SPSs related to Brown and Levinson’s politeness theories. In addition, Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford’s list of SPSs may be far from comprehensive. In this study, I want to determine if other strategies are used by NNSEs.

5. In Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford’s (1990) study, the NNSEs, who were all graduate students in linguistics, have TOEFL scores of 573 and above. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford thus labeled the English proficiency of these NNSEs as “advanced level” (468). In my study, I want to compare the overall English proficiency level of the Chinese students to that of the NNSE students in Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford’s study and examine the validity of their assertion that NNSEs’ failure to use SPSs “is not attributable to lack of linguistic competence but to lack of context-specific pragmatic competence” (468).

Consequently I have the following research questions:

1. How is an international student advising interview organized? Is it structurally the same as that of an academic advising interview?

2. How does a request, a congruent speech act in Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford’s study become incongruent in international student advising sessions? How is the notion of congruence or incongruence, in the case of requests, specifically manifested or redefined in international student advising sessions?

3. Among the status-preserving strategies identified by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, what are those used by Chinese students in international student advising sessions? Besides Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford’s status-preserving strategies, what are other strategies that occur and how are they realized linguistically and non-linguistically?

4. What effect does the degree of potential for an incongruent request in the focal topic have on the interview, especially the advisor’s response and the interview structure? What are the differences between negotiations of congruent requests and those of incongruent requests?
5. Are there any differences in the negotiations of incongruent requests across sessions? If yes, what does this tell about the use of status-preserving strategies and politeness strategies?

6. What is the overall proficiency of the Chinese students as measured by their TOEFL and GRE verbal scores? What does this tell about the role of pragmatic competence in the students’ use or absence of SPSs and politeness strategies?

This study involved discourse analysis of international student advising conversations in the tradition of Conversation Analysis. My purpose was to investigate how incongruent requests were negotiated in international student advising sessions and how the use of SPS and politeness strategies affected such negotiations. A second goal was to offer a descriptive study of the strategies used by Chinese students in making incongruent requests in international student advising conversations.

The research in this thesis may be of value in various ways. First, it may present a picture of request negotiation in authentic international student advising sessions and thus expand the research of counseling interviews. Secondly, it is a study of pragmatics and may shed some light on the pragmatic research of request as a speech act. Thirdly, although the intercultural aspect of the data is not addressed, the study itself provides instances of cross-cultural communication in institutional settings. Fourth, it may offer pedagogical implications for EFL instructors in China and raise their awareness of the importance of pragmatics in cross-cultural encounters.

Chapter 2 of this thesis is a review of literature. Chapter 3 explains the methods used for this study. Data analysis and the results of the study will be discussed in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, I will draw conclusions, give implications of this study, and make recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I will review three strands of prior literature relevant to this study: (1) literature on the theoretical framework of this study, including discourse analysis versus conversation analysis and pragmatics; (2) literature that helps account for the findings in this study, including some concepts in conversation analysis such as adjacency pairs, insertion sequences and preference organization, face-work and politeness strategies, the counselor as gatekeeper and comembership, and coding systems for requests and laughter; (3) literature upon which this study is built and which it partially replicates, i.e., Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford’s study of congruence in academic advising interviews.

Discourse Analysis versus Conversation Analysis

Stubbs (1983) defined discourse analysis as “the linguistic analysis of naturally occurring connected spoken or written discourse” (1). It studies language organization beyond the sentence or clause, i.e., such linguistic units as “conversational exchanges or written texts” in social contexts (1).

Grabe (1984) provided a detailed illustration of how discourse analysis means different things to different people. Tannen (1984) pointed out that discourse can occur in any context and in any form, “including two made-up sentences in sequence; a tape recorded conversation, meeting or interview; a novel or play” (6). To her, discourse analysis is never “monolithic;” rather, it is inherently “interdisciplinary” (7). Schiffrin’s (1990) view of discourse analysis accords with these previous researchers. However, she further divided up the definition in two sections and offered two interpretations. One emphasizes “the

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2 Grabe (1984) succinctly illustrated various things involved in discourse analysis in the view of researchers from different disciplines: rhetoricians, functional linguistics, formal linguists, sociolinguists, psycholinguists, cognitive psychologists, applied linguists, composition researchers and educationists, and text linguists (101-102).
linguistic regularities characterizing texts,” which regards “discourse” as the unit of language beyond the level of the sentence; the other emphasizes the social and cultural implications of ways of this speaking, which takes “discourse” as “the use of language” (3). Despite the two different emphases, many who analyze discourse integrate the two concerns.

Tracy (1995) identified five analytical approaches including conversation analysis under the umbrella of discourse analysis. All these researchers have seen discourse analysis as the overarching category. However, discourse analysis is also considered a specific kind of analysis and used in contrast to conversation analysis. In the study of the organization of conversation, Levinson (1983) distinguished discourse analysis from conversation analysis as two major approaches to the analysis of conversation. He rejected discourse analysis for the methods, theoretical principles, and primitive concepts advocated, which he said are “typical of linguistics” (286). Specifically, discourse analysis employs the following procedure: (a) isolating a group of units or categories of discourse; (b) forming a set of rules over these categories, “delimiting well-formed sequences of categories (coherent discourses) from ill-formed sequences (incoherent discourse)” (286). There is often an appeal to intuition about this “well-formed formula” and a tendency to give in-depth analysis of a text singled out (286). While admitting its strength of integrating “linguistic findings about intra-sentential organization with discourse structure,” Levinson held that discourse analysis was inappropriate to the area of analyzing conversation (287). Rather, he upheld conversation analysis as “the outstanding empirical tradition in pragmatics,” for its stringently empirical, fundamentally inductive, data-driven methods, its avoidance of premature theory formation and rejection of intuition (285).

For this thesis, I considered conversation analysis as one type of discourse analysis and tried to observe several general principles of conversation analysis as recommended by Schiffrin (1990):

1. The analysis of discourse is empirical.
   a. Data are about how people actually use language rather than how linguists think people use language.
b. Analyses are accountable to data.

2. Discourse is more than just a sequence of linguistic units.

3. There is mutual contextualization between linguistic forms and meanings, which create discourse together with social meanings and interpretive schemata.

4. Conversation is *interactively* negotiated and achieved.

5. What is said, meant, and done is sequentially situated within *local* contexts.

6. How something is said and interpreted is constrained by
   a. speaker intentions
   b. conventionalized strategies for making intentions recognizable
   c. meaning and function of form within contexts
   d. sequential context of other utterances
   e. properties of the discourse mode (narrative, exposition)
   f. social context e.g. participant identities, structure of the situation, setting.

   (9-10) [Emphasis mine]

**Adjacency pairs, insertion sequences, and preference organization**

According to Schegloff and Sacks (1973), adjacency pairs are utterance pairs that are “widely operative in conversation” (195). Adjacency pairs usually have the following features: (1) adjacently positioned; (2) two utterances produced by different speakers; (3) ordered as “a first pair part” and “a second pair part;” (4) two pair parts which are typologically affiliated, e.g., question-answer, request-granting/refusal (293-294). Levinson (1983) pointed out that although adjacency pairs appear to be fundamental in conversational organization, adjacency is “too strong a requirement” in that there are embedded sequences, i.e., insertion sequences, between the two pair parts (304). As a result, the first and second parts (e.g., a question and an answer) may be many turns apart. While insertion sequences sort out the preliminaries of an answer, the answer is often delayed.

Levinson (1983) further pointed out that not all the second parts of an adjacency pair are equal; some types are preferred. Here, preference is a structural concept. Specifically, dispreferred seconds are linguistically marked with various kinds of “structural complexity;” preferred seconds are “unmarked” -- they are much simpler in structure (307). A preferred
response for a question is an expected answer and the dispreferred is an unexpected answer or no answer; a preferred response for a request is acceptance/approval/granting while the dispreferred to it is a rejection/refusal (336). Levinson formulated a rule “to avoid the dispreferred action” (333). Nevertheless, when dispreferred responses do come up, they usually carry the following characteristics: (1) delivery after significant delays (pauses, insertion sequences); (2) preface markers of dispreferreds, often the particle “well”; (3) accounts for dispreferreds; and (4) declination component. Levinson’s preference organization theory is of great importance to the current study in that the way in which the advisor responds to the student’s request not only reflects the congruence of the request but also the way the student makes the request.

Laughter

In conversation analysis, laughter has often been considered as a non-linguistic phenomenon and neglected; however, it often plays an extremely important role in conversations,

either as a means of marking off a sequence, (telling one’s conversational partner that one has ‘got the point’ of a joke), as a signal of embarrassment (‘I don’t really want to pursue this point any further’), as a weak kind of apology or as whatever else fits the context of a particular conversation. (Mey, 1993, 216)

Jefferson (1984) thus described a recurrent phenomenon of laughter in trouble-talk conversations: The speaker (“troubles-teller”) says something and then laughs, and the listener (“troubles-recipient”) does not laugh, but supplies a “recognizably serious response” (346). Comparing an ordinary transcript in which laughter is named and a partially phonological transcript in which laughter is quoted, Jefferson (1985) studied the placement of laughter in relation to the utterance. She found that laughter is not a matter of “he can’t help laugh, but instead can be managed as an interactional resource, as a systematic activity” (34).
Adelsward (1989) also pointed out the strong interactive character of laughter and further investigated its social significance in institutional discourse by studying data from four different institutional settings: job interviews, telephone conversations, post-trial interviews, and negotiations between high-school students. Adelsward noticed that one of the characteristics of a job interview was that “the participants have to manage a social relationship” and establishing “a good climate is both a means and a goal in itself” (119). Adelsward found that laughter was used as one of the strategies to achieve such a climate and that in interviews resulting in a job offer there was more mutual laughter. Here, Adelsward held that laughing “is a sign of mutual rapport and diminishing distance” (120). Adelsward went on to point out that laughter was used by successful interviewees “as a strategy for successful impression management” in that these interviewees had to present themselves favorably while in the meantime maintaining their status as inferior to the interviewers. By laughing, they could frame their contributions “in a humorous or modest mode” and avoid appearing “overly egocentric” (123). In this sense, laughter can be used as a status-preserving strategy, protecting face needs (Goffman 1959, Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987). This also applies to embarrassed laughter. However, embarrassed laughter can signal a “loss of face” when the laugher is defeated or severely discouraged (Adelsward, 1989, 125).

Examining the telephone conversations between mothers and clerks at a social-welfare office, Adelsward demonstrated that laughter is often associated with potentially face-threatening situations. When a person wants to apologize, laughter is used as a “modifying strategy” to “lessen a potential face threat” (126). Laughter used in this situation is often unilateral.

Adelsward’s illustrations of laughter as a device to regulate conversational climate, maintain status difference, and diminish face threats are very important to the laughing events in this study. Making incongruent requests is inherently face-threatening and here, whether a student can employ this device together with other status-preserving strategies may directly affect whether the student is going to have a rapport with the advisor or risk each other’s
face. It may also be helpful to associate the occurrence of laughter with the degree of inappropriateness and hence incongruence of a topic in studying the influence of topic on conversational characteristics.

Pragmatics

The modern usage of the term pragmatics is attributable to Charles Morris’s famous definition of pragmatics as “the study of the relation of signs to interpreters” (1938, 6). Levinson (1983) provided four definitions of pragmatics with emphasis on the four major phenomena pragmatics is concerned with: structural features of language, certain semantic aspects not covered in semantics, “the context-dependent nature” of pragmatics, and the concept of “appropriateness or felicity” of pragmatics. The definition centering around the notion of “appropriateness or felicity” seems to be most relevant to this study: “Pragmatics is the study of the ability of language users to pair sentences with the context in which they would be appropriate” (24).

Crystal (1985) pointed out that modern linguistics has applied pragmatics to the study of language from the perspective of users. He thus defined pragmatics as a matter of “the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction, and the effects their use of language has on the other participants in the act of communication” (240). In this sense, according to Mey (1993), pragmatics shares great similarities to Chomsky’s notion of “performance” which reflects users’ “competence,” their knowledge of a certain language and its rules (36).

The interpretation of pragmatics by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford et al. (1991) showed Levinson’s (1983) influence. By saying that a language learner’s performance is “pragmatically appropriate,” they meant that the language the learner uses observes “social, cultural, and discourse conventions” (4). For them, a speaker’s ability to use utterances “appropriate both for a given speech event and for the participants in that event” demonstrates the speaker’s pragmatic competence (1990, 468). Furthermore, in their study
of academic advising sessions, Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1990) used the two notions "linguistic competence" and "pragmatic competence" in contrast with each other and declared that NNSEs’ lack of success is not attributable to lack of linguistic competence but to lack of context-specific pragmatic competence involving the use, kind, and number of status-preserving strategies as well as the content and form appropriate for noncongruent speech acts. (1990, 468)

Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford’s distinction of the two notions does not mean that they are not aware of the tradition that pragmatics is part of linguistics hence pragmatic competence is part of linguistic competence. Rather, it reflects their consciousness of the importance of pragmatics in language learning and production. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford’s understanding of pragmatics also applies to the current study.

Levinson (1983) pointed out that conversation is the prototypical kind of language usage to which one looks for "insight into pragmatic phenomena" and around which various pragmatic concepts are centrally organized (284). This would undoubtedly identify the present study as an investigation into pragmatics.

Face and Politeness Strategies

Goffman’s face-work

Goffman (1967) defined the term “face” as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (5). Face can be lost, sustained, or elevated. By face-work, Goffman included actions every member of a society takes to “make whatever he is doing consistent with face” (12). On the one hand, the person should have self-respect; on the other hand, he is expected to be considerate for the feelings and the face of others. In other words, the person will have two points of view on face-saving – “a defensive orientation toward saving his own face and a protective orientation toward saving the other’s face” (14). When face is threatened, face-work must be done in compensation.
The surest way for a person to avoid face threats is to shun interaction where such threats are likely to appear -- the so-called “avoidance process” (15). Other basic kinds of face-work include showing respect and politeness and employing “circumlocutions” (17). A “corrective process” is called for “when the participants in an undertaking or encounter fail to prevent the occurrence of an event that is expressively incompatible with the judgments of social worth that are being maintained, and when the event is of the kind that is difficult to overlook” (19, emphasis mine). Such face-work is realized in various politeness strategies in Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory.

**Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory**

Brown and Levinson’s (1978, 1987) notion of “face” was derived from that of Goffman (1967). They identified two categories of face according to participant needs. One is positive face – “the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others”; the other is negative face, which bespeaks the want that one’s action “be unimpeded by others” (62). The fundamental principle for their politeness theory is the idea that “some acts are intrinsically threatening to face and thus require ‘softening’” (24). For this reason, culturally-elaborated politeness strategies are developed by each group of language users to minimize face loss and communicate politely. Such strategies for performing face-threatening acts (FTA) as postulated by Brown and Levinson are summarized in Figure 2.1. The safest way to avoid face loss is to avoid FTA altogether, i.e., Goffman’s “avoidance process.” Bald on-record strategies are employed in emergencies, task-oriented activities, unequal power relationships, and joking or teasing, etc. Examples of off-record, indirect strategies would be giving hints, understating, overstating, being ironic, and using rhetorical questions, and so forth. Positive politeness is used to denote the speaker’s recognition of the hearer’s desire to be liked while negative politeness is required when the speaker recognizes the hearer’s desire not to be bothered. With positive politeness, the speaker tries to claim common ground with the hearer by attending to the latter (e.g. You must be hungry after the long trip), exaggerating
Low risk to face loss

Do FTA

Don’t Do FTA

High risk to face loss

Baldly—Without Redress

On Record

With Redress

Positive Politeness

Negative Politeness

Off Record

Figure 2.1 Brown and Levinson’s politeness strategies

approval, using in-group identity markers (e.g. Help me with this bag, will you pal?), and avoiding disagreement, and so forth. The strategy also conveys cooperation between the speaker and hearer, e.g., by presupposing the speaker’s feelings. With negative politeness, the speaker is conventionally indirect, avoids presuming or assuming, or coercing the hearer. The speaker communicates a desire not to impose on the hearer with speech acts like apologizing, and linguistic features such as the use of impersonal, plural pronouns, passive voice, and indefinites. In short, positive politeness expresses solidarity and negative politeness expresses restraint. Both are tied to the relationship between the speaker and addressee, and the potential offensiveness of the content.

Brown and Levinson (1987) pointed out that requests can threaten the face of both participants. By making a request, the speaker (S) threatens the hearer’s (H’s) negative face in that the former wants the latter to do or not to do something, and hence exerts pressure on the latter. The request offends the S’s negative face as well, in the sense that when a request is granted, S has to express thanks, humbling his own face; when an inappropriate request is made, he has to apologize to admit his guilt or ignorance of something he is expected to know; and when a request is denied, the S’s face wants are not met. For these reasons, requests made by the student in international student advising sessions are also likely to endanger face for both the advisor and the advisee; however, the potential weightiness of different types of requests varies.

Brown and Levinson laid out the following formula to compute the weightiness of an FTA:
Wx = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + Rx

Three factors are counted in the computation: D is the social distance between S and H; P is the relative power H has over S; and Rx is the absolute ranking or degree of imposition of the FTA. Brown and Levinson stated that all three parameters are socially, culturally, and situationally defined. D is based on “stable social attributes”; often it is assessed by “the frequency of interaction and the kinds of material or non-material goods (including face) exchanged between S and H,” especially the exchange of positive face which reflects “social closeness” (77). In international student advising interviews, the student comes to see the advisor only for business purposes, in an official setting, so D can be measured as great and it can be somewhat shortened only when the same student has come to see the same advisor more than once and when each interview is a pleasant experience to both. The advisor, as an institutional representative to assist international students in maintaining their legal, non-immigrant student status, has authorized power over the student. When a student makes a request compatible with the institutional rules, the ranking of imposition is very low, next to zero; however, when the student persists in a request incompatible with the rules, which is the focus of this study, the degree of imposition is extremely high. As a result, the weightiness of the face threat caused by the request is very large as well.

The Counselor as Gatekeeper

Erickson and Schultz (1982) studied counseling interviews by filming and audiotaping the routine counseling sessions in two junior colleges among 4 counselors and 25 students, and designated a counselor like this as a gatekeeper due to the fact that “[h]e or she has the responsibility and the authority to make decisions about the social mobility of the student within the organization” (4).

Besides the role of “an impartial gatekeeping decision maker,” the counselors Erickson and Schultz studied were also involved in the five types of “advocacy activities,” which are summarized here:
Teaching the social order (describing to the student the social structuring of the school, and mobility channels available)

Teaching the encounter (explaining the sequential discourse structure of the interview and appropriate communicative role behavior for the student)

Sponsoring student mobility (actively assisting the student by offering special help, e.g., waiving organization rules)

Fostering student self-image (helping make the student feel competent and capable of achieving a desired goal)

Defending counselor self-image (maintaining self-presentation of the counselor as a fair and qualified counselor, students' advocate). (19)

According to Erickson and Shultz (1982), conversation is socially organized for both participants have to take action by taking into account what the other is doing at the time. The social organization in the counseling interview is “reflexive” because

who the student is able to be depends in part on how the counselor acts, and who the counselor is able to be is influenced by how the student acts. The ways in which each talks and listens from moment to moment becomes an environment for the other party. They are continuously part of one another’s immediate social ecology. (6-7)

Conversation is also culturally organized. How one chooses to efficiently communicate with and appropriately interpret the other is determined by the communicative knowledge shared by the two outside the counseling setting. A substantial part of shared knowledge is language and people’s stylistic use of it. The complete knowledge demanded is called communicative competence. In short, Erickson and Shultz stated that “the social organization and cultural organization of communication are jointly involved in the conduct of face-to-face interaction” (8). Such interaction is not only “locally produced,” “orderly and institutionalized,” but also “creative and spontaneous,” i.e., improvised, an important component of the present study.
Comembership

Comembership, according to Erickson and Schultz (1982) is “an aspect of performed social identity that involves particularistic attributes of status shared by the counselor and student -- for example, race and ethnicity, sex, interest in football,” etc. (17). Comembership is invoked by “small talk,” a conversational means employed by the counselor and the student to discover their commonness (35).

Erickson and Schultz’s (1982) notion of comembership was actually derived from Brown and Levinson’s (1987) theory of positive politeness. The linguistic form of politeness in many aspects are similar to those of language between intimates, who share interests, knowledge, goals, and values, and approve of each other’s personality. Positive politeness utterances are employed as a kind of “metaphorical extension of intimacy, to imply common ground or sharing of wants to a limited extent even between strangers” (103). By doing this, the speaker indicates his wants to “come closer” to the hearer, in other words, to shorten the distance between them and hence to reduce the weightiness of the FTA (103). One type of positive politeness strategy is to claim “common membership” or “in-group comembership” by using “in-group identity markers” (102). Here, common membership and in-group membership are the predecessors of the term comembership. Another strategy the speaker uses to claim common ground with the hearer is “small talk” about topics unrelated to the main subject (117).

Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993) further suggested that there are two aspects of comembership: one is the social comembership as discussed by Erickson and Schultz (1982); the other is “role comembership that is established by institutional role” (228). Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford referred to the latter as the “extended institutional relationships” between the graduate students and the advisors, on such topics as the academic conferences which students and advisor would attend and relocation of the department.
Comembership provides a foundation for solidarity and makes it possible for the
counselor to conduct business efficiently yet remain friendly and preserve face for both
participants. This generalization applies to international student advising sessions as well.
The student’s attempt to assume or claim comembership with the advisor, if warranted by
the latter, becomes a device to facilitate request-making.

Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford’s Study of Academic Advising Interviews

Interview structure

Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1992), referring to Agar (1985), divided an academic
advising session into three periods: diagnosis, directive, and report writing (see Figure 2.2).
This three-part structure is very useful for recognizing the organization of international
student advising interview, although variations are to be expected.

Status difference

According to Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1992), in the context of the university in
general and the advising sessions in particular, the advisor should be seen having a higher
status than students, owing to their rank as a faculty or staff member, their expertise in their
field, and their institutional familiarity. In addition, the fact that the students are required to
consult the advisor contributes to their subordinate status. For this reason, the student must
be “polite, modest, and unrebellious” (474). Any attempt to violate these implicit rules
would be counted as incongruent with their student status. Factors contributing to the status
difference in academic advising sessions are presented in the Table 2.1.
Figure 2.2 Structure of the advising interview (based on Agar, 1985; Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig, 1992, 95)
Table 2.1: Factors that contribute to status (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1990, 473)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Advisors</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Status Rank</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>Novice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional role/position</td>
<td>Institutional representative</td>
<td>Client</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The notion of congruence and status-preserving strategies**

As far as congruence is concerned, Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1990) have the following definition:

Congruence addresses the match of a speaker’s status and the appropriateness of speech acts given that status. Congruent speech acts reflect the expected or established role of the participants. No speech act is inherently congruent because congruence is situationally determined, that is, congruence is determined by speaker roles in specific situations. (473)

In the context of the academic advising sessions, speech acts congruent with the role of the advisor include advising, recommending, and requesting students’ academic history. A lack of institutional knowledge will be incongruent with the status of the advisor. On the part of the students, providing personal academic history, requesting institutional information, requesting permission, and requesting advice are all speech acts congruent with student status. On the other hand, according to Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, “noncongruent speech acts include correcting the advisor, supplying institutional information, evaluating or complimenting the advisor, and rejecting the advice of the advisor” (476) (see Table 2.2).
Table 2.2 Congruence of speech acts with respect to status (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1990: 476)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congruence</th>
<th>[+]</th>
<th>[-]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advisors</td>
<td>Give advice</td>
<td>Express lack of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Solicit information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advance warning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Provide history</td>
<td>Make suggestions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Request information</td>
<td>Correct advisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Request permission</td>
<td>Offer evaluation/compliments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Request advice</td>
<td>Reject advice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford argued that in exchanges between participants of unequal status, the maxim of congruence is “Make your contribution congruent with your status” (477). Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1990) observed that

Status congruence extends the analysis of speech acts as being at cost to a speaker or hearer (House and Kasper, 1981) or as being face threatening acts (Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987) by identifying speech acts that are consistent with a particular role or status. (480)

Actually their congruence maxim echoes Goffman’s (1967) face-work, that is, making whatever one is doing consistent with face. As face-work must be done when an act that is “incompatible” with social worth is unavoidable, or politeness strategies as mentioned in Brown and Levinson’s (1987) must be employed when face is threatened, when congruence is impossible, speakers in academic advising sessions can use SPS to mitigate incongruence.

Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford obviously owe their notion of incongruence to Goffman’s notion of incompatibility. The former observed six strategies in the advising sessions:

_Strategy A_: Appear congruent. Use the form of a congruent speech act when possible.

_Strategy B_: Mark your contribution linguistically. Use downgraders.
Strategy C: Timing. Do not begin with a noncongruent contribution.
Strategy E: Be brief.
Strategy F: Use appropriate content (478-479).

Some speech acts made by students in international student advising sessions are intrinsically face-threatening or incongruent with their status, so whether they can utilize politeness and/or status-preserving strategies will play an important role in their negotiation.


Coding System for Request

Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989), in their cross-cultural speech act realization project (CCSARP), investigated cross-cultural and intralingual variation in requests and apologies, two intrinsically associated face-threatening acts. Their goal was to “establish patterns of speech act realization under different social constraints across a number of languages and cultures, including both native and nonnative varieties,” and hence to build a framework for empirically based studies of speech acts (22). Data were collected by means of discourse-completion test (DCT) among subjects of English, French, Danish, German, and Hebrew from seven countries. Blum-Kulka et al. developed an excruciatingly detailed coding system (see Table 3.2) for the speech acts studied, whose designation of request perspective, strategies, and segments proves to be very helpful to the present study. Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper identified 15 types, including both syntactic, lexical and phrasal downgraders (e.g., “understater;” “downtoner”), and 11 types of upgraders (see Chapter 3 and Table 3.2).
CHAPTER 3. METHODS

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section describes the pilot study. The second section illustrates the process of data collection, including setting, equipment, and procedure; kinds of advising sessions taped; and interlocutors. Sections three and four discuss transcription and coding systems. Section five, the last section, addresses data analysis.

The Pilot Study

From August 12 to September 12, 1997, I conducted a pilot study of 20 international student advising sessions using 3 American advisors and 23 international students at a large university in the US. The notes taken from these sessions helped me get an idea of the context and structure of the advising sessions. I studied the context and structure of the interview, the status difference between the interlocutors, and the designation of congruent versus incongruent speech acts based on and in contrast with those in Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford’s (1990, 1992) studies. The similarities and differences between the study of academic advising sessions and international student advising sessions helped me formulate research questions for this thesis.

Data Collection

The final written consent for this study was acquired from the international student office at a large midwestern university on November 12, 1997. Preparation for data collection started after formal approval was obtained from the University Human Subjects Committee on November 20, 1997. Data from 15 advising sessions conducted by one American advisor and 16 Chinese advisees were taped between Dec. 3, 1997 and Jan. 13, 1998.
Setting, equipment, and procedure

Data were collected in the advisor's office of the international student office. A tape recorder and a palm-size PEM microphone were placed on the advisor's desk, in plain view of both participants. Before each session, the advisor briefly explained the research to the student and provided an informed consent form, written in both Chinese and English for the student to read and sign. After getting the student's consent, the advisor would turn on the tape recorder. Both the advisor and advisee had the right to stop taping if they wanted to. One or two days after each session, I contacted the student by email, phone, or fax and asked him/her to complete a personal data survey form (see Appendix B). All survey forms were completed by February 28, 1998. The survey form was used to estimate the students' overall English proficiency level, by looking at their TOEFL and GRE Verbal scores, the amount of time they have lived in the US, the amount of time they had for course work in English and daily use of and interaction in English.

Kinds of advising sessions taped

Altogether 16 advising sessions were audio-taped, one of which was excluded from the study because the advisor forgot to ask the student to sign the consent form. One taping was stopped by the student mid-session; however, remaining tape portions have been used because the student agreed to let the investigator to use them. Predominant topics were visa and job issues, with other subjects including seeking help in English and changing academic level.

Interlocutors

The interlocutors included a female American advisor at the international student office who was a native speaker of English, and 16 advisees, all of whom were native speakers of Chinese. Among these 16 advisees, 14 were male and 2 were female. The results of the post-session survey (see Appendix B) showed that fifteen out of the 16 participants were graduate assistants in various departments, either teaching assistants or research
assistants or both and either carrying a half-time or a quarter-time assistantship. The only exception, a female, was another participant's wife, an undergraduate student. The number of years these students had spent studying English varied from 8 to 12 years, and the length of stay in the US ranged from 3.5 months to 5.5 years. All but one had taken or were taking at least one ESL class offered by the university ESL program. Their TOEFL scores ranged from 523 to 633, with an average of 608. Their GRE verbal scores ranged from 480 to 640, with an average of 570. All participants had been to the international student office seeking advice at least once before, so none of them were new to the advising sessions. These students also differed in the amount of time of using English per day, their ability to understand the advisor, and how well they were understood. Table 3.1 summarizes this information (see Appendix B for more information). Twelve students claimed their ability to understand the

Table 3.1 Descriptive statistics on the characteristics of Chinese participants (n = 16)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years of English course work in China</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>8-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours per day using English</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>1-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours per day of contact with NSE</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours per day of contact with NNSE in English</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEFL score</td>
<td>608</td>
<td>523-633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRE verbal score</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>480-640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years in the US</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.33-5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of visits to the advising office</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1-10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 These courses are:
Academic English I (undergraduates and graduates)
Academic English II (undergraduates)
Academic English II (graduates)
Supervised Independent Study (Listening/Reading)
Communication Skills for International Teaching Assistants
advisor was high or very high. Only two categorized their listening ability as "so so" and one student felt his ability to understand the advisor was poor. Thirteen out of the 16 participants declared that making themselves understood by the advisor was not difficult at all. Judging from these factors, the English proficiency of participants in general can be categorized as advanced.

Role of and relationships between the advisor and students

The relationship between the advisor and students is unbalanced; in other words, they are status unequals. The advisor is typically viewed as having higher status than the students, due to her rank as an advisor, staff member, and gatekeeper, her expertise in her field, and her institutional familiarity. Furthermore, the fact that the students are required to attend advising sessions contributes to their subordinate status.

Transcription and Procedure

Theory and procedure

This study used natural data as proposed by Wolfson (1983, 1986). Ochs (1979) distinguished what speakers actually do (“naturalistic speech behavior”) from what they report (“native-speaker intuitions”) (43). According to Ochs, many who study the use of language prefer natural data to intuitive or experimental data. The latter are also called unnatural data, because natural data reflect the real world and are more accurate than the latter -- “what is as opposed to what ought to be,” which accounts for the use of natural data in this study (43).

The taped conversations were transcribed in their entirety, based mainly on the transcription conventions developed by Jefferson (Levinson, 1983, 369-370) (see Appendix A). The sessions were timed, excluding the long pauses during which the advisor left the desk to make photocopies of documents, because such pauses could be substantial temporally, e.g. 2 minutes, yet insignificant to the negotiation of the topic at hand. However, all shorter
pauses were included. Measured in this way, the length of the session ranged from 1.8
minutes to 18.9 minutes, with an average of 7.9 minutes. Each uninterrupted utterance or
sequence of utterances (including non-lexical contributions such as “uhhun”) was counted as a
turn and the number of turns in each session was recorded. Due to limitations in
transcription facilities, laughter was labeled rather than transcribed.

Reliability of transcription

After the initial transcription, the transcripts were reviewed and proofread twice by
the investigator. Then, approximately 12% of the data and transcript were sent to another
graduate student in TESL/Applied Linguistics, a NSE, for verification. There was agreement
between the NNSE and the NSE on about 98% of the transcript checked. After that, the data
were once again examined by the investigator for accuracy. Occasionally there was a part of
an utterance which was untranscribable, due to the quality of recording.

Development of Coding Systems

Request

The coding methods of request, as used in this study, were based on Levinson’s
(1983) theory of pre-sequence and the coding system developed by Blum-Kulka, House, and
Kasper (1989). According to Levinson (1983), a pre-request sequence has a four-position
structure; that is,

Merritt, 1976: 324
Position 1: A: Hi. Do you have uh size (flashlight batteries?) ((PRE-REQUEST))
Position 2: B: Yes sir ((GO AHEAD))
Position 3: A: I’ll have four please ((REQUEST))
Position 4: B: ((turn to get)) ((RESPONSE))
(Levinson, 1983, 357)

However, between the pre-request and the request, there may be insertion sequences. In
other words, Position 2 can be expanded into many turns. Levinson’s pre-request sequence
is actually also a request sequence, with its inclusion of both request (Position 3) and response (Position 4).

Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) further delineated a complete structure of a request and recognized five major components, as illustrated below:

1. Alerter  
   Henry,
2. Preposed supportive moves  
   I missed class yesterday.
3. Head act  
   Could I borrow your notes for a little while?
   Strategy type  
   Query preparatory (Could I ...?)
   Perspective  
   First-person speaker-oriented (I)
4. Internal modification  
   Downgrader (a little while)
5. Postposed supportive move  
   I promise to return it this afternoon.

Other strategy types include mood derivable (e.g., imperative), performative, ("I am asking you to ..."), locution derivable or obligation statements ("You'll have to move your car."); want statements ("I'd like to ..."), suggestory formula ("How about ...?"); strong hints, and mild hints. Besides first-person speaker-oriented perspective "I," a perspective can also be hearer oriented ("Could you ...?"); speaker and hearer oriented "Could we ...?"), and impersonal "Can one ...?"). In this study, I examined relevant requests and identified Levinson's (1983) four positions as well as their equivalent designations by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989). Moreover, I used Levinson's outline to depict the overall structure of a request and Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper's methods to scrutinize the linguistic features of each segment of a request (see Table 3.2).

**Congruent versus incongruent requests**

In international student advising sessions, students request information, advice, or permission, depending on the current topic. Some requests are appropriate, such as requests for advice; others are inappropriate, for instance, a request to put personal funds on a new I-
Table 3.2 Downgraders and upgraders as internal modification devices in request making (based on Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper, 1989, p. 17, pp. 275-289)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Downgraders</th>
<th>Upgraders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Syntactic downgraders</td>
<td>a. Intensifier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Interrogative</td>
<td>The kitchen is in a terrible mess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Negation of a preparatory</td>
<td>b. Commitment indicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>condition</td>
<td>I'm sure/certain you won't mind giving me a lift.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Subjunctive</td>
<td>c. Expletive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Conditional</td>
<td>Why don't you clean that bloody/damn mess up?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Aspect</td>
<td>d. Time intensifier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Tense</td>
<td>You'd better move your car right now/immediately!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Conditional clause</td>
<td>e. Lexical uptoner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Combination of the above</td>
<td>Clean up that mess!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Lexical and phrasal downgraders</td>
<td>f. Determination marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Politeness marker</td>
<td>I've explained myself and that's that!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Understater</td>
<td>g. Repetition of request</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Hedge</td>
<td>Get lost! Leave me alone!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Subjectivizer</td>
<td>h. Orthographic/ suprasegmental emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Downtoner</td>
<td>i. Emphasis addition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Cajoler</td>
<td>Go and clean that kitchen!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Appealler</td>
<td>j. Pejorative determiner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clean up that mess (there)!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
while the document only accepts official income, which is the student's assistantship (see Figure 3.1). The standard for measuring the appropriateness of a request is whether it accords with the institutional and immigration rules prescribed for international students as conveyed and explained by the advisors. A request observing the rule is appropriate; on the contrary, a request breaking the rule is inappropriate.

Figure 3.1 Flow chart of request making
(The steps in the boxes are where incongruent requests were made. These same rules apply hereafter.)

An inappropriate request is not necessarily an incongruent request. The notion of congruence was relative in international student advising sessions. What made a request incongruent was when a student made an inappropriate request when data showed that he/she was aware of its inappropriateness beforehand, and when a student insisted on an inappropriate request after it was rejected and explained by the advisor. In the second case, it was when a request became a petition that it became incongruent, in that to be congruent with his/her status, the student had to show compliance. By petitioning, the student was actually saying: “I don’t want to take the answer you gave me; I want another one which is more
favorable to me.” It is an extended way or special realization of rejection, which is
legitimately an incongruent speech act in both academic and international student advising
sessions. However, the focus of this study is not to judge whether such incongruent requests
should exist. As all know, incongruence is sometimes fundamental to certain kinds of
requests in real life. The emphasis of this thesis is to study how these incongruent requests
were realized.

Laughter

With regard to laughter, the present study adopted the coding method utilized by
Adelsward (1989); that is, “all instances where either or both of the participants could be
heard to laugh or pronounce a phrase laughingly” were counted as “laughing events” (112).
There was no differentiation made by intensity of the laughter.

Each laughter was distinguished between unilateral (one person laughing) and mutual
(both laughing) laughter. In the present study the recordings were of such a quality that it
was not difficult to discriminate between unilateral and mutual laughter. Besides, all laughter
was categorized based on who initiated the laughter, i.e., whether it was advisor-initiated or
advisee-initiated. The criterion used for judging the initiator was a “pragmatic” one, that is,
“the person who first introduces something to laugh at -- a laughable -- issues the invitation”
(113). The laughter initiator was the person who actually performed the act of laughing first.
The coding of laughter is demonstrated in the following segment:

[Before this segment, the advisor asked the student whether he walked or drove in the snow
that day.]
72 S: I walk. I usually ride a bicycle but it is a split, so making our clothes and everything
dirty
73 A: [laughing] Oh yes [laughing]
74 S: So I don’t
75 A: You need a bumper
76 S: A bumper? // but I think
77 A: // a little fender yes it’s called a fender
78 S: Yah right but I think most bicycles in the United States don’t // have
79 A: // have a fender. *It's peculiar, isn't it?  
[both laughing]  
79 S: In China most most bicycle has a fender  
80 A: Yes because people use them for real purposes rather than exercise  
[both laughing] (Session 11)  
(Boldface in data is used throughout this study to indicate relevant emphasis.)

Here the student initiated the first laughing event with his utterances at turn 72. The advisor accepted the invitation and started a unilateral laughter at turn 73. Both the student and the advisor initiated the second laughter at turns 78, 79, which were mutually joined by the two interlocutors. The advisor’s utterance at turn 81 initiated the last mutual laughter in this segment.

**Data Analysis**

In this study, the data analysis abided by Schiffrin’s principles of conversation analysis. The analysis was empirical, inductive, and data-driven. In Mey’s (1993) words, the data were the “exclusive foundation and heuristic basis” of my findings and generalizations (195). From the data, I got an overview of the interview structure; I obtained from the data the background information for the types of topics usually occurring in international student advising interviews; and from the data, I found that the content or implication of the topic had an effect on the interaction and use or lack of politeness or status-preserving strategies also had an effect on the conversation climate. Language phenomena discussed in this thesis found themselves in relation to previous theories and research and invited the latter to account for them rather than I looked for certain evidence to match or support the already existing theories. However, I need to make it clear that my explanation of what was going on in the conversation was just what appeared to me the most prominent aspect of the various possibilities of a recurrent language phenomenon. It does not exclude other interpretations with support from other theories.
Here are the procedures I used for data analysis. First, I familiarized myself with the data and took notes, which worked as a kind of general, initial analysis. I studied each session, wrote a synopsis of what happened, identified the four components -- diagnosis, directive, report writing, and closing -- of the interview structure, so that I could map out how the conversation progressed. As I examined the data, I wrote some general comments in the margins and marked turns with relevant linguistic features. For example, at the end of session 2, I wrote: “This is a long and happy conversation.” This conversation has 395 turns; I identified many instances of small talk, laughter, and jokes, some of which were initiated by the advisor. I marked each prominent interesting phenomenon as I read through the data. As the same phenomenon recurred, I put a commentary note. For example, in session 3, I marked the places where the student made preemptive moves. Therefore, I noted: “This student tried to manipulate the session to his advantage.”

As I familiarized myself with the data, I also gained insight into the background information of the institutional context which was revealed through the interview conversations. After I finished all 15 sessions, I had a clear view of the kinds of topics, the bureaucratic procedure, and institutional rules involved in each topic. Again, I obtained all the information on the basis of the recurrent phenomena across several sessions rather than focusing on one session. To verify and complete my view of the information, I double checked and clarified with the advisor by email.

Knowing the institutional context was very helpful for me to determine the appropriateness and congruence of each request, and draw the flow charts of request making (Figure 3.1), interview structure (see Chapter 4, Figure 4.1), visa issue and job issue conversations (Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.3). Afterward when I reviewed each session again for further analysis, I could easily tell which stage of request making the student was in and position that stage on the respective flow chart, and judge the congruence of the request. In session 2, for instance, the student was asking for an I-20 for his son so that the latter could
apply for a visa. At that point, the student was not aware of the difficulty of getting an F2 visa in China, so the request was congruent, and the negotiation turned out to be pleasant.

The next step was to identify requests in each advising session, categorize them by request content, and examine each request for congruence based on the criteria set above. I focused on the thematic or topical requests, so I excluded those requests for linguistic clarification or confirmation, which usually happened when a student, as a NNSE, did not understand what the advisor had said. I counted the number of congruent requests, as well as incongruent requests in every session and compared the use of incongruent requests across types of topics and across different sessions in the same topic type. Then I distinguished topics having little or no potential for incongruent requests such as request for change of academic level, or help with English, from those having high potential for incongruent requests, e.g., request for reducing standard estimation of living expenses on the I-20 form. I studied the influence of the two categories on the conversational characteristics of the respective sessions.

I also looked at how in some sessions the students negotiated the incongruent request yet still managed to preserve face for both themselves and the advisor. One criterion I used was whether in declining the student's request, the advisor used upgraders or not. Another criterion was that in closing the conversation, the student expressed his/her understanding and acceptance of the rejection, and the advisor, in return, empathized with the student's situation and offered some sort of comfort. In another extreme case the negotiation of the incongruent request was very frustrating. The evidence for this was that the student was

4 In this case, the advisor always accommodated to the student's request for linguistic clarification and the request was always congruent. For example,

52 A: Only that part, ok? The rest of the information we have. This is what I want, ok? And that's what your wife can show too (4.)
53 S: Pardon me?
54 A: And that's what your wife will show also when she goes to get her (.) that amount of money (Session 10)
almost irritated so he asked to turn off the tape recorder. The student's incongruent request was headstrong as the advisor's rejection was unbending, straightforward, and immediate so that the latter sounded like a retort. The two kinds of negotiations of incongruent requests formed a strong contrast so I compared how linguistically differently the students had made their requests and correspondingly caused different responses from the advisor. Examples of such a comparison include the use of mitigators versus aggravators, and indirectness versus directness in the pro forma and frustrating negotiations respectively.

In Chapter 4, I will present the interview structure, introduce the background for the major types of topics occurring in international student advising sessions, examine the role of topic content in the interview interaction, and study how the employment or lack of politeness or SPSs makes a difference in the student's negotiations of incongruent requests.
CHAPTER 4. ANALYSIS, RESULTS, AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I will illustrate the structure of international student advising interviews, in contrast to that of academic advising interviews. Then I will provide background information for the major types of topics appearing in international student advising sessions: visa issue and practical training; and sessions around these topics are the focus of analysis. Then, I will disclose the influence of a focal topic’s potential for an incongruent request on the ensuing interview, especially on the interview structure and the advisor’s initial response to the topic. After that, I will compare negotiations of incongruent requests where students use politeness or SPSs with those in which such strategies are missing and I will reveal the importance of these strategies in international student advising interviews. The last section of this chapter will discuss the students’ pragmatic competence as related to their proficiency and the amount of useable input.

Interview Structure

A typical interactional advising interview includes the four components identified in academic advising interview by Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1992): diagnosis, directive, report writing, and closing sequence. Moreover, the focal topics of the international student advising interviews vary from one to another. Most of them relate to maintaining Chinese students’ status in the US. For this reason, almost all international student advising sessions in this study started with a prompt from the advisor: “So what is that I can help you with?” (session 3) “What can I help you with?” (session 4) and “Tell me what is that” (session 1), and so forth, which I designated as the opening prompt (see Figure 4.1). Following the opening prompt is diagnosis, which denotes the main topic of the interview. Each of the complete international student advising interview also has a closing sequence. However, what is different from an academic advising interview is the sequencing. In the international student advising interview, the diagnosis appeared not only at the onset of the sequence, but
also at any point before closing, together with directive and report writing, although not necessarily in this order. In report writing, the advisor completed an official document and requested certain information from the student. It was not obligatory. The student did not have to take something written to leave. It could happen any time during the advising sessions and did not necessarily signify the completion of the session. In short, the sequential combination of diagnosis, directive, and report writing in the international student advising interview is anything but uniform. The structure of an international student advising interview is delineated in Figure 4.1.

![Diagram of the structure of an international student advising interview](image)

Figure 4.1 Structure of an international student advising interview

Table 4.1 provides a detailed description of the interview structure of session 1, which presents one view of how an international student advising interview can be organized very differently from the academic advising interview. From this table, we can see that the period of diagnosis intermixes with the period of directive, and there is no report writing, which is strikingly different from the structure of a regular academic advising interview. Figure 4.2 further clarifies how the structure of an international student advising interview is unique in contrast with an academic advising interview.
Table 4.1 Interview structure of session 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turns</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Opening Prompt</td>
<td>A: Tell me what is that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>Diagnosis 1</td>
<td>Topic: request to do a new I-20. (The student was told by the advisor in a previous interview that he could now come and do a new I-20 with the current advisor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-24</td>
<td>Diagnosis 2</td>
<td>Reasons for doing a new I-20.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>Conclusion of Diagnosis 2</td>
<td>There is no need to do a new I-20.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-39</td>
<td>Directive 1</td>
<td>A: So what you need to do then is to go back to the Embassy with the I-20 plus this (referring to the bank statement).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Insertion Sequence</td>
<td>The student wants to know why the previous advisor told him to come; current advisor could not explain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49-50</td>
<td>Diagnosis 3</td>
<td>A: So your wife did go to get a visa?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-58</td>
<td>Directive 2</td>
<td>A: Ao: well she has to go and try.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59-63</td>
<td>Diagnosis 4</td>
<td>Advisor tried to figure out the previous advisor's reason.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64-70</td>
<td>Diagnosis 5</td>
<td>A: When your wife went to get her visa, did she have this with her?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71-72</td>
<td>Directive 3</td>
<td>A: Send it to her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73-85</td>
<td>Directive 4</td>
<td>When and how the student could see the previous advisor again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86-87</td>
<td>Closing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Background

Visa issue

After they came to the US with an F1 visa, many Chinese graduate students decide to invite their spouses (and sometimes children as well) to come with an F2 visa and accompany them. To do this, they need to ask the international student office to issue a new I-20 for their dependents and then the students themselves mail the I-20 back to China. With this and other necessary documents the dependents can go to the US Embassy to apply for an F2 visa (see Figure 4.2).
Eight out of the 15 sessions were about the visa issue, among which one student (session 2) was applying for a new I-20 for his son, one (session 14) tried to get a new I-20 to bring his sister, and another (session 15) was about maintaining a dependent's status. Each of the other five sessions (sessions 1, 3, 4, 5, and 10) included in this study focused on bringing over the student's wife. In sessions 4 and 10, the wives had already been denied an F2 visa; the rest were still in the process of issuing an I-20.
The reason why some students made incongruent requests relates to the difficulty of getting an F2 visa in China. The most common reason given by the US counselors was when the students' spouses arrive, their assistantship, usually their sole income, could not cover all their expenses. To solve this problem, students tried different methods. The student in session 5 was seeking another quarter-time assistantship in addition to his current one. Before an I-20 was issued, being fully aware of the difficulty of getting an F2 visa, the student in session 3 reported that his nine-month teaching assistantship would be transferred to a 12-month research assistantship, so he requested the latter be reflected on the new I-20 for his wife. He also tried to reduce the estimated living expenses on the I-20. After his wife was denied a visa, the student in session 10 informally got an increased figure of his research assistantship from his major professor and asked to renew the I-20 with this new figure. More often, students requested to put their personal funds on the I-20.

What made some of the requests in the visa issue inappropriate and hence incongruent was the fact that they violated the institutional rules. One such rule is that the international student office does an I-20 based on the Letter of Intent, a contract between a student and his/her department in the current fiscal year. Resources other than this such as personal funds and informal estimated figures are not allowed on the I-20; neither can the

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5 Such difficulties are illustrated in the following segments:
308 S: // Uhhun * And why why you said at this time the F1 F2 is very difficult to get why?
309 A: Uhm we really don't know why
310 S: Uhhun
311 A: but we had many people coming from China whose spouses whose wives and husbands have not been able to get // F2 visa
312 S: // So for * for the children is same?
313 A: We don't I don't know that so much but a lot of time they like to see more money in the assistantship (Session 2)
students reduce the living expenses which the advisor estimates by university standards.  

**Practical training**

The second big issue existing in international student advising sessions is Practical Training. There are two types of Practical Training: Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT) (see Appendix D). Five out of the 15 taped sessions involved Practical Training, of which two were about CPT (sessions 6, 11), and the other three involved OPT.

There was only one case of an inappropriate request in the application of Curricular Practical Training, in session 6, where the student submitted the application before he was registered for a course; however, the request did not turn out to be incongruent because the student showed compliance:

7 A: Ok so: are you going to register for this class, have you done that yet?  
8 S: Yah I'll try I'm trying to go to the office later  
9 A: Ok you have to be registered for the class first  
10 S: Ok  
11 A: before we can  
12 S: Uhhun  
13 A: approve  
14 S: Ao: ok  

(Session 6)

Moreover, according to the advisor, not having enough to live on was not much the issue, as illustrated below:

37 A: = Yes but that is no guarantee that she will get a visa. I have heard of one student who showed thirty thousand dollars personal funds and his wife was denied a visa  
38 S: Ao::  
39 A: So I don't think I don't think that's so much the issue, ok?  

(Session 1)

and

103 A: = I had a student in who had a half-time assistantship that covered all the expenses // for himself and his wife  
104 S: // All right  
105 A: and she was denied  

(Session 5)
In the case of Optional Practical Training (see Figure 4.3), the international student advisor checks to make sure that the students are eligible for the application and have got all the necessary documents. No inappropriate requests were found in this checking procedure. After the check, students themselves must mail their application to the designated INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) Center. The data showed that in the past, the students always got their EAD (Employment Authorization Document) card one month after

Figure 4.3 Flow chart of the job issue conversation
they sent their application; however, lately the application files had been backlogged and it took much longer for the students to get their approval. As pointed out by the advisor, this affects many students and causes some of them to panic. Students worry that the companies will give up hiring them since they cannot go to work on the date scheduled. Some students have finished everything at the university, so they will have to live without income or insurance until the card arrives. That is why the timely arrival of the card is so crucial.

The international student office stands on the side of the students concerning this issue. The office encourages international students to seek jobs at international companies in the US and even has workshops to assist them in this way. Moreover, as mentioned above, the office also produces a letter of recommendation when a student applies for an OPT. In this case, the advisor is the advocate and sponsor for the students' interest. So when the

\[\text{7 53 A: Well it's not really that it's because the Immigration Office in Lincoln was was told by the headquarters}\\7 54 S: Uhnhm\\7 55 A: of Immigration that they had to uhm process some other request that have been backlogged and this is what happens. If they do this and then this waits.}\\(\text{Session 7})\\\]

and

\[\text{106 A: You're among quite a few students who're really pressed for this card an'}\\107 S: Yah I'm I should have applied a long time ago}\\(\text{To be continued})\\(\text{Continued})\\108 A: Well normally this came back in a month. This is the oddest happening and // so it affects many many students\\109 S: // So this is this happens to other students\\110 A: Ao: many\\111 S: Many\\112 A: yah yah I mean they they told us what I think was last spring or a year ago spring that they were very very best, always processed these within a month and they have then other things caught piled up and they had directive from Washington, D. C. and they have to do those things. This (slime) was very bad timing}\\(\text{Session 9})\\\]

\[\text{8 216 A: Yah it's a long time. Now I have a question for YOU. Sometimes we have workshops regarding employment and invite previous students to come back and talk to our current students}\\(\text{Session 7})\]
EAD card did not arrive timely as it should, the international student office tried to seek methods to mitigate the problem. In summary, when the advisor and the student encountered an obstacle which arose from some power beyond both of them, a certain degree of role comembership was formed between the two.

However, even in such a situation, the student was not allowed to seek a solution by violating the institutional rules. For example, one student offered to go to the agency of the designated INS Center to ask for the card herself while the office was not open to the public; another student who had applied for OPT suggested applying for a CPT, hoping the latter would be approved soon. Nonetheless, the fact was that once a student applied for OPT, he could not do a CPT. Starting work without an EAD card was also a temptation. This type of negotiation of incongruent requests was frequently suggested by students.

The Role of Focal Topic in International Student Advising Conversations

According to Erickson and Schultz (1982), in interview conversations, the ways in which one interlocutor talks and interprets influences the other and becomes the other’s immediate environment. Schiffrin (1990) described this as a principle for conversation analysis — “What is said, meant, and done is sequentially situated within local contexts” (10). In international student advising conversations, the focal topic is usually determined by the student, depending on the problem or request he/she has in mind. The students’ utterances influence those of the advisor’s, and hence influence the whole interview in two different levels:

9 33 A: Uhm we have asked one of our state legislators to help us help us with this with people who have jobs pending
34 S: Yah
35 A: Whether or not that's going to help or not I don't know, but that's the only possibility. (6.) Yah but you need to talk to the company, tell them what's going on. It's no fault of yours. It's no fault of theirs. It's just the way it is with immigration

(Session 9)
1. Macro-level

    Topic affects interview structure and many other conversational characteristics (Based on the topic, the advisor determines what procedures are needed to fulfill the task).

2. Micro-level

    Students’ particular utterances affect advisor’s ensuing responses.

This section focuses on how the congruence of the topic influenced the interview conversation. The next section “Politeness and status-preserving strategies in making incongruent requests” will address the micro-level influence.

In this section, I will compare sessions having topics with little or no potential of incongruent requests to those having topics with high potential of incongruent requests. I will focus on how the topic is initiated, what the advisor’s immediate response to the topic is, and how small talk and laughter are used in the conversation. For the convenience of analysis, I will simplify the first category as “safe” topics/sessions and the second “risky” topics/sessions. Topics of the first type include asking for a new I-20 for a dependent without being aware of the difficulty of getting an F2 visa (session 2), asking for permission and recommendation for application when the student was totally eligible (session 8), asking to change an academic level (session 13), and so forth. Topics of the second type include increasing income or reducing the living expenses when issuing an I-20 or asking to renew an I-20 after the dependent was denied an F2 visa (as in sessions 1, 3, 4, and 10).

The initiation of the topic and advisor’s pace to respond

Nine out of the 15 sessions started with the advisor’s core prompt “What can I help you with?” or “Tell me what is that.” A student's starting a topic after being prompted by the advisor is the most common way of topic initiation in international student advising conversations. However, a comparison of the two types of topics/sessions shows that for “safe” topics, the advisor sometimes spelled out the student’s request or initiated the topic first, and the initial approval for the request usually came very quickly, accompanied by an appropriate positive appraisal.
1 A: This is close. Ok (??) all right, what can I help you with?
2 S: Yah this is my [Noise of opening papers] I-20 form
3 A: Ok are you doing a change of level or?
4 S: Yah change of level
5 A: Ok from Bachelor's to Master's
6 S: Yah
7 A: Ok, very good [noise of opening papers]

(Session 13)

In this opening sequence, the advisor spelled out the student's request at turns 3 and 5 for the student. Furthermore, as a preferred response, the advisor offered an appraisal or confirmation of the appropriateness of the request "Ok, very good," implying "That's good. It is something we can handle."

In session 8, rather than prompting the student to explain, the advisor directly initiated the topic.

1 A: There we go. All right. It takes some technology here. Ok, so looks like you're going to apply for a Practical Training
2 S: Yes
3 A: Ok (1.) [Noise of opening and looking at papers] ok get everything here (10.) [noise of opening papers] Do you have the rest of this yeah you do // because we're going to look through it in a minute
4 S: // Uhhun yah (4.)
5 A: Have you been offered a job yet?
6 S: Yah =
7 A: = Yah by Texas Instrument. Do you have a job offer letter?
8 S: Uhhun
9 A: So it's very clear too (5.) Ok so graduation for you will be May
10 S: Uhhun. (3.) So there won't be any problem I apply for OPT // before May, right?
11 A: // No no * (6.) [Continuing examining papers] should be just fine.

(Session 8)

After the diagnosis sequence from turn 3 to turn 9, when the student asked whether there would be any problem for his application, the advisor immediately responded "No no" even before the student finished his question (notice the overlap). The question and answer consisted of an adjacency pair, without any delay to check the preliminary of the request. Moreover, after 6 seconds of pause, while she was continuing to examine papers, she added
that it “should be just fine” as further affirmation. According to Levinson (1983), all this shows that here the advisor provided an answer expected by the student, i.e., a “preferred” response (336).

In contrast, in “risky” sessions, the advisor waited for the student to put forward his/her request hence initiate the topic.

1 A: Tell me what is that
2 S: Yesterday I see the the advisor
3 A: Uhhun Linda
4 S: Linda yah but first they she said that I cannot, that you cannot issue the a new I-20 for me. But when I I went yesterday afternoon, I came here and take this sheet uhm he leave a message for me and she said that um we can change the I-20 now so, I if you can issue a new I-20 for me, I don’t
(2.)
5 A: So on what basis are we doing a new I-20?

(Session 1)

Here the student was given a chance to fully present his cause and to make a request. The student did not finish the last sentence not because he did not have enough time. There was a 2-second pause after his utterance. The advisor’s response, if a preferred one, should have appeared immediately after the student finished his question “if you can issue a new I-20 for me.” According to Levinson (1983), the advisor’s delay foreshadowed a dispreferred response, which was exactly the case. At turn 5, rather than answering the student’s question, the advisor started a diagnosis sequence to check the conditions for the student’s request. This diagnosis sequence took 24 turns. At turn 29, the advisor gave a negative answer to the student’s request “So it doesn’t matter how much money you have in here.” The direct and explicit rejection came even later, at turn 53, which said “We don’t need to do a new I-20.”
Small talk and laughter

Another difference between “safe” sessions and “risky” sessions is that in the former there are many instances of small talk accompanied by laughter which are missing in “risky” sessions.

Table 4.2 shows that the focal topic of session 2 was to issue an I-20 to bring the student’s son. The major task was report writing of information needed for issuing the I-20. The student was not very aware of, therefore unconcerned with the difficulty of getting an F2 visa at this point, and the advisor did all the writing throughout the session. This is the longest (lasting nearly 19 minutes), and one of the most felicitous conversations. Table 4.2 shows that distributed throughout the session, intermixed with reporting writing are nine insertion sequences. Insertions sequences 1, 2, and 4 directly relate to the interview business; for example,

[Before this sequence, the student just failed to remember his social security number.]
45 A: Do you have office telephone?
46 S: Yah I have a office telephone but I: don’t remember =
47 A: = Ok
48 S: [laughing]
49 A: How about home? [teasing tone]
50 S: Home I know =
51 A: = You got that one? [teasing tone]
52 S: [Recites home phone number]
53 A: [Report writing phone number]
   Ok well you probably don’t call yourself in the office too often.
54 S: Yah
   [both laughing]

(Session 2)

In this segment, the student seemed to have initiated the laughter at turn 46 because he realized that this was the second time he said he could not remember a number he was supposed to remember. He started the unilateral laughter at turn 48. This is an embarrassed apologetic laughter, and in this case, appears to be what Adelsward (1989) termed a face-
Table 4.2 Interview structure and insertion sequences of small talk in session 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turns</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-8</td>
<td>Recording frame</td>
<td>A explained the purpose of recording.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>Opening</td>
<td>Topic initiation: A: Ok so you had said you would like to bring your son.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-19</td>
<td>Diagnosis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-45</td>
<td>Report writing</td>
<td>About wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-54</td>
<td>Report writing</td>
<td>Student’s telephone numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insertion sequence 1</td>
<td>Student forgot home phone number (teasing, laughter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-58</td>
<td>Report writing</td>
<td>Student’s email address</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59-71</td>
<td>Report writing</td>
<td>Son’s last name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insertion sequence 2</td>
<td>Linguistic negotiation of son’s last name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72-86</td>
<td>Report writing</td>
<td>Son’s first name, birth date and place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87-93</td>
<td>Report writing</td>
<td>When he last saw his son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insertion sequence 3</td>
<td>How hard separation is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93-100</td>
<td>Report writing</td>
<td>How will the son come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101-126</td>
<td>Directive</td>
<td>Produce “Letter of Intent”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insertion sequence</td>
<td>Negotiation of what “Letter of Intent” is and look for it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>127-135</td>
<td>Report writing</td>
<td>About wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>136-155</td>
<td>Insertion sequence 4</td>
<td>Started by son’s photo the student showed the advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>155-162</td>
<td>Report writing</td>
<td>About wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>163-191</td>
<td>Insertion sequence 5</td>
<td>The couple’s majors and romance, started by advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>191-198</td>
<td>Report writing</td>
<td>Advisor explained the living expense form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>199-212</td>
<td>Report writing</td>
<td>Advisor works on computer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>212-222</td>
<td>Insertion sequence 6</td>
<td>Singing outside (laughter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>222-234</td>
<td>Insertion sequence 7</td>
<td>Snow in student’s hometown, started by advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>235-300</td>
<td>Directive</td>
<td>Advisor showed what she had written on the form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>301-307</td>
<td>Directive</td>
<td>A: bring the bank statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>308-321</td>
<td>Report writing</td>
<td>Student requested information: why F2 difficult?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>322-351</td>
<td>Insertion sequence 8</td>
<td>Difficulty to leave his son behind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>352-364</td>
<td>Directive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>365-367</td>
<td>Diagnosis</td>
<td>A: Have you requested a letter of invitation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>368-372</td>
<td>Report writing</td>
<td>Student requested information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>373-374</td>
<td>Diagnosis</td>
<td>Student requested information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>375-385</td>
<td>Directive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>386-395</td>
<td>Closing sequence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
saving device. The advisor accepted this invitation, so in a teasing tone she posed two questions at turns 49, 51. Moreover, she joked with the student at turn 53 about his forgetfulness. This joking served as an invitation to join in mutual laughter, apparently a sign of mutual rapport and shortened distance. According to Adelsward, it indicates the establishment of a good interactional “climate” (119).

The other six insertion sequences in this session were irrelevant to the focal topic, but characterized small talk, often accompanied by mutual laughter. Among these six, insertion sequence 6 was a side sequence and insertion sequences 5 and 7 were initiated by the advisor. Insertion sequences 6 and 7, which are adjacent, are cited below:

212 S: // Uhhun
(70.) [A works on the computer, typing]
[a female singing outside]
213 A: [laughing]
214 S: happy
215 A: We’re getting this song for recording too // she she will she might not be so happy
216 S: // Yeh [laughing]
[Both laughing as song continues]
217 A: She’s getting // really
218 S: // enjoy music
219 A: Yah [both laughing] (2.) well I think she likes this snow
220 S: [laughing]
221 A: Should we clap? [laughing]
(5.)
222 A: Do you get snow in your city // at home?
223 S: // No no no
224 A: No
225 S: No I’m town actually Hunan is the southwest in China
226 A: Ok
227 S: It’s very warm place
228 A: Uhhun::
229 S: You can’t see the snow for ten year something maybe just ten year once
230 A: Uh ha?
231 S: very little snow hhun light snow not little, light snow
232 A: (4.)
233 S: but I think Iowa’s winter is too long // it it’s just two * month it’s ok
234 A: // here * yes I I agree
The data show that there was a 70-second pause before insertion sequence 6 and a 92-second one after insertion sequence 7, while the advisor was working on the computer. If insertion sequence 6 as a side sequence came at the right time to entertain the two interlocutors, insertion sequence 7 was the advisor's intentional effort to break the silence and engage the student in conversation. Such considerateness on the advisor's part was hardly found in risky sessions (compare Table 4.3 with Table 4.1). The influence of the topic on the advising conversations is summarized in Table 4.3.

### Table 4.3 Congruence of topics versus conversational characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic Initiation</th>
<th>Topics with little or no potential of incongruent requests</th>
<th>Topics with high potential of incongruent requests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advisor initiated the topic or spelled out the student's request.</td>
<td>Advisor waited for the student to bring up the topic and make the request.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Talk and Laughter</td>
<td>Insertion sequences of small talk were throughout the session, often accompanied by laughter.</td>
<td>Almost no small talk and laughter were present.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Politeness and Status-Preserving Strategies in Making Incongruent Requests**

In international student advising sessions, since students' requests are highly constrained by institutional and immigration rules, the eventual response to an incongruent request is almost always a rejection. However, what makes a difference is how each student approaches the request-making linguistically and non-linguistically. Students who use status-preserving strategies can preserve face for both themselves and the advisor; in contrast, students who fail to use status-preserving strategies will lose not only the approval for the
request, but also risk a good rapport with the advisor, and jeopardize face for both themselves and the advisor. This section will compare these two kinds of situations, with focus on sessions 3, 7, and 10 for employment of politeness and status-preserving strategies, and sessions 10 and 4 for the failure to do so.

Use of politeness and status-preserving strategies

Downgraders and indirectness

The data from session 3 show that the student came to the US in August, 1997 and this was his first semester. At that time he was a teaching assistant and signed his Letter of Intent for only half a year. But the next semester his assistantship would change from TA (teaching assistantship) to RA (research assistantship) and the latter, according to him, would cover "the whole year twelve months" (turn 32). His point was to put the 12-month assistantship on the new I-20 for his wife, although he himself never said that he wanted a new I-20. It is obvious from the data that to him, getting an I-20 was not as much the issue as how much income could be put on the I-20. In this session, the student made several preemptive moves to control the session to his advantage, especially through controlling the report writing. This is an act very incongruent with the student's status; nevertheless, owing to his use of downgraders and indirectness in his verbal justification, the conversation did not threaten the face of either interlocutor.

After he explained the purpose of his visit, the advisor spelled out his request in a professional manner: "What we need to do is issue you an I-20 to include your wife" (turn 25). The advisor then took out an I-20 request form and started the report writing of the information needed. My analysis focuses on this part of the conversation.

[Before this segment the student reported and the advisor wrote out his social security number, telephone number and email address]

84 A: Ok now information about your wife // What is her family name?
85 S: // my wife * family name is J let me sign
86 A: Ok
87 S: It’s a sort of easier

(Session 3)

Turns 88-100 was an insertion sequence in which the advisor learned how to pronounce the wife’s family and first name. After that the session proceeded like this:

101 S: It’s spouse right?
102 A: Uhn wife
103 S: Wife ok
104 A: Uh you always used to put spouse? And then they said husband or wife
105 S: uhm
106 A: So are you going home or will you stay in the US?
107 S: I just stay here
108 A: and then your wife will come?
109 S: Uhhun
110 A: State purposes, dependent [report writing]
(3.)
111 A: // and you
112 S: // Yah uhh * the the total the total expense have been estimated here
113 A: I’ll I’ll go through another form with that
114 S: Uhhun

(Session 3)

The “I-20 Request Form” was placed in the lobby with many other types of forms in the international student office, so the student could have filled out the items intended for them on the form before they came to see the advisor, but the data show that none of them actually did so. Often the form was produced by the advisor during the session after the diagnosis period and then the advisor took town the information for the student, i.e. report writing. It is apparently unusual for the student to take the form and do the writing, as the student in this session did (turn 85).

By taking the role of writer in session 3, the student was to some extent controlling the negotiation. Typically, the advisor as writer controlled the session through report writing. The student, although holding the information, had to provide it in the way requested by the advisor. In this session, when the student became the writer, the two interlocutors seemed to exchange their roles, with the student gaining some power with the
acquisition of the role of writer. This was reflected in turn 101, where the student became information seeker and the advisor had to provide an answer when requested.

By holding the pen, the student would be able to fill out the expense information on the I-20 request form. Actually turn 112 demonstrates he had prepared for this section beforehand and brought with him an estimation of total expenses. However, the advisor took back the writer role at turn 106 and the student’s attempt was rejected at turn 113. It can be reasonably presumed from the advisor’s ensuing rejection that that estimation was lower than the standard amount prescribed by the university, in other words, to his advantage.

The student’s apparent intention to control the session so as to reduce the expenses estimated on the new I-20 became more obvious as the advisor was actually filling out the expense sheet she promised at turn 113 with him.

123 A: Now I also want to fill out an expense sheet with you
124 S: Uhn
125 A: because this is this is the lowest we can go, ok?
126 S: Ok.
127 A: These are standard amounts and you pay half of that
128 S: Uhhun
129 A: but I’ll do this letter
130 S: Computer fees // engineering
131 A: // It’s half of this * (3.) [working on computer] and where will you be living when she comes?
132 S: Uhn I will be living in Hawthorne
133 A: Ok
134 S: I I can just choose from these sections
135 A: Uhhun
136 S: these prices
137 A: That probably be Hawthorne?
138 S: Uhhun
139 A: Ok
140 S: Present? Uh
141 A: Yah these are standards of amounts // so they are not negotiable on this one
142 S: // [laughing] * I think I do not need so much [laughing]
143 A: It’s the lowest we can go. It’s already lower than the university amount so
144 S: Uhhun
145 A: (6.) [Working on computer] any children coming?
146 S: No I haven’t children
147 A: Ok
148 S: So books because three hundred yah probably that’s reasonable [laughing]

(Session 3)

The advisor was doing the writing. She explained in advance that “this is the lowest we can go” and that “These are standard amounts” (turns 123, 125) which were precautions against the student’s attempt to reduce those figures. The student did not take the cautions though. Again he was trying to preempt the authority “I can just choose from these sections” (turn 134). However, this time his effort was firmly rejected by the advisor “they are not negotiable on this one” (turn 141). Attempt thwarted, the student laughed and spelled out explicitly an indirect request of reducing the expenses on the I-20 “I think I do not need so much.”

In this session, the student tried several times to carry out an incongruent request, i.e., reducing living expenses on the new I-20 form. An implicit request was explicitly rejected and such rounds went on and on. Making such an incongruent request was very face-threatening, for both the advisor and the student, yet the data show that neither of the interlocutors was irritated or frustrated. Though hopeless, the negotiation was quite long – 79 turns (turns 79-150). How could the student achieve such a negotiation without endorsing the face of both interlocutors? A more careful examination of his contribution shows that he has employed the following SPS and politeness strategies.

First, he has used “Strategy B” identified by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993), that is, “Mark your contribution linguistically. Use mitigators” (231). At turn 87, he thus justified his first preemptive move toward controlling the report writing: “It’s a sort of easier.” Here, he used a hedge “sort of” and an understater “easier,” minimizing the preemptive nature of his act. Similarly, when the advisor went by standard amounts to calculate his expenses, he said “I I can just choose from these sections.” Here, “just” means “simply,” which was another understater. Semantically, he appeared to simplify the procedure for the advisor, which by appearance was a facilitative act. At turn 142, he used a
negative form “I think I do not need so much” rather than a positive form “I think this is too much.” At the beginning of turn 148, it seemed he wanted to say something about cost of books, but rather he said “yah probably that’s reasonable,” using a downtoner “probably”. The fact that he changed his mind in the middle and that he mused aloud all manifested that he was complaining about the estimated expenses for books, but rather he showed compliance. In this sense, he had also used “Strategy A: Appear Congruent” (478).

All these lexical or syntactic contributions, hedges, understaters, negative forms, downtoners, according to Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) are downgraders or mitigators. In Brown and Levinson’s theory, these are negative politeness strategies. The student had used them in all preemptive moves, greatly lessening the face-threatening weight of his attempts.

Another strategy he used was to avoid making incongruent requests directly and explicitly. Throughout the negotiation, the student aimed to reduce the expenses on the I-20 form, but the word “reduce” was never mentioned and the request was very implicit. The most explicit move he made was turn 142 “I think I do not need so much;” however, it was made with a downgrader and accompanied by laughter before and after. Adelsward (1989) pointed out that occurring with an incongruent request, laughter was used as a face-preserving strategy to protect face needs. All this mitigated the potential face loss in his negotiation with the advisor.

**Comembership, query preparatory, and negation of a preparatory condition**

When an EAD card as an authorized approval for OPT was delayed, students were tempted to seek some inappropriate solutions. One such obstructed attempt was found in session 7:

57 A: Uhm did you submit a job offer letter //when you sent your applications?
58 S: //Yah yah
59 A: and did you write “expedite” on the envelope?
60 S: Uhh probably not. I I I, don't know I thought was we had enough time at that time so
61 A: Well we thought that too, 20th
62 S: Yah but so I think if we can work out to apply a Curriculum Practical Training? Is that?
63 A: Well probably not
64 S: Is that ok? =
65 A: = No it's not. Once a person applied for OPT then you don't do CPT
66 S: I see
67 A: Ok because your intent was to to graduate with this one degree
68 S: Yah
69 A: and your OPT is based on that
70 S: Unnhun
71 A: so we can't then do CPT
72 S: I see I see

(Session 7)

Since there was no way to rush the application of OPT, the student was trying to apply for a CPT, for the latter was authorized by the international student advisor hence much faster to approve. In this request, the student aligned himself with the advisor and assumed a sort of comembership by using "we" at turn 60 and 62. Now let us return to Brown and Levinson's computation formula for the weightiness of an FTA,

\[ W_x = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + R_x \]

Given the fact that two factors -- P, the power H (the advisor) has over S (the student), and R -- the rank of imposition of the incongruent request are constant here, the only way to reduce W is to reduce D, the distance between the student and the advisor. Comembership in Brown and Levinson's view was a positive politeness strategy, which the speaker employed to indicate his wants to "come closer" to the hearer, in other words, to shorten the social distance between them and thus lessen the weightiness of face threat in the incongruent request.

The student also used query preparatories "if we can work out ... " "Is that?" "Is that ok?" All this showed the student's tentativeness in making the request, which softened its imposing implication. Furthermore, with the question form, the utterances seemed to be a
request for information, which was a congruent speech act. By doing so, the student had
utilized Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford’s Strategy A: Appear congruent. Even though there
was a possibility that the student was requesting information, the attempt was rejected and
explained by the advisor and the student showed understanding and acceptance, which made
any further move on the same request incongruent. Later in the same session, at turn 94
the student again raised the same request, which was now undoubtedly incongruent.
However, to make this request the student used a negation of a preparatory condition, which
was a syntactic downgrader.

93 A: You cannot start until you have the card
94 S: Yah that’s why but there is no way I can make a CPT?
95 A: Not CPT once uh
96 S: Uhn hun I see
97 A: CPT you probably would have to cancel your OPT application
98 S: Oh that’s
99 A: and reapply
100 S: No I don’t want to do that no yah (Session 7)

Although both request moves were turned down, the student’s employment of
politeness and status-preserving strategies apparently affected the advisor’s way of rejection.
In response to the student’s first requesting move, the advisor said “Well probably not” (turn
63), where “probably” mitigated the dispreferred negative response. In rejection to the
second request move at turn 97, the advisor said “you probably would have to cancel your
OPT application.” Here, in addition to the mitigating “probably,” the advisor used
subjunctive mood. “Probably” seemed to be a hedge as a negative politeness strategy, or an
understater as an example of off-record politeness in Brown and Levinson’s (1987) study. In
either case, the advisor’s use of it lessened the weightiness of face threat in rejection.

Hint, suggestion, and brevity

As mentioned before, when the EAD card did not come in a timely manner, starting
work without the card was always a temptation. In session 7, the same session discussed
above, the student, after his two request moves toward applying for a CPT were denied, attempted such an effort.

114 A: But I think you should let Cargiu know what’s going on. I don’t think they will = 115 S: = Actually they called me (.) last week. The manager there they called me for they are worried that too and they apparently need me actually so they actually want me, you know, start a little bit earlier but yah since = 116 A: = They they can’t have you start until they see your card 117 S: Yah

(Session 7)

At turn 114, the advisor gave advice as how to soothe the problem at this point, that is, let the company know what was going on. The student’s immediate response at turn 115 showed that he was doing exactly the right thing, i.e., talking it over with the company, except that the company called him and wanted him to start a little early, which was actually a hint to work without the EAD card. Rather than saying “I want to start early,” where “I” was the student himself, and would be the agent, here the agent was “they,” i.e., Cargiu and its manager. The use of an absent third person “they” as agent, together with the use of a hedge (“you know”), and understater (“a little bit”), all contributed to the indirectness of the hint. The advisor sensed this so she immediately (notice the latch) replied with a denial at turn 116. However, in her rejection, the advisor respected the indirectness of the student’s utterance. Instead of saying “You cannot start until you have your card,” she preserved the student’s use of “they” as an agent.

Another example of attempting to work without an EAD card was found in session 9:

36 S: Ok do you think this will affect my er my job? 37 A: I don’t know that, but if you don’t talk to them it’s going to affect it too. We know that so you need to tell them what’s going on. If they want to hire you, they need to know what’s going on with your immigration status 38 S: Uh for example without that card? 39 A: They cannot legally hire you 40 S: Ok. (Session 9)
Here the student was making a suggestion of working without the EAD card, but she used one of the status-preserving strategies in Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford’s study, that is, “Strategy B: Be Brief” (479). The utterance (turn 38) is syntactically fragmental, just a prepositional phrase, but it is concise and apparently sufficient to convey the message the student wanted to convey.

As discussed before, the result of a negotiation of an incongruent request was almost always rejection. However, in session 9, the student showed understanding and acceptance of the situation. The following is the closing of the session

126 A: I don’t know what they’ll tell you so you try to it too ok? So when you come in tomorrow, you have your job offer letter and some information about what you find, but I don’t suppose you’re going to get anything real exciting.
127 S: Hhhhh [deep audible sigh]
128 A: but you never know // all right?
129 S: // Yah you’re right. We cannot do anything
130 A: I’m sorry // See you tomorrow
131 S: // Ok thank you very much * for your time.
132 A: Ok enjoy the snow
133 S: Thank you
134 A: Bye bye

(Session 9)

In previous conversation, the two interlocutors have agreed that the student would call a number and listen to the recording to check the status of her EAD card application. At turn 126, the advisor said that she did not think the student was going to “get anything real exciting,” to which the student responded with a deep audible sigh, which showed her acceptance, though an implicit and reluctant one, of the disappointing possibility. Noting this, the advisor made an effort to cheer her up, “but you never know” with a tag “all right?” eliciting the student’s feedback. Immediately the student made an explicit positive appraisal of the advisor’s discouraging prediction at turn 126, showing her complete understanding and acceptance of the situation at turn 129. As a response at turn 130 the advisor acknowledged the negative feedback of her prediction, which was returned by the student’s acknowledgment
of her appreciation of the advisor’s time at turn 131. To this point, it is very obvious from the exchange that the student had not taken the rejection personally. The advisor then initiated a pre-closing at turn 132, in this case, a kind of ritual gift-giving in conversation. Here, the student’s understanding and compliant attitude was very facilitative, which made the segment a great example of a smooth conversation.

Another example of this type was found in session 7, after the student’s request to work without an EAD card was turned down,

177 S: All right since this is everyone’s problem probably I can’t complain about that
178 A: Uh you can complain. You have a right to complain
179 S: [laughing]
180 A: [laughing]
181 S: All right thanks =
182 A: = We thought it’s also going to be a month, forty-five days
183 S: Yah
184 A: So we complained too
185 S: Ok

(Session 7)

The student’s understanding and acceptance of the situation showed his concession in the negotiation and even renunciation of the incongruent request. When the student did so, the advisor in return sanctioned the student’s right to complain “uh you can complain. You have a right to complain.” By doing so the advisor offered comfort to the student by showing empathy with the latter’s problem.

**Frustrating negotiation of incongruent requests**

In session 10, the student’s wife was denied a visa in Beijing, so he talked to his major professor and informally got an estimated figure of his assistantship which was higher than the one on the I-20, and requested to change the figure on the I-20 into the new estimation, in other words, to renew an I-20. In the recorded portion of the session, the student made clear his request, which was explained and rejected by the advisor. The data show that the
negotiation seemed to be so frustrating that the student was irritated and asked to turn off the tape recorder.

In contrast to other negotiations of incongruent requests where the students employed various status-preserving strategies, these data showed that the student in this negotiation not only failed to use status-preserving strategies, but also used inherently incongruent speech acts such as direct rejection, instructive and commanding statements, as well as upgraders/aggravators.

**Rejection and upgraders**

The following is the beginning of session 10:

1 S: Yah uh still about my wife  
2 A: Uhn  
3 S: Uhn as F2 visa  
4 A: Uhhun has -- she - been - denied - a - visa?  
5 S: Oh yes [noise of opening papers] I think the  
6 A: It's very common in Beijing China all over China right now  
7 S : **No no especially** in Beijing [laughter]

(Session 10)

The data of other sessions showed that when the advisor said denial of F2 visa was very common all over China, she said this with authority because she receives many students with the same problem every week. By responding "No no," the student appeared to be denying the advisor's expertise on this subject, which was incongruent with his status.

A similar phenomenon occurred again when the advisor explained that the figure on the I-20 was not estimated but confirmed.

32 A: That's the current fiscal year's so if this is any different from what we've already got, we'll do a new I-20  
33 S: But this is also a estimate figure  
34 A: No this is not an estimate. This should not be an estimate. That is what has been confirmed and we do the I-20 based on that
35 S: Ok **anyway** I **like** I like to renew that. That means that’s what time refuse in Beijing, but this should be somewhat document should be changed, otherwise it will be refused again
36 A: It could be
37 S: This is a **serious** problem // now (??)  

(Session 10)

Turn 33 showed that the student had a misconception about the figure for the income on the I-20, which was clarified by the advisor at turn 34. The student did not show incomprehension of what was explained to him; however, at turn 35, he used a determination marker “anyway”\(^\text{10}\) which manifested his rejection of the rule and persistence in his request, which was now incongruent.

At turn 7, the student also used “especially,” an intensifier to personalize his problem and appeal for the approval for his request. This use of intensifiers was typical of the student’s discourse throughout the session, such as “serious” at turn 37, and the highlighted parts in the following sequences:

15 S: So uh probably get a **higher number** of this as this amount // a month
16 A: // This is your * assistantship?*
17 S: Yah so probably **very easy** for for F2 visa // usually in Beijing
18 A: // Not necessarily

and

52: Only that part, ok? The rest of the information we have. This is what I want, ok? And that’s what your wife can show too
53: Pardon me?
55 S: But this this is **very important** to her =

(Session 10)

\(^{10}\) See Table 3.2. The example Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) gave for **determination marker** is: "I've explained myself and that's that!" Like "that's that," "anyway" also shows the student's determination to carry something out in spite of the circumstances, so I categorize it as a determination marker.
By consistently using intensifiers, the student appeared to imply that the advisor was not treating his problem as a special case, hence not doing her job well. According to Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989), determination markers and intensifiers are all upgraders, which are face-threatening in request-making.

**Directness, speaker-oriented perspective, and instructive statements**

It has been noted that in pro forma negotiation of incongruent requests, students tended to be indirect in making their requests, so that sometimes their request was implicit throughout the conversation; however, in session 10, the student was very explicit and straightforward in making his requesting moves. In his two request moves, turn 23 and turn 35, the student explicitly used the words “change” and “renew.” In session 3, the student who wanted to reduce the estimation of living expenses on the I-20 did not even mention the word “reduce.” Furthermore, rather than using comembership, speaker and hearer oriented perspective “we” as the student in session 7 did, the student in this session used “I” throughout the session. The self-oriented “I want” and “I like” are very direct and imposing. Also there was no syntactic downgrader like the negotiation of a preparatory condition to mitigate the imposing force of the request, as was found in pro forma negotiations. In contrast,

19 S: Ao: is it really? So uh today I talked to my my major professor  
20 A: Uhhun  
21 S: and asked him to (?) something about just about estimate  
22 A: Uhhun  
23 S: I get this figure from him (1.) so **I want to change I-20 for that that means renew that** and  
35 S: Ok anyway I like I like to renew that. That means that’s what time refuse in Beijing, but this should be somewhat document should be changed, otherwise it will be refused again  
36 A: It could be  
37 S: This is a serious problem // now (?)  
38 A: // and then could be refused again anyway
39 S: [laughing]
40 A: Ok but what we put in here because you gave us this amount and this is what you showed 6/2/97 to 6/30/98
41 S: Oh yah but this uh my I mean I'm not mean this this this because this is already good but for the moment I only want to change that
42 A: You'll change with what you can show us and this is the form that we need, ok?
43 S: Ok
44 A: We need to know the amount of money between here and here. That's what we will put on the I-20 (1.5)
45 S: So what, I I don't know this
46 A: I don't know how his figure is in that at all, ok? So what he puts here, I'll put on the I-20

(Session 10)

(Arrows are used to demonstrate how the advisor used the exact words the student used in his request to reject it, which will be discussed by the end of this section.)

both requesting moves were straightforward, declarative statements: “I want to change I-20” and “I like to renew that.” Moreover, immediately after the request utterance, he attached an explanation, for instance “that means renew that” (turn 23), which made the request even more explicit. Furthermore, the structure “that means ...” sounds instructive; explaining that a procedure means renewing an I-20 to the advisor who was an expert in the institutional rules was highly incongruent with the student’s status. In addition, the explanation attached to the second request move even had a commanding implication, by illustrating the devastating outcome of not renewing the I-20: “this should be somewhat document should be changed, otherwise it will be refused again” (turn 35).

In contrast to the earlier situation in which the students used downgraders in their requesting utterances, and in which the advisor tended to utilize downgraders in her response, we see that the student’s directness and use of upgraders was met by the advisor’s also becoming very direct and occasionally using an upgrader. Moreover, the more upgraders the student used, the quicker the advisor was to reject.

17 S: Yah so probably very easy for for F2 visa // usually in Beijing
18 A: // Not necessarily

(Session 10)
Also, at turn 35, the student pointed out that the outcome of not renewing the I-20 was that the visa "will be refused again;" immediately at turn 36, the advisor said "It could be." The student then used an intensifier "serious" at turn 37 to stress the urgency of the problem, which only incurred a more explicit discouragement "and then could be refused again anyway" at turn 38 with "anyway" as an upgrader. The student responded to this discouragement with laughter, which, on this occasion, could not be counted as a face-preserving strategy, but a sign of face loss, "feelings of defeat" (Adelsward, 1989, 125). Another use of upgrader was at turn 46 "not ... at all," which intensified her negation hence rejection of the student's request.

One interesting phenomenon was that the advisor used the exact words the student had used in his request to reject it. In other words, she used lexical repetition in her rejection. Two such examples were found between turns 35 and 38, and turns 41 and 42, with the respective words underlined and connected by arrows. One more example occurs near the end of the recorded section:

55 S: But this this is very important to her =
56 A: = Well I know it's important but we also (.) are (.) cannot do what we cannot do. What we can do is show what you're getting this year

(Session 10)

At this point, the advisor’s rejection has become a retort, and the negation has become intense both in pace (notice the latch) and in content. After one more round of turns, the student asked for permission to turn off the tape recorder, to which the advisor agreed. The comparison between pro forma negotiation of incongruent requests and frustrating negotiation of incongruent requests is presented in Table 4.4.
Table 4.4 A comparison of presence and absence of status-preserving strategies in negotiations of incongruent requests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pro forma negotiation of incongruent request (sessions 3, 7, 9)</th>
<th>Frustrating negotiation of incongruent request (session 10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of downgraders/mitigators</td>
<td>Use of upgraders/aggravators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. hedge: “a sort of”;</td>
<td>i. intensifier: “especially,” “very easy,” “very important.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. understater: “easier,” “just;”</td>
<td>ii. determination marker: “anyway.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. negation: “I think I do not need so much.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. downtoner: “probably.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirectness</td>
<td>Directness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. incongruent request implicit;</td>
<td>i. incongruent request explicit: “get a higher number of this as this amount;” “I want to change 1-20.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. hint, self-detachment: “so they actually want me, you know, start a little earlier.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. suggestion and brevity: “For example without that card?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comembership or speaker and hearer oriented</td>
<td>Speaker oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“we”—speaker (student) and hearer (advisor)</td>
<td>“I”—speaker (student only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Query preparatory</td>
<td>Declarative Statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“so I think if we work out to apply a Curriculum Practical Training?” “Is that?”</td>
<td>“I like I like to renew that.” “I only want to change that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negation of a preparatory'condition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“but there is no way I can make a CPT”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing understanding and acceptance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“All right since this is everyone’s problem probably I can’t complain about that.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Yah you’re right. We cannot do anything.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

English Proficiency and Pragmatic Competence

In Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford's (1990) study, their NNSE students have TOEFL scores of 573 or above. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford thus categorized their students' English as advanced and further claimed that the latter's lack of use of SPSs was attributable to their
pragmatic competence rather than linguistic competence. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford did not consider the variation in pragmatic competence among their NNSE participants, nor did they compare this variation with that in the students' linguistic competence, which makes their claim too simplistic.

In my study, the students have an average TOEFL score of 608 (see Table 3.1) and GRE Verbal score of 570. The mean of each type of scores has been affected by the only undergraduate student, who came with an F2 visa and changed to the student status later, and whose TOEFL was 523 and GRE Verbal was 480, both at the lowest end of the range. Other than the scores of this student, the lowest TOEFL score was 577, higher than that in Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford's study. From a statistical perspective, that only undergraduate student was an outlier. If measured by the same standard used by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, the overall proficiency of the Chinese students can be said to be more advanced than in their study. However, it is obvious from the analysis so far that despite this unanimously advanced level, there is variation in pragmatic performance among the students.

Moreover, I noticed that the two students involved in the EAD card issue, who not only employed face-preserving strategies in their negotiations of incongruent requests but also showed understanding and acceptance of the rejection, were the two whose length of stay in the US was the longest, 4.5 and 5.5 years respectively. This suggests that there may be a relationship between the students' pragmatic competence and their length of stay in an English speaking environment; i.e., the longer they stay, the more pragmatically competent they become. Investigating the source and nature of input to NNSEs in academic advising sessions, Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1996) suggested that one fact which constrains the NNSEs' development of pragmatic competence is "the absence of input from speakers in the same institutional role as the NNS" (185). Therefore, it makes sense that as Chinese students stay in the US longer, they get more useful input than those who have not stayed in the US as long.
To study exactly how NNSEs' pragmatic competence relates to their linguistic competence and their exposure to useable input apparently will be very revealing to the research of the pragmatic dynamics in international student advising conversations; it is, however, beyond the scope of this study.

The following chapter will present the conclusions of this study and provide implications and directions for future research.
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This chapter summarizes the conclusions drawn from this study and offers implications and directions for future research. Answers to the research questions are as follows:

1. How is an international student advising interview organized? Is it structurally the same as that of an academic advising interview?

There are similarities and differences between the structure of an international student advising interview and that of an academic advising interview. The two are similar in that a typical international student advising session contains all the four major components recognized by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993) in a typical academic advising interview: diagnosis, directive, report writing, and closing, in this sequence. However, what makes an international student advising interview different is that except for closing which self-evidently comes at the end of the session, the other three components reoccur and their order is unpredictable. Moreover, almost all international student advising interviews start with an opening prompt, usually, “What can I help you with?” initiated by the advisor. This difference is mainly caused by the fact that a regular academic advising interview has only one focal topic, i.e., academic scheduling, while various topics exist in international student advising sessions, centering around international students’ social, cultural, personal, and academic concerns and maintaining their legal, non-immigrant student status in the US. From this we can see that the number and types of topics can influence the interview structure.

2. How does a request, a congruent speech act in Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford’s study become incongruent in international student advising sessions? How is the notion of congruence or incongruence, in the case of requests, specifically manifested or redefined in international student advising sessions?

This study uses Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford’s (1990) “Maxim of congruence,” i.e., the match of production to the speaker’s status, to evaluate the congruence of the students’
requests. Nevertheless, requests in the international student advising setting have different contents and some of them even carry different forms, therefore, a new specialized definition of congruence is required. Basically, whether a request is incongruent or not is highly restricted by the content of the request. If, in order to realize a request, the student has to violate certain institutional rules, the request is inappropriate. After such a rule is explained by the advisor to the student, and the latter insists on the same request, the request becomes incongruent. That is, it is when a request becomes a petition that it becomes incongruent, because by petitioning, the student is actually rejecting the advice given by the advisor, which is overtly a speech act incongruent with the student’s status.

It seems that none of the three types of requests identified by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1990), requests for information, permission, and advice, apply to the situation above and they are all congruent with the students’ status in academic advising sessions. However, in international student advising interviews, due to the conflict between the students’ realistic problems and the institutional rules, negotiations of inappropriate and hence incongruent requests are almost unavoidable, despite the fact that the results of such negotiations are almost always a rejection. Apparently, something must be done by the students to soften the tension and save face for both themselves and the advisor. The use of such strategies testifies to the student’s pragmatic competence.

3. Among the status-preserving strategies identified by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, what are those used by Chinese students in international student advising sessions? Besides Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford’s status-preserving strategies, what are other, including Brown and Levinson’s politeness strategies that occur and how are they realized linguistically and non-linguistically?

It seems that each of the six status-preserving strategies (SPSs) identified by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford has found its evidence of application in pro forma negotiations of incongruent requests. In addition, laughter, a nonlinguistic phenomenon, and small talk — one of Brown and Levinson’s politeness strategies, are also used by the students to mitigate the
potential face threat of their requests or show their understanding and acceptance of the rejection.

Both SPSs and politeness strategies are used to meet people's face wants. There is a high degree of overlap between the two types of strategies. Together with laughter, they can all be called face-preserving strategies.

4. What effect does the degree of potential for an incongruent request in the focal topic have on the interview, especially the advisor's response and the interview structure? What are the differences between negotiations of congruent requests and those of incongruent requests?

The incongruence of the request itself, no matter how it is made by the student, also appears to have an effect on the advisor's response. This is manifested by the fact that in "safe" sessions with little or no potential for incongruent requests, i.e., sessions with congruent requests, the advisor sometimes initiated the topic, the preferred response for the request, an approval came quickly, and there were insertion sequences of small talk and mutual laughter intermixed with business talk. On the contrary, in "risky" sessions with high potential for incongruent requests, the advisor tended to wait for the student to explain the topic; the dispreferred response, a rejection, was much delayed; and no small talk was present. This finding corresponds with Levinson's (1983) theory of preference sequences in conversational organization.

5: Are there any differences in the negotiations of incongruent requests across sessions? If yes, what does this tell about the use of status-preserving strategies and politeness strategies?

There are differences in the negotiations of incongruent requests across sessions, which demonstrates the great importance of employing face-preserving strategies in such sessions. Students who used such strategies as downgraders, small talk, query preparatory, hints, and suggestions were able to maintain a good conversation climate and preserve face for both themselves and the advisor. On the contrary, students who failed to use these
strategies, and who utilized upgraders and incongruent speech acts such as rejection and instructive statements, lost not only the approval for the request, but also a good rapport with the advisor, and risked face for both themselves and the advisor.

6. What is the overall proficiency of the Chinese students as measured by their TOEFL and GRE verbal scores? What does this tell about the role of pragmatic competence in the students’ use or absence of SPSs and politeness strategies as declared by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford?

In this study, the students’ TOEFL and GRE Verbal scores seemed to be evenly distributed among the students. If relying on this as a measurement of their linguistic competence, we can say that generally they are uniformly highly competent. Yet the students’ pragmatic performance in individual advising sessions appeared to be strikingly varied. Also, the two students who explicitly expressed their understanding and acceptance of the rejection to their incongruent request on the issue of delayed EAD card were the two whose length of stay in the US was the longest, 4.5 years and 5.5 years. A future study should look into the relationship between the students’ linguistic proficiency and their pragmatic performance in the advising conversations and see how the students’ length of stay in the target language environment and their overall target-language input influence their acquirement of interactional skills.

This study has also expanded the research of institutional interviews in that it has presented the interview structure, kinds of topics and hence kinds of negotiations involved, thus revealing the mechanisms in one kind of international student advising setting.

Due to the mere fact that each of the advising sessions is between an American advisor and one or two Chinese students, the study introduces itself into the category of investigating cross-cultural communications. However, as explained in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the study did not address the cross-cultural aspect of the advising conversations. A cross-cultural analysis of discourse will address the major factors significant for understanding intercultural discourse, as identified by Scollon and Scollon (1995), such as
ideology (history, beliefs, and values), face systems (the concept of the self, ingroup-outgroup relationships), forms of discourse (functions of language, non-verbal communication), and socialization (education, enculturation, acculturation).

Future research can address the cross-cultural aspect of the interviews. Take, making incongruent requests, for example. One dimension of cross-cultural study is the function of rules which may be viewed differently in different cultures. It is possible that rules in one culture are un-negotiable, while in another there are always chances for exceptions, depending on how persistent one is and what diplomatic maneuvers one uses. If such cultural differences exist, a negotiation in which a person from the flexible culture makes an incongruent request to a person from the rigid culture is very likely to be unsatisfactory.

This study can be of value to four groups of people. First, it has pedagogical implications for EFL instructors in China. Typical EFL classes in China are still teacher-centered, textbook-bound, and focus on the students’ linguistic competence e.g., grammatical knowledge, and lack emphasis on the students’ pragmatic competence, e.g., ability to talk spontaneously and properly. This study has not only manifested the importance of pragmatics in cross-cultural encounters but also provided a number of specific pragmatic skills in the form of SPSs and politeness strategies for teaching.

Secondly, this study can serve as a reminder to EFL textbook compilers in China that more pragmatic content needs to be incorporated into the English textbooks. Many EFL textbooks currently in use have no authentic culturally-specific pragmatic contexts. For example, the following dialogue is very common in EFL textbooks:

A: What’s your name?
B: My name is Li Hong.
A: How old are you?
B: I’m twenty.
A: Where do you come from?
B: I come from Nanjing.
A: Where are you going?
B: I’m going to the library (Hu Wenzhong, 1982, 46).
Since there is no explanation about the social relationship between the two speakers and the situation of the dialogue -- whether this is a casual exchange or a kind of cross-examination -- students tend to automatically assume this is how NSEs would talk when they first meet with each other. Nonetheless in American culture, asking about one’s age in routine greetings is considered both forward and rude.

If read by Chinese students in the US, this study will also help raise their pragmatic consciousness. An attempt to appropriately apply the strategies discussed above to their interactions with native speakers of American English, especially in an institutional setting where they are status subordinate, will benefit them and lead to smooth cross-cultural communications. Finally, this study might also be useful to the international student advisors who may lack awareness of the strategies used by Chinese students in international student advising sessions.
APPENDIX A  TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

// indicates the next speaker overlaps at this point.
* asterisk shows the point where overlap ends.
(0.0) Numbers in parentheses indicate pauses or gaps in approximately tenth of seconds
(.) micropause -- potentially significant but very short pause, comparable perhaps to an
average syllable duration or somewhere below 0.2 seconds’ duration.
CAPS Uppercase type is used for stress (pitch and volume).
: A colon means the syllable is lengthened. Multiple colons indicate a more prolonged
syllable.
= used for “latching,” to show there is no gap between utterances.
? A question mark indicates strong rising intonation.
, used to indicate maintained (“continuing”) intonation.
. used to indicate falling intonation contour.
[] used to specify “some phenomenon that transcriber does not want to wrestle with”
or non-verbal action, etc.
( ) uncertain passages of transcript
**bold** used to point to parts of the transcript relevant to the analyst’s description.
hh indicates an audible out-breath, -hh an in-breath.
(°) indicates that the following talk is said softly.
- indicates slow pace of utterance
APPENDIX B POST-SESSION SURVEY

1. Name ____________________________ 2. Sex ____________

3. The last time you took TOEFL was ___/_____/______ (Please give date).

4. TOEFL scores: total _______ listening _______ structure _______ reading _______.

5. The last time you took GRE was ___/_____/______ (Please give date).

   GRE verbal score: _______.

6. How many years of course work in English did you have in China? _________

7. Have you taken any English courses since you came to the US? _________

   If yes, please specify (e.g. English 101B, 101C, 101D, 101E1, 101E2, 180, or other)

8. How long have you been in the US? _________

9. How many times have you come to OISS since you came to the US? _________

10. When was the last time you came here? _________

Please complete the following statements:

11. In total, I use English (including speaking, listening, reading, and writing) _______

   a. less than 1 hour each day   d. 5 to 6 hours each day
   b. 1 to 2 hours each day   e. over 6 hours (specify _______)
   c. 3 to 4 hours each day

12. I speak English with native speakers _______

   a. less than 1 hour each day   d. 5 to 6 hours each day
   b. 1 to 2 hours each day   e. over 6 hours (specify _______)
   c. 3 to 4 hours each day

13. I speak English with non-native speakers of English (such as other international

   students) _______

   a. less than 1 hour each day   d. 5 to 6 hours each day
   b. 1 to 2 hours each day   e. over 6 hours (specify _______)
   c. 3 to 4 hours each day

14. In this advising session, my ability to understand the advisor was _________

   a. very high   d. somewhat low
   b. high   e. very low
   c. so so

15. Making myself understood by the advisor was _________

   a. very difficult   d. somewhat difficult
   b. difficult   e. not difficult at all
   c. so so
APPENDIX C  OVERVIEW OF FIFTEEN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADVISING SESSIONS BY MAJOR TYPES OF TOPICS

Visa Issue

1. Asking to change I-20, put personal funds on it, but his wife has not gone to apply for a visa yet.
2. Getting a new I-20 for his son, unaware of the difficulty of getting an F2 visa.
3. Getting a new I-20 for his wife, aware of the difficulty of getting an F2 visa.
5. Asking if it is ok to mail the original new I-20 back to his wife; looking for a quarter-time assistantship plus the one he currently held.
10. Wife denied a visa; adding money (estimated figure by his major professor) to I-20.
14. Getting an I-20 to bring a sister.
15. F1 changed to F2 to maintain legal status.

Practical Training Issue (OPT/CPT)

6. Applying for a CPT, internship.
7. Applied for OPT, but EAD card did not come.
8. Applying for OPT; advisor checking required papers.
9. Applied for OPT, but EAD card did not come.
11. Applying for CPT, but forgot to bring the right I-20.

Others

12. Seeking help in spoken English.
13. Changing academic level: from Bachelor to Master.
APPENDIX D ADDITIONAL TABLE: COMPARISON BETWEEN OPT AND CPT

The comparison of Curriculum Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT) is summarized in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CPT</th>
<th>OPT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Authorization for employment (internship, practicum etc.) directly related to a student’s major area of study</td>
<td>Employment authorization which gives students the opportunity to gain work experience in their field of study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-conditions</td>
<td>Either required or optional in the course curriculum. In either case, must register for a course.</td>
<td>After completion of course requirement for the degree, but before graduation; or within 60 days after graduation. No need to register for a course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorizer</td>
<td>The International Student Advisor (ISA)</td>
<td>The ISA recommends OPT, but the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) must authorize it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document of Approval</td>
<td>INS will issue an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) which the students must have before they can begin to work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Based on “Curricular Practical Training: F1 Visa Holders (Prior to Graduation)” and “Optional Practical Training: F1 Visa Holders” by International Student Office.)
REFERENCES CITED


situations and prepatterned speech (pp. 157-185). NY: Mouton.


ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank all the people who have contributed to the completion of this study. I am especially grateful to Dr. Roberta Vann for her guidance throughout the entire period in which the study was carried out. She has not only given me valuable input about this thesis study, but also taught me the fundamentals for research report writing which I knew little of before and which I am sure I will benefit a lot hereafter. The knowledge I learned from her discourse analysis class has laid the groundwork for this study.

I also want to thank Dr. Susan Conrad for both her scholarly advice and positive moral support. Every email message from her and every short talk with her was a source of insightful comments as well as refreshing encouragement. From her sociolinguistics class, I obtained some experience with conversation analysis, which proved to be useful for this study.

I give thanks, too, to Dr. Clyde Thogmartin for his suggestions for the implications and directions for future research, and to the Office of International Students and Scholars for the approval of this project. I also owe to Chinese students for their cooperation and help in data collection, which made this study possible.

Finally, all the thanks to my husband for his patience, support, and excellent cuisine through the entire period of my thesis study.