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Relevance Theory, Culture and Communication: Interpretations of Broadcast Talk by Native Speakers of Mandarin Chinese and British English

By

Qiufen Yu

A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University, UK

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ABSTRACT

In studies of culture and communication, it is widely believed that (a) cultures can be distinguished according to the use of direct and indirect style (e.g. Adair and Brett 2004; Brew and Cairns 2004; Cohen 2004; Ting-Toomey 1999); (b) culture is closely related to communication style (e.g. Fujishin 2007; Neuliep 2006; Pekerti and Thomas 2003); and (c) there are differences in interpretation between people from different cultures (e.g. Cohen 2004; Gao and Ting-Toomey 1998; Scollon and Scollon 1995; Ting-Toomey 1999). Drawing on Relevance Theory, I argued that communication styles in cultures that have been categorised as using direct and indirect style are both indirect, and that there is no direct connection between culture and communication style. Specifically, I proposed that the claim that there are differences in interpretation between people with diverse cultural backgrounds can be more effectively addressed by focusing on contextual assumptions people draw on in response to an utterance. To investigate how cultural differences are realised by focusing on native speakers of Mandarin Chinese and British English, this study adopted a qualitative technique to analyse data in order not only to reveal how or whether cultural differences are realised through the use of communication style, but also to provide an in-depth understanding of contextual assumptions that hearers draw on and their relationship with cultural difference.

This study involved two sets of radio talk shows broadcast in China and Britain. It also involved a series of interviews with hearers from China and Britain. The main findings from the study are: (1) styles of speakers of Mandarin Chinese and British English are both indirect; (2) there is no direct correlation between culture and communication style, and (3) cultural differences are realised if hearers from different
cultures draw on different contextual assumptions in response to an utterance. This research has important implications for researchers in the area of culture and communication in understanding cultural differences in communication, and for research into contextual assumptions in intercultural encounters.
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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Aims and rationale

As we enter the 21st century, the emergence of a global culture has changed people’s lives in many ways. One direct impact that the global culture has on our daily lives is illustrated by one simple example given by Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005, 3) below:

We find ourselves having increased contact with people who are culturally different…. In what was once a homogeneous community, we may now find more diversity and cultural values in flux.

The frequency of such contacts helps to integrate people with diverse cultures into a global community and therefore facilitates the exchange of ideas, yet it is also seen as a source of cultural divergence, leading to ‘intercultural misunderstanding’ (House 2000, 145). In order to communicate effectively with people from other cultures and avoid or minimize misunderstanding in intercultural encounters, scholars in the area of culture and communication have brought the issue of culture differences in communication into focus. As Hall (1983, 185) concludes,

Human beings are such an incredibly rich and talented species with potential beyond anything it is possible to contemplate that … it would appear that our greater task, our most important task, and our most strategic task is to learn as much as possible about ourselves [and others] …. My point is that as humans learn more about their incredible sensitivity, their boundless talents, and manifold diversity, they should begin to appreciate not only about themselves but also about others.
In order to learn as much as possible about ourselves and others with diverse cultural backgrounds (Hall 1983, 185), scholars engaged in the study of culture and its relationship with communication have invested enormous energy to theorise cultural differences. My present study has grown out of a review of previous literature that addresses cultural differences and their relationship with communication.

My review of past literature indicated that scholarship in the area of cultural differences falls into two strands. One line of research tends to work on the assumption that understanding styles of speakers with different cultural backgrounds provides a means of distinguishing cultures (e.g. Adair and Brett 2004; Cohen 2004; Fujishin 2007; Neuliep 2006; Pekerti and Thomas 2003; Ting-Toomey 1999). In these studies, relevant scholars argue that the distinction between direct and indirect communication can be used to differentiate cultures, in that a direct style tends to predominate in Western cultures and an indirect style tends to predominate in Eastern cultures. I now use two examples from the literature to illustrate how the direct and indirect distinction is used to characterize cultures. The first example is from a study carried out by Fujishin (2007). In this study, Fujishin argues that in a business context, in response to a question of whether a negotiator wants to do business with another, negotiators from Japan and England or America tend to use different styles to express a refusal, in that a Japanese negotiator will use an indirect style to say something like (b), whereas a negotiator from England or America will say something like (a), as shown in [1.1].
Direct Style (used in America and England)
(a) No.

Indirect style (used in Japan)
(b) You have a good product.

(Fujishin 2007, 69-70)

Similarly, Adair and Brett (2004) claim that in the context of business negotiation, in response to a question of whether a negotiator wants to buy the product being offered, negotiators from Western cultures tend to use a direct style to say something like (a) to express their intention that the price of the product being offered is too high. To imply the same meaning, negotiators from Eastern cultures prefer to use an indirect style to produce an utterance like (b), as shown in [1.2].

[1.2]

Direct style (used in Western cultures)
(a) My company is financially weak, so without a good price, my company will not be able to buy the product at all (adapted from the original).

Indirect style (used in Eastern cultures)
(b) We’ve had a bad quarter, and our acquisition budget is extremely limited.

(Adair and Brett 2004, 162)

According to Adair and Brett (2004), if negotiators from Western cultures say something like (a), this implies that the negotiators want to buy the product at a lower price. In contrast, negotiators from the East tend to say something like (b) to imply the same meaning.
However, in both cases, these scholars do not actually explain how they come to categorise one style as being ‘direct’ and another style as being ‘indirect’.

A second line of research addresses cultural differences by pointing out that there are differences between people with distinct cultural backgrounds in the way they are likely to interpret a given utterance in a specific context (e.g. Cohen 2004; Gao and Ting-Toomey 1998; Scollon and Scollon 1995; Ting-Toomey 1999). In these studies, the differences in interpretation are attributed to the variations in the cultural backgrounds of the interlocutors. For example, according to Ting-Toomey (1999, 125), intercultural misunderstanding can easily occur when a Japanese speaker utters ‘hai, hai’ as shown in [1.3].

[1.3]
If Japanese say ‘hai, hai’, Westerners think that the Japanese have actually signalled ‘yes’ to a contract agreement, while the Japanese think that they have merely acknowledged hearing the speaker’s statement (Ting-Toomey 1999, 125).

What Ting-Toomey suggests here is that Westerners and Japanese interpret the utterance ‘hai, hai’ in radically different ways, and such differences are caused by the differences between Japanese and Westerners in their respective cultural backgrounds. However, Ting-Toomey does not actually explain how culture impacts on interpretation.

In my research, I argue that if we accept the general claims made by existing studies of culture and communication that cultures vary according to the use of style, it is necessary to provide an explanation for how one style can be categorized as direct and another as indirect. Only when we have a clear idea of how such categorizations are
made, can we be in a position to determine whether or not cultural differences are realised through the use of communication style. I further argue that if we accept the claim made by existing studies of culture and communication that differences in interpretation are caused by the cultural backgrounds of the interlocutors, it is necessary to explain how cultural background relates to interpretation. With these concerns in mind, I argue that in order to address the relationship between culture and communication, we must focus on the complete act of communication: how an utterance is produced and how the utterance is interpreted. I argue that a methodology based on Sperber and Wilson’s (1986/1995) inferential model can provide a more detailed description of what both speaker and hearer do in the process of communication. I also argue that the adoption of Hong’s (2009) dynamic constructivist view of culture as a supplementary approach in the process of exploration can make explicit the dynamic nature of cultural knowledge. My goal in this thesis is to make explicit what actually happens in the process of communication in order to explore how communication styles can be best studied, and how culture has an impact on interpretation.

1.2 Theoretical departure

I believe that Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995) provides a descriptive vocabulary and an explanatory framework that would enable me to explain how the direct and indirect distinction as shown in [1.1] and [1.2], as well as how differences in interpretation as shown in [1.3] may be addressed. My thesis takes the following axiomatic premises based on Sperber and Wilson’s (1986/1995) Relevance Theory:
(1) All human communication is a matter of degree. As a result, communication is explicit to a greater or lesser degree;

(2) In an act of communication, a speaker’s behaviour is used as evidence by a hearer in the construction of assumptions about her meaning;

(3) There is no such thing as direct communication at all. Understanding utterances always requires the hearer to carry out inferences.

(4) A hearer needs to draw on context in order to interpret the utterances produced by the speaker. Context is not limited to information about the immediate physical environment or previous utterance; it also includes such things as general cultural assumptions.

I apply insights from Relevance Theory to my own investigation of cultural differences in communication in real life interactions, and adopt Hong’s (2009) dynamic constructivist view of culture as a supplementary approach for the exploration of cultural difference. I hypothesise:

In a study of communication in a given culture, it will be possible to demonstrate that:

(a) Communication in the culture is explicit to a greater or lesser degree;

(b) An utterance produced by a speaker from the culture is merely a piece of evidence that a hearer uses in the construction of the assumptions about the speaker’s meaning;

(c) Understanding utterances produced by a speaker from the culture requires a hearer to carry out inferences;

(d) A hearer of the culture needs to draw on context, including cultural knowledge, to interpret an utterance.
In the light of above hypotheses, I adopted a qualitative approach to study whether or not cultures vary according to the use of style, and how differences in interpretation of an utterance between interlocutors are related to the cultural backgrounds of the interlocutors, by focusing on China and Britain. I collected and analysed two sets of data from radio programmes broadcast in China and Britain respectively. I also carried out a series of interviews to identify the contexts that hearers of Mandarin Chinese (henceforth MC) and British English (henceforth BE) were accessing when they interpreted utterances produced by callers in the radio talk shows. In particular, I sought to identify whether or not the two sets of hearers interpreted the utterances differently, and whether or not the differences were related to variations in the contexts the hearers had accessed. I asked the respondents two sets of questions. The first set of questions focused on some specific utterances heard from the programme. The second set of questions focused on the entire conversation between the caller and the host, in which I asked the respondents what problem they thought the caller wanted to solve.

My analysis shows that the relevance theoretic approach and the dynamic constructivist approach are supplementary to each other, in that they both provide some useful insights in my analysis of cultural differences in communication and enable me to address issues that existing studies of culture and communication cannot.
1.3 Structure of the thesis

In the remaining seven chapters of this thesis, the structure is as follows:

In Chapter Two, I critically evaluate previous studies of culture and communication, and argue that they leave unexplained many claims they make about cultural differences in communication.

In Chapter Three, I explain how a relevance theoretic approach may provide a solution to issues that have been left unexplained, and define the specific research questions that my present study addresses.

In Chapter Four, I describe in detail the research procedure I designed to address the research questions.

Chapters Five and Six form the heart of this thesis. In Chapter Five, I analyse the set of caller’s utterances to show that utterances produced by callers from both China and Britain require some degree of inference on the part of a hearer, and both sets of callers use specific linguistic devices to guide the interpretation process. In Chapter Six, I analyse the context that hearers draw on in response to the utterances produced by the callers to show that different interpretations are available if hearers draw on different contexts.

In Chapter Seven, I summarise and discuss the significance of my findings in the light of what they add to the findings of the existing scholarship. I also discuss how the issue of cultural differences in communication might be theorised.
Finally in Chapter Eight, I conclude the whole thesis by summarising the contributions that my thesis makes to the area of culture and communication, and point to potential scope for a further study in a similar area.

Throughout the thesis, references are made to transcripts. These are located in the appendices (numbers 1-13). Among the thirteen appendices, the first appendix is about transcription conventions, and the remaining twelve appendices are transcripts of the English and the Chinese data, from my empirical study.

In this thesis, I have referred to the speaker as she and the hearer as he, following the convention of Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995), without intending any contextual implications. Since in this thesis a caller who phones in to a radio advice talk programme is studied as the speaker who constructs problems in order to seek advice on the problem, and the host as well as overhearing audience as the hearer, I have referred to a caller as she and a host and overhearing audience as he, unless otherwise stated (e.g., when in a direct quotation, or when the context identifies the gender of both speaker and hearer).

1.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced the aims and rationale of the research reported in this thesis, and have summarised the procedures through which my research is conducted. In the next chapter, I review previous studies of culture and communication that address cultural differences in communication.
Chapter Two: Previous Approaches to Culture and Communication

Introduction
This chapter has two main aims. My first aim is to evaluate studies that address the relationship between culture and communication, in order to argue that there are two key approaches to the study of cultural differences, namely, approaches that draw on the distinction between high and low context communication, as proposed by Hall (1976), and approaches that draw on the dimension of individualism and collectivism identified by Hofstede (1980). According to the literature, Hall and Hofstede share a concern to theorise how cultures affect the way people communicate. Hofstede’s study, which I will evaluate in Section 2.2.1.1, is influenced by Hall’s theoretical model, as described above.

To date, a considerable amount of scholarship has been invested in studying cultural differences in communication. Much of the literature on culture and communication tends to address cultural differences according to style. One example of such a theorisation can be seen in the argument made by Ting-Toomey (1999, 103), as follows:

[I]n individualistic cultures, people tend to…emphasise the preferential use of direct talk. In contrast, in collectivistic cultures, people tend to…emphasise the preferential use of indirect talk.

In my subsequent discussion, I will demonstrate that many studies take this stance.

As my evaluation will show, studies that have applied and developed the two approaches are problematic insofar as while they apply the two key approaches to
studying cultural differences, they do not make explicit the criteria they are using when they are making claims about the possible cultural differences they are addressing. My aim in evaluating the literature is to argue that because of this, these studies do not have sufficient grounds to be able to support their claims.

My overall intention here is to make the point that if we accept the general claims about cultural differences in communication in the existing studies of culture and communication, it is necessary to develop a more precise theoretical perspective from which cultural differences in communication can be investigated. My present thesis attempts to develop such a theoretical framework and demonstrates how it can be applied to the investigation of cultural differences by focusing on China and Britain. In addressing these aims, this chapter begins with a definition of some of the key concepts that recur in the literature.

2.1 Defining concepts

In this section, I define three key concepts that recur throughout my literature review. They are:

(a) Culture;

(b) Cross-cultural communication;

(c) Communication styles.

In the following three subsections, each of these issues will be dealt with briefly.

2.1.1 Culture

Aneas and Sandin (2009, 3) argue that ‘there have been numerous attempts to define the meaning of the term of culture’; however, ‘no consensus has been achieved when
it comes to formulating an interdisciplinary definition which can be accepted across
the diverse fields of study’. From the early 1960s, one definition of culture has
focused on the links between culture and communication. For example, Hall (1959, 191) argues that ‘culture is communication and communication is culture’. This
definition appears to be tautological, but it indicates Hall’s view of the inseparable
nature of culture and communication. Similarly, Smith (1966, 7) maintains that

Culture is a code we learn and share, and learning and sharing require
communication. And communication requires coding and symbols, which must
be learned and shared. Communication and culture are inseparable.

In addition to the importance attached to the link between communication and culture,
Smith suggests that culture is learned. If culture is indeed learned, it follows that
culture is a form of knowledge distributed within populations, and it should therefore
be understood in terms of sharing.

In the last two decades, however, largely as a result of the classic work of Hofstede
(1980), many culture and communication researchers characterise this form of
knowledge distributed in populations as a set of static, fixed values and norms shared
among a social group such as national, ethnic or racial groups (e.g. Bond 1991;
Gudykunst and Kim 2003; Hofstede 1980; Lindsey et al. 1999; Lustig and Koester
1999; Spencer-Oatey 2008; Triandis 1995). For example, Lustig and Koester (1999,
30) define culture as

[A] learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, and norms, which
affect behaviours of a relatively large group of people.
Similarly, Spencer-Oatey (2008, 3) conceptualises culture as

A set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but not determine) each member’s behaviour and his or her interpretation of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behaviour.

The shared perceptions of values, beliefs and norms are assumed to affect us in the way we interact with our environment, which influences how we act in different situations. This perspective may be characterised by the definition provided by Aneas (2003, 120, cited by Aneas and Sandin 2009, 4) below:

[Culture can be defined as] the set of knowledge, values, emotional heritage, behaviour and artifacts which a social group share, and which enable them to functionally adapt to their surroundings.

More specifically, it has been argued that national culture has a great impact on one’s communicative behaviour, particularly in the use of communication style (e.g. Bennett 1998; Gudykunst 2004; Gudykunst and Kim 1992; Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey 1988; Hofstede and Hofstede 2005; Zhu et al. 2006). For example, Gudykunst draws on the findings by Levine (1985, 25) about the differences in the use of styles between Amhara culture in Ethiopia, a collectivistic culture and the United States, an individualistic culture to argue that:

The Amhara’s basic manner of communicating is indirect…the speaker … may not reveal what is really on his or her mind…The dominant North American temper calls for clear and direct communication (Gudykunst 2004, 51).
Gudykunst’s point here is that people’s respective cultural values such as individualism and collectivism (I discuss the two terms in some detail in Section 2.2.2) influence and shape their use of ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ styles. This implies that when interacting with culturally dissimilar others, people must understand the differences in the use of styles in different cultures in order to engage in effective communication.

In my study, I take the view that if we accept the general claims about cultural differences in communication in the existing scholarship of culture and communication, we need not only a different methodology but also a more precise definition of culture.

In recent years, scholars in the area of culture and communication have argued that existing culture and communication research fails to acknowledge the dynamic nature of culture, and that researchers must focus on the interaction between social cultural values and norms and psychological processes in order to understand how culture influences an individual’s communicative behaviour. These scholars include Hong and her colleagues (e.g. Hong and Chiu 2001; Hong et al. 2000; Hong et al. 2003; Hong and Mallorie 2004). The main contribution of these scholars to the study of culture and communication is that they define culture from a dynamic constructivist perspective. They argue that earlier research does not attempt to understand the process through which culture influences affect, cognition and behaviours. Rather, it describes the unique characteristics of people from different nations and then attributes the observed similarities and differences between cultures to traits that are deeply rooted within the groups belonging to cultures in terms of, for example, individualism and collectivism. Hong and her colleagues further argue that existing
culture and communication research can benefit from a dynamic constructivist approach, which looks at how culture influences communicative behaviour from the perspective of cultural psychology (Hong and Chiu 2001; Hong et al. 2000). Although several other contemporary anthropologists (e.g. D’Andrade 1995; Shore 1996; Sperber 1996) and sociologists (e.g. DiMaggio 1997) adopt a similar view, Hong et al. (2000, 716) claim that their own dynamic constructivist approach has an advantage over others, in that: (a) it ‘goes beyond these other constructivist approaches to culture in its emphasis on the dynamics of knowledge activation’; (b) it provides a clear explanation for how ‘specific pieces of cultural knowledge become operative in guiding the construction of meaning from a stimulus’ (Hong et al. 2000, 709); and (c) it points out that all individuals are capable of representing multiple cultures in their mind, and switching between representation of cultures. In this dynamic constructivist approach,

[Culture has been defined] as knowledge, consisting of learned routines of thinking, feeling and interacting with other people, as well as a corpus of substantive assertions and ideas about aspects of the world (Hong 2009, 4).

Conceptualizing culture in this way makes it clear that cultural differences are not explained by value orientations, but rather,

[C]onceptualized as differences in systems of shared meaning among members of different cultural groups. To the extent that a given meaning system is widely shared among members of a cultural group, it would be frequently used in communication among members and thus become chronically accessible (Hong and Mallorie 2004, 63).
Viewing culture as a shared ‘meaning system’, as advocated here, stands in direct opposition to those that define culture as systems of values, beliefs and norms, as discussed above. According to Hong et al. (2003, 454), ‘the critical way in which this dynamic approach differs is its assumption that culture is internalized in smaller pieces, in the knowledge structures or mental constructs that social perceivers use to interpret ambiguous stimuli’. Hong et al. (2004, 63) explain that ‘stimuli’ are ‘cultural clues’, including, for example, utterances or icons. In essence, according to this dynamic constructivist approach,

(1) Culture can be seen as a shared ‘knowledge structure or construct’ of ideas, values and beliefs (i.e. a shared cultural meaning system). The internalized construct ‘does not continuously guide our information processing’ but rather does so when triggered or activated in response to a stimulus (Hong et al. 2003, 454).

(2) Bicultural or multicultural individuals ‘can hold more than one cultural meaning system’ and shift between these systems in response to cultural clues in the environment (a process called cultural frame-switching) (Hong et al. 2004, 63).

(3) A given cultural meaning system can have profound influences on one’s judgements or behaviour when, in particular situations, the relevant implicit theories or shared assumptions are cognitively accessible, salient and applicable (i.e. relevant) in the situation (e.g. Hong and Chiu 2001; Hong et al. 2003).
What all this indicates is that when this meaning system is triggered or activated in response to a cultural clue, it will make intra- and intercultural communication possible. It also indicates that a dynamic approach to culture is a meaning-based approach.

In my study, I will show that the dynamic constructivist approach to culture has the benefit of addressing cultural differences in communication, in that it has implications for the theorisation of how cultural knowledge might impact on bicultural individuals.

So far, I have pointed to a distinction between two ways of theorising culture: (a) as a static, fixed set of values and norms; and (b) as a type of knowledge that is activated in the dynamics of meaning production. I will show later in Section 2.2 that the two key approaches to cultural differences proposed respectively by Hall (1976) and Hofstede (1980) favour the former, rather than the latter. In this and the following chapter, I make a case for the benefits of adopting a dynamic constructivist model that addresses the dynamic nature of culture.

2.1.2 Cross-cultural communication

Scollon and Scollon (2003, 539) argue that cross-cultural communication research refers to ‘the independent study of the communicative characteristics of distinct cultural or other groups’. It involves comparing and contrasting communication patterns of people of one culture with that of people from a different culture. What is distinctive about this area of research is that ‘the members of distinct groups do not interact with each other within the study’ (Scollon and Scollon 2003, 539). Thus, for example, if Chinese are compared with English with the aim of finding some similarities and differences in some aspects of communication, the resulting study can
be labelled cross-cultural communication research when comparable ‘individuals interact with members of their own culture’ (Gudykunst 2000, 314).

Many publications use the term ‘cross-cultural’ interchangeably with the term ‘intercultural’ communication, however, it has been argued (e.g. Gudykunst 2000, 314; Otten et al. 2009, 2; Scollon and Scollon 2003, 539) that these terms are conceptually different. According to Gudykunst (2000, 314), intercultural communication research involves ‘examining behaviour when members of two or more cultures interact’. So, for example, if one examines self-disclosure when Japanese and Americans communicate with each other, then the resulting study can be labelled intercultural communication research. According to Gudykunst (2000, 314), the relationship between the two types of research is that ‘understanding cross-cultural differences in behaviour is a prerequisite for understanding intercultural behaviour’. What this indicates is that a lack of awareness of cross-cultural differences can make it difficult for people with distinct cultural backgrounds to interact with each other. Consequently, the interaction between them may lead to various forms of intercultural misunderstanding. In order to build cross-cultural understanding, my study attempts to examine cross-cultural differences in communication when comparable individuals interact with members of their own culture, namely, a cross-cultural comparative study. I also show how members of one culture understand an utterance produced by a member of the other culture, and whether there are differences between members from different cultures in interpreting the utterance.

In my study, I will be accepting the general claims about cultural differences in communication in the existing literature of culture and communication, and I will
argue that if these claims are accepted, it is necessary to develop a more precise theoretical perspective through which cultural differences can be investigated.

To date, there have been numerous studies that focus on cultural differences or similarities in communication within or between East and West (e.g. Bilbow 1996, 1997; Brew et al. 2001; Goodwin and Lee 1994; Li et al. 2001; Loh 1993; Luke 1996; Oguri and Gudykunst 2002; Spencer-Oatey and Xing 2004; Zhang 2006). As I show in the literature review below, many studies are premised on the assumption that cultural differences or similarities in communication can be explained according to style.

Given that studies of culture and communication have proposed that cultural differences in communication can be explained according to style, in the next section, I address how communication styles are conceptualized in the existing literature.

2.1.3 Communication styles

It is widely accepted that the study of style is a huge area, and it usually falls under the rubric of ‘stylistics’. In my study, I focus on two main ways of theorising styles, because, as I will show in my later discussions, they will enable me to talk about how style is an issue of culture. My goal in this section is to address how the two ways of theorising styles are defined in the existing literature.

As early as 1976, Hall made a proposal that culture has a direct effect on people’s communicative behaviour, in that it influences the way people communicate (1976, 91). In proposing this, Hall (1976, 91) makes a distinction between high and low context communication styles. I will discuss this distinction in some detail in Section 2.2.2, when I evaluate Hall’s basic argument about the influence of culture on
communication. Briefly, Hall’s point is that in the process of communication, if people in one culture rely more on what is explicitly said in the interaction, rather than on what is implied, then this culture can be characterized as a low context culture. Conversely, if people in another culture rely on information that is not explicitly expressed in words, then this culture can be characterized as a high context culture. Hall’s (1976) distinction between high and low context cultures has sparked a great deal of culture and communication research. Hofstede (1991) draws on the work by Hall (1976) in which he develops such a distinction to argue that all of the cultures Hall labels as high-context are collectivist, and all of the cultures Hall labels as low-context are individualist, as follows:

A high-context communication … [is the] type of communication … frequent in collectivist cultures…. A low-context communication…is typical for individualist cultures (Hofstede 1991, 89).

The proposals made respectively by Hall (1976) and Hofstede (1991), as described above, have been applied extensively to the study of cultural differences (see for example, Gao 1998; Gao and Ting-Toomey 1998; Samovar et al. 2009). In terms of application, much of the relevant literature provides evidence that indicates that Hall’s model of high and low context communication is used to address cultural differences in terms of whether the style of a specific culture is direct or indirect. This is evident in the statement made by Samovar et al. (2009, 217) below:

[T]he Asian mode of communication (high context) is often vague, indirect, and implicit, whereas Western communication (low-context) tends to be direct, and explicit.
On a more general level, communication style has also been addressed by scholars engaged in pragmatic studies, and in particular, relevance scholars like Blakemore (1992) and Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995). They argue that from the perspective of a relevance-theoretical framework, the style of a speaker is connected with the speaker’s choice of how to formulate her utterance in such a way that a hearer is able to identify easily the intention the speaker is attempting to convey. This is clear in the argument that Blakemore makes below:

Talk of style normally occurs when a writer or speaker is perceived as having done something special, to have put a certain amount of time and effort into the formulation of their message….Style consists in the choices that speaker and writer make in communicating their thoughts… [It is a speaker’s] decision about what to make explicit and what to leave implicit (1992, 173).

According to relevance scholars (e.g. Blakemore 1992; Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995), a speaker aiming at relevance should try to formulate her utterance in such a way that the first line of interpretation to occur to the hearer is the one intended by the speaker.

Viewed in this way, style is not described as being direct or indirect as proposed by culture and communication scholars, but as a speaker’s endeavour to guide a hearer to identify the intention of the speaker. In this and the following chapter, I argue that there are clear benefits in addressing style in relation to a speaker’s effort to formulate her utterance, as proposed by relevance scholars. I go on to show how seeing style as a speaker’s choice of formulating her utterance can bring into view some of the
problems that arise from the definition of style that informs the work of many scholars who focus on culture and communication research.

Thus far, I have pointed to two ways of defining communication styles: (a) as a means of distinguishing cultures according to the use of direct and indirect communication, and (b) as a consequence of a speaker’s decision about what to make explicit and what to leave implicit when formulating her utterance. I will show later that the studies based on the approaches proposed by Hall (1976) and Hofstede (1980) all favour the former, rather than the latter. I will also show that there are benefits in addressing style as a speaker’s effort to help hearers identify the intention of the speaker.

2.1.4 Summary

In this section, I have pointed to the distinction between two ways of theorising culture and I will show in my subsequent literature review that my study argues for the dynamic constructivist approach to culture, because it will help to address the limitations of those studies that take culture as a fixed set of values and norms. I have pointed to two ways of defining communication styles and I will show in this and the following chapter that my study argues in favour of seeing style as the result of a speaker’s decision about how to formulate her utterance. This is because seeing style as the result of a speaker’s decision about how to formulate her utterance can bring into view some of the problems that stem from studies in favour of style as a way of distinguishing cultures. I have also defined cross-cultural communication research as a study in which the members of distinct cultural groups do not interact with each other and established the difference between cross-cultural and intercultural communication study.
In the next section, I evaluate studies based on the approaches proposed respectively by Hofstede (1991) and Hall (1976) to address cultural differences in communication, in order to argue that for the claims about cultural differences made by existing studies on culture and communication to be supported, we need a more precise methodology from which cultural differences can be investigated.

2.2. Evaluation of studies drawing on the two key approaches

Cultural differences in communication have been explored extensively in linguistics and cultural anthropology (e.g. Blum-Kulka and House 1989; Gumperz 1982; Hall 1976; Hecht et al. 1993; Hofstede 1980; Hofstede and Hofstede 2005; Patricia 1997; Ting-Toomey 1999; Ting-Toomey and Kurogi 1998; Wierzbicka 2005), and there are many sound conceptual and applied perspectives revolving around cultural differences in communication. Writing in the late 1980s, Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988, 45) make the point that among the different orientations, there are two related but somewhat different approaches that have been regarded as two ‘broad dimensions of cultural variability that influence many aspects of interpersonal communication’. There is evidence that this view continues to hold in more recent studies. For example, Cardon (2008, 399) argues that these two approaches ‘are fixtures in nearly all of the academic literature having anything to do with cross-cultural comparisons, particularly in the management and communication field’. One of the dimensions that Cardon (2008) and Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) refer to is the dimension of individualism and collectivism, developed by Hofstede (1980). The second dimension that these scholars refer to is the model of high and low context communication, as proposed by Hall (1976).
Given the widespread acceptance of the two approaches, it is reasonable to assume that although the two approaches were proposed decades ago, they remain highly influential. It is for this reason that in the next two subsections, I take both of them as a starting point in order to review the subsequent literature.

2.2.1 Evaluation of studies based on Hofstede’s approach

In this section, I evaluate the literature that addresses cultural differences drawing on Hofstede’s (1980) approach. Firstly, in Section 2.2.1.1, I review Hofstede’s basic claims, in order to argue that Hofstede’s approach assumes that culture is a fixed set of values and norms; and it also assumes that people who belong to a specific culture are a homogeneous group, and therefore it does not include people who hold bicultural meaning systems. Then in Section 2.2.1.2, I evaluate literature that draws on Hofstede’s approach to exploring cultural differences, in order to argue that relevant studies make the claim about the use of direct and indirect style in individualistic and collectivistic cultures; however, they do not make explicit the criteria they have used to categorise these two types of style.

2.2.1.1 Hofstede’s dimension of individualism and collectivism

Individualism–collectivism is one of the major dimensions of cultural variability isolated by Hofstede (1980, 1991). He suggests that this dimension represents broad differences among nations, particularly, in organizational behaviours. To uncover differences in ‘work related values’ between IBM employees, in 1967, Hofstede and his team surveyed IBM employees in different parts of the world (Hofstede 1980). After analysing data relating to 53 countries and three regions (in the report of 2005, he analysed data for 74 countries and regions), Hofstede attributed some of his findings to cultural differences. One of his findings is the difference between
individualism and collectivism. A central issue that underlies the individualism and collectivism dimension is the relative importance attached to ingroups. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005, 76) describe this dimension as follows:

Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people’s lifetimes continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.

Hofstede’s approach provides valuable insights into cultural differences, in that it assumes that in a collectivist culture, people pay attention to ingroup goals, such as family harmony, integrity and well-being of the ingroup. In contrast, in an individualistic culture, personal goals which are motivated by self-interest are valued highly. To this extent, Hofstede addresses culture as a fixed, static set of values and norms underlying people’s actions. I will show later in this chapter that Hofstede’s static view of culture causes problems to subsequent scholars, in that when they follow Hofstede (or both Hofstede and Hall) to address cultural differences, they assume that the context in which an utterance is produced is determined before the process of comprehension. Consequently, their methodologies do not allow an analyst to explain the assumptions activated in on-going interactions. Hofstede’s approach also assumes that people who belong to a specific culture are a homogeneous group, and therefore does not include those who hold bicultural meaning systems. For example, people from China who have learned English, or have been exposed to English culture, and vice versa, are not considered in Hofstede’s approach. I will
show in this chapter that because of this, when Hofstede’s followers address cultural differences in intercultural interactions, they are unable to address how culture informs the behaviours of those bicultural individuals.

Hofstede has gone on to characterise national cultures surveyed as being either individualistic or collectivistic. For example, based on the most recent individualism index scores for 74 countries and regions provided by Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), China scores very low in the individualism scale (ranks 56-61 out of 74). In contrast, Britain scores very high in the individualism scale (ranks 3 out of 74). These scores indicate that China and Britain are seen to differ in their cultural orientations, with China being a collectivistic culture and Britain being an individualistic one.

Since its first publication in 1980, Hofstede’s dimension of individualism and collectivism has been applied to a wide variety of contexts. In the section that follows, I review some studies that have applied Hofstede’s approach to addressing cultural differences in communication, in order to argue that relevant studies do not make explicit the criteria they are applying when they make claims about the possible cultural differences they are addressing.

2.2.1.2 Evaluation of studies applying Hofstede’s approach
Although Hofstede’s approach has generated a large body of research, in application, studies addressing cultural differences in communication tend to rely on this single broad dimension to account for one main issue: the differences between individualism and collectivism according to the distinction between direct and indirect style.

In the literature of culture and communication, the distinction between direct and indirect style refers to the extent to which speakers reveal their intentions through
explicit communication (e.g Adair and Brett 2004, 165; Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey 1988, 100; Ting-Toomey 1999, 103). For example, writing over two decades ago, Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988, 100) categorise this distinction as follows:

The direct verbal style refers to verbal messages that embody and invoke speakers’ true intentions… the indirect verbal style, in contrast, refers to verbal messages that camouflage and cancel speakers’ true intentions.

What Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey actually argue here is that if the set of propositions or assumptions that a speaker is attempting to convey to her audience are explicitly expressed by the words the speaker uses, then the style of the speaker is direct. Conversely, if the set of propositions or assumptions are expressed by the context in which the words are communicated, then the speaker’s style is indirect. There is evidence that recent studies on culture and communication still draw on this distinction to address cultural differences. For example, in accounting for differences between high context and low context cultures (I will discuss the two terms in Section 2.2.2.1), Adair and Brett (2004, 161) argue that:

[An indirect style refers to the assumption that], meaning is conveyed not just by a person’s words or acts, but also by the contexts in which those words or acts are communicated. [A direct style refers to the assumption that], meaning is embedded in words or acts.

As I show in my subsequent literature review, while theorising cultural differences according to this distinction, relevant studies have revealed many problems in terms of the theories they apply and the methods of analysis they use. In this section, I
evaluate four examples of research on culture and communication that addresses cultural differences based on Hofstede’s approach.

The first example I focus on is conducted by Adair and Brett (2004). In this account, in order to examine cultural differences, Adair and Brett focus on the use of direct and indirect styles between individualistic and collectivistic cultures in the context of negotiation. They argue that the styles of negotiators from individualistic cultures are direct, whereas the styles of negotiators from collectivistic cultures are indirect. As proof of this, Adair and Brett use the following evidence.

According to Adair and Brett (2004), in response to a question of whether negotiators want to accept the price of the product being offered, a negotiator from an individualistic culture might say something like (a) to express that the price of the product being offered is too high to be accepted, whereas a negotiator from a collectivistic culture might say something like (b) to express the same meaning, as shown below:

**Direct style**

(a) My company is so financially weak, so without a good price, my company will not be able to buy the product at all (adapted from the original).

**Indirect style**

(b) We’ve had a bad quarter, and our acquisition budget is extremely limited.

(Adair and Brett 2004, 162)

In consequence, Adair and Brett (2004, 162) characterise (a) as being direct and (b) as being indirect.
We can see that (a) is not a direct quotation of an utterance made by the negotiator from an individualistic culture. It is not clear what actual utterance could be, and therefore the reliability of such data needs to be questioned. Despite this, however, if we accept the claim in this study that there are differences in the use of direct and indirect style between individualistic and collectivistic cultures, the immediate question one may ask is how this claim can be substantiated. As Brown and Levinson (1987, 55) point out:

[When discussing spoken data], descriptions will have uncertain status and must be taken on the assumption that other observers so placed would similarly observe.

The argument Brown and Levinson make here is that, for an analyst himself or herself to understand a speaker involved in the study is not sufficient; it is also necessary for the analyst to justify his or her claim by explaining how the claims are generated at a specific context.

It might be easy to make a case for why one style is more indirect than the other. For example, according to speech-act theory (e.g. Austin 1975; Searle 1980), in any communicative event, speakers come to perform acts through their use of utterances. When Adair and Brett characterise (a) as direct and (b) as indirect, they seem to assume that if one hears (a), one may make the assumption that the propositional content of (a) pretty much maps onto what the speaker is trying to convey here, which is without a good price, my company is not able to buy the product at all. Equally, if one hears (b), one would assume that the propositional content of (b) can be taken to convey a range of different things: it could potentially indicate that (i) we are not able
to buy anything because of a bad quota and a limited budget; or that (ii) we could only buy products at a lower price. Because the propositional meaning expressed in (b) does not map onto what I take to be the speaker’s meaning as in (i) and (ii), (b) is therefore indirect.

With regard to categorising styles, I agree with Adair and Brett that (b) is indeed indirect, because it could potentially generate a range of implicatures like (i) and (ii). What I do not agree with is their categorising (a) as being direct. In my view, (a) is not direct, because the utterance itself does not explicitly state the meaning the utterance is intended to have, in that it does not explicitly state the speaker’s meaning which I would argue is something like ‘you have to offer us a better price if you want us to buy your product’. To work out the intended meaning, one has to go beyond the literal meaning of the uttered sentence in (a) to do some inferential work. Because of this, I argue that both (a) and (b) are indirect. What this means is that Adair and Brett are applying specific criteria when distinguishing between (a) and (b). However, Adair and Brett (2004) do not make explicit the criteria underlying their categorisation process. Without explaining how the two types of style are categorised, one can only assume that, for Adair and Brett, what counts as direct and indirect forms of style is self-evident to a hearer. As I have just shown, what they categorise as ‘direct’ is not direct. Because Adair and Brett do not actually show how they come to categorise (a) and (b) as direct and indirect respectively, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), this study does not justify its claim about the possible difference between individualistic and collectivistic cultures in the use of styles with supporting evidence.
This problem is not specific to Adair and Brett’s work. A similar example can be seen in the work by Ting-Toomey (1999). In this study, Ting-Toomey draws on Hofstede’s distinction between individualism and collectivism to examine cultural differences between America and Japan in the use of styles in conflict situations. According to Ting-Toomey (1999, 103):

[I]n individualistic cultures, people tend to encounter more situations that emphasize … direct talk…. In contrast, in collectivistic cultures, people tend to encounter more situations that emphasize…indirect talk….The direct and indirect styles differ in the extent to which communicators reveal their intentions through the straightforwardness of their content message.

Ting-Toomey uses the following example to illustrate how differences in the use of direct and indirect styles between Americans and Japanese are realised in conflict situations:

**Dialogue 1** (A dispute between two European American neighbours)

Jane (*knocks on her neighbour’s open window*): Excuse me, it is 11 o’clock already, and your high-pitched opera singing is really disturbing my sleep. Please stop your gargling noises immediately! I have an important job interview tomorrow morning, and I want to get a good night sleep. I really need this job to pay my rent.

Diane (*resentfully*): Well, this is the only time I can rehearse my opera! I’ve an important audition coming up tomorrow. You’re not the only one that is starving, you know. I also need to pay my rent. Stop being so self-centred!
Jane (*frustrated*): I really think you’re being very unreasonable. If you don’t stop your singing right now I’m going to file a complaint with the apartment manager and he could evict you…

Diane (*sarcastically*): OK, be my guest…Do whatever you want. I’m going to sing as I please.

**Dialogue 2** (two Japanese housewives talking about Mrs B’s daughter’s piano lesson)

Mrs. A: Your daughter has started taking piano lessons, hasn’t she? I envy you, because you can be proud of her talent. You must be looking forward to her future as a pianist. I’m really impressed by her enthusiasm – every day, she practices so hard, for hours and hours, until late at night.

Mrs. B: Oh, no, not at all. She’s just a beginner. We don’t know her future yet. We hadn’t realized that you could hear her playing. I’m so sorry you have been disturbed by her noise.


An issue that arises from the above examples is that there is no reference to indicate whether the data Ting-Toomey uses is naturally occurring interaction, elicited data, or invented data, so this is again an issue of reliability that is not established. Nevertheless, Ting-Toomey’s point in citing the above set of examples is to argue that there are differences between Japan and America, in that the styles of the two Americans are ‘direct, to the point, bluntly contentious’, whereas the two Japanese ladies ‘are practising the high-context communication style’, which implies that their styles are indirect.
If we accept the claim Ting-Toomey makes that Americans and Japanese differ in their use of styles, this then raises the question of the grounds on which Ting-Toomey is claiming that one set of utterances is direct and the other is indirect.

It is possible to assume that when Ting-Toomey claims that utterances produced by the American ladies are direct, she seems to assume that if one hears an utterance like ‘Please stop your gargling noises immediately’, one would assume that this utterance is functioning as a command, in that Jane may be using that form of words to tell Diane that she should stop singing immediately. It can be assumed that Diane’s response that ‘Well, this is the only time I can rehearse my opera’ is functioning not to comply with Jane’s request since this type of non-compliance implies a refusal to obey that command. For Ting-Toomey, the utterances produced by Jane and Diane are both direct because the propositional content of what the American ladies said appear to map onto the meaning the speakers are trying to convey here. However, I argue that neither of the utterances is direct, in that neither actually states the meaning it is intended to have. For example, neither explicitly states ‘I hereby command you to stop’ and ‘I hereby refuse to obey your command’. Therefore, the American ladies actually use indirect communication that requires some degree of inferencing on the part of a hearer.

I agree with Ting-Toomey’s claim that the style used by the Japanese ladies is indirect. It seems obvious that if one hears an utterance produced by Mrs. A that ‘I’m really impressed by her enthusiasm – every day, she practices so hard, for hours and hours, until late at night’, one would assume that this utterance appears to function as a compliment. However, it does not explicitly indicate the meaning it is intended to have, in that it does not actually say ‘I hereby compliment your daughter on her piano
skills’, one may therefore assume that the utterances made by Mrs. A may not be intending to express a compliment, but are implying the opposite of what Mrs. A has said, in that she may be using this form of words to tell Mrs. B indirectly that she has been disturbed. On this basis, one may draw the conclusion that what Mrs. A has said is intended to make an indirect complaint. The interpretation that Mrs. A is complaining can be supported by the apology of Mrs. B. An apology would not be an appropriate response if the utterance were actually interpreted as a compliment.

Thus, both Japanese and American ladies use indirect communication that requires the generation of implicatures. My point is that Ting-Toomey must have applied some sort of criteria to enable her to categorise the utterances made by the American and the Japanese ladies as being direct and indirect respectively, although it is not made explicit what the criteria are. In the absence of a theoretical criterion by which Ting-Toomey can make such categorisations, like Adair and Brett (2004), Ting-Toomey suggests that what counts as direct and indirect is self-evident to a hearer. Because Ting-Toomey does not actually do what Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that we do, in that she does not explain how she categorises one style as direct and another style as indirect, the claim this study makes is not justified.

A third study I review in relation to its approach to cultural differences in communication is seen in the work by Brew and Cairns (2004). Drawing on the theoretical frameworks by Hofstede (1980) and Hall (1976), Brew and Cairns’ study sets out to examine the interaction between cultural orientation and three situational constraints (i.e. time urgency, cultural identity of the other and work status of the other). Specifically, they attempted to investigate the choice of direct and indirect style and conflict management behaviour for three conflict scenarios in a multicultural
workplace located in Singapore and Bangkok. For this purpose, Brew and Cairns carried out separate interviews with two groups of employees from countries in East Asia and Australia: two cultures that have been regarded, according to Hofstede (1980), as a collectivistic and an individualist culture respectively. In this interview, the participants were asked to choose one response (from three or four different communication approaches) which best reflected how they would really act if faced with such a situation. The following example of the responses is provided by Brew and Cairn, who categorise the responses (I only use two as an illustration) into direct and indirect style respectively:

**Direct style**

(a) Tell your boss in precise words why you think the features will detract from the promotion.

**Indirect style**

(b) Tell your boss in a diplomatic and subtle manner why you think the features will detract from the promotion.

(Brew and Cairns 2004, 338)

On the basis of their analysis, Brew and Cairns make the claim that

The overall hypothesis that East Asian host-nationals are generally more likely than expatriates from Australia to choose indirect communication strategies across all situations was only supported when dealing with a supervisor, particularly a Westerner (2004, 345-6).

Therefore, what Brew and Cairns actually argue here is that there are similarities in the two cultures in the use of style, except that ‘East Asians only managed conflict
more indirectly than Australians with supervisors, particularly a Western supervisor’ (2004, 331).

If we accept Brew and Cairns’ above claim, this again raises the question of the grounds on which Brew and Cairns are claiming that one set of utterances is direct and the other is indirect.

However, there is no evidence to indicate how Brew and Cairns come to categorise (a) and (b) as a reflection of using direct and indirect style respectively. Without such an explanation, one can only assume that Brew and Cairns are suggesting that what counts as direct and indirect is self-evident to a hearer. However, as I have shown earlier, this distinction is not self-evident. One may take Brew and Cairns’ categorising (a) as a reflection of using direct style as an example. When making such a categorisation, Brew and Cairns seem to assume that if an individual chooses the response described in (a), this individual prefers to express his meaning in ‘precise words’. Although Brew and Cairns do not clarify what they mean by the term ‘precise words’, based on the way they categorise (a) as direct, I assume this term refers to the set of propositions or assumptions that a speaker is attempting to convey to her audience is expressed explicitly in words the speaker uses. In my view, even where a speaker is attempting to convey to her ‘boss’ a set of propositions or assumptions expressed explicitly in words, the speaker might still use an indirect style. For example, a speaker might say: ‘Boss, these features will make us lose our customers’; or ‘Boss, these features will not give good impressions to our customers’. In both cases, the propositional content of what is said appears to map onto what the speaker is attempting to convey here. However, in neither of them is meaning self-evident in that neither explicitly states the meaning it is intended to have. For example, neither
says explicitly the speaker’s meaning which I would argue is something like ‘Boss, these features are bad features’. Hence, both of them are indirect that require the inferential work on the part of a hearer. What my analysis indicates is that Brew and Cairns must have applied specific criteria to categorise (a) and (b) as a reflection of using direct and indirect style respectively. Since Brew and Cairns’ account does not make explicit the criteria, their study is therefore another example of not being able to support their claim about the use of direct and indirect style with clear evidence.

A fourth example I review is conducted by Cohen (2004), who focuses on analysing cultural differences in diplomatic negotiations. Cohen argues that communication styles differentiate between collectivistic and individualistic cultures like Japan and America, as follows:

The Japanese particularly take pride in their familial skill at reading between the lines, at intuiting the intention behind an elliptical hint. They even have a term for it: haragei – communicating from the belly, that is, reading the other’s mind, or talking around an issue until a consensus emerges. In view of the American preference for straight talking, however, Americans may take subtlety and opacity for evasiveness and insincerity (Cohen 2004, 146-7).

What Cohen actually argues here is that the style of Japanese is indirect, whereas the style of Americans is direct. To support this argument, Cohen cites the following example: on the eve of the departure of Prime Minister Eisaku Sato of Japan for a crucial summit with President Richard M. Nixon in 1970, Sato released the remark as in (a) to the press. However, in response to Sato’s remarks, Nixon said something like (b) as shown below:
**Indirect style**

(a) Since Mr. Nixon and I are old friends, the negotiations will be three parts talk and seven parts haragei.

**Direct style**

(b) Nixon insisted he agree to an explicit five-point proposal as the basis for a settlement.

(Cohen 2004, 145)

Cohen (2004, 147) argued that when saying (a), the Japan’s prime minister indirectly communicated that ‘he could have a heart-to-heart talk with the leader of his country’s closest ally, a man he considered a personal friend’. This indicates that Cohen categorises (a) as indirect which requires the inference on the part of a hearer. Cohen further argued that the difference in the use of direct and indirect style between Japan and the United States posed a major barrier to effective diplomatic negotiations in this instance. This implies that while categorising (a) as indirect, Cohen categorised (b) as direct.

One issue that arises from Cohen’s examples is that (a) appears to be a direct quotation of an utterance, whereas (b) is the report of an utterance carried out by Nixon. It is therefore unclear whether they are invented data, elicited data or naturally occurring data. This, again, leads us to question the issue of the data Cohen uses. Despite this, however, if we accept Cohen’s (2004) claim that there are differences in the use of direct and indirect style between Americans and Japanese, the question then arises: on what ground is Cohen claiming that one set of utterances is direct and the other is indirect?
It can be assumed that when categorising (a) as indirect, Cohen seems to assume that (a) could potentially indicate a range of implicatures. For example, it might imply that (i) the negotiations between us will not be based on policies but on our interpersonal relationship; it might also imply that (ii) the negotiations between us will not be as formal as expected. Because the propositional content of what is said in (a) is distinct from what is implied as in (i) and (ii), (a) is indirect. My view is that it is appropriate for Cohen to categorise (a) as indirect, because I believe (a) could indeed generate different interpretations like (i) and (ii). However, I do not agree with Cohen’s categorising of (b) as being direct. It might seem obvious that if one hears (b), the immediate assumption one would make in this context is that Nixon’s utterance does not appear to be a direct statement of non-cooperation, but appears to express some form of justificatory remark which implies a refusal to negotiate in a way suggested by Sato. Since (b) does not explicitly state the meaning the utterance is intended to have, in that it does not actually say *I refuse to negotiate on the basis of three parts talk and seven parts haragei*, (b) is therefore indirect.

Again, it appears that Cohen is applying specific criteria which would enable him to categorise (a) as being indirect and (b) as being direct. However, because Cohen does not actually explain what criteria he is using, as with those studies I have reviewed so far, he is not able to support the claim that there are differences in the use of style between Japan and America with clear evidence.

### 2.2.1.3 Summary

In this section, by reviewing relevant literature on culture and communication, I have argued that applying Hofstede’s approach to examining cultural differences reveals that relevant studies make claims for the use of direct and indirect styles in
individuālistic and collectivist cultures, but they do not provide sufficient grounds for being able to justify such claims.

In the next section, I review the literature based on Hall’s approach to the study of cultural differences in communication, in order to argue that relevant scholarship has limitations in explaining the relationship between culture and communication.

2.2.2 Evaluations of studies based on Hall’s approach

Hall’s model of high- and low-context communication has been widely accepted and applied when comparing differences in communication among various cultures. In application of this model, the relevant literature falls into two main research strands: (a) addressing cultural differences by assuming that there is a correlation between culture and communication style, and (b) addressing cultural differences by assuming that there is a correlation between interpretation and one’s cultural background. In this section, I shall evaluate each by showing how it fits into a particular trend in scholarship. The aim of this evaluation is to point to problems with literature in its theorization of cultural differences.

I begin in Section 2.2.2.1 with my evaluation of Hall’s basic claims, in order to argue that Hall’s approach also assumes that culture is a fixed set of norms and values, and that people who belong to a specific culture are a homogeneous group. Here, I also argue that Hall’s approach assumes that there is a correlation between high context cultures and indirectness. Then in Section 2.2.2.2, I review the literature that has applied Hall’s approach to addressing cultural differences, in order to argue that studies make claims that there is a connection between culture and communication style, however they frequently omit explanations for how culture and the use of
communication style are connected. In Section 2.2.2.3, I review literature that has applied Hall’s approach to addressing differences in interpretation between people with distinct cultural backgrounds. In this section, I argue that whilst the relevant literature makes claims about the differences in interpretation between cultures, the way in which cultures impact on interpretation remains unexplained.

2.2.2.1 Hall’s model of high and low context communication

Hall (1976) argues that culture influences the way people communicate. In arguing this, Hall draws a distinction between high and low context communication, claiming that this is one way to understand cultural differences in communication. Hall illustrates the distinction in the following way:

A high-context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low-context (LC) communication is just the opposite; i.e., the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code (Hall 1976, 91).

In the above quotation, Hall uses the term ‘the coded, explicit transmitted part of the message’. At the time of Hall’s (1976) research, the idea that meaning must be interpreted in a specific context, which was first proposed by Grice (1957, 1967, 1975, 1989), was not well developed, and the pragmatic theories that Hall could draw on were limited. I therefore assume that Hall’s use of ‘explicit code’ refers to the set of propositions or assumptions expressed explicitly in the words a speaker uses.
In order to illustrate the distinction between HC and LC communication, Hall (1976, 58-64) uses the following anecdote he observed in Japan, a HC culture within his ‘high- and low-context continuum’, as an example:

Hall once had an experience of staying in hotels in Japan. During his stay there, Hall found himself moved from one hotel to another without being told the reason, and ‘the whole matter of being moved like a piece of derelict luggage puzzled me’ (Hall 1976, 61). As someone who sees himself as a member of a low-context culture, America, Hall (1976, 61) did not expect to be moved unless the reasons for the move were explained to him. ‘To move someone without telling him is almost worse than an insult, because he is below the point at which feelings matter’ (Hall 1976, 61). Therefore, Hall ‘had no notion of the meaning attached to being moved from hotel to hotel in Japan’ (1976, 62). After further experiences in Japan and many discussions with Japanese friends, Hall finally understood that in Japan, ‘as soon as you register at the desk, you are no longer an outsider; instead, for the duration of your stay you are a member of a large, mobile family. You belong’ (Hall 1976, 65, emphasise original). According to Hall, the fact that he was moved was tangible evidence that he ‘was being treated as a family member - a relationship in which one can afford to be relaxed and informal and not stand on ceremony’ (Hall 1976, 65).

If members of a culture, as this Japanese example shows, depend less on the meaning explicitly communicated in words, but more on existing knowledge about a particular event, Hall characterises this culture as a high context culture. Conversely, if members of a culture like America depend more on the meaning communicated explicitly in words, Hall characterises this culture as a low context culture.
Hall’s example indicates that the impact that the Japanese culture had on the communicative behaviour of the hotel staff led to them withholding communication. It also indicates that, as with Hofstede, Hall’s approach assumes that culture is a fixed set of norms and values, and that people who belong to a specific culture are a homogeneous group, in that they all appear to conform to these norms.

According to Hall’s high and low context continuum, China is located at the high-context end of the continuum, whereas Britain is located at the low-context end of the continuum. They are therefore regarded as high and low context cultures respectively.

Whilst arguing that cultural differences may be explained by the model of HC and LC communication, Hall highlights the importance of context in communication. This is evident in Hall’s (1976, 92) remarks below:

> The level of context determines everything about the nature of the communication and is the foundation on which all subsequent behaviour rest.

To illustrate this, Hall (1976, 86) uses the following anecdote as an example:

> In the fifties, the United States Government spent millions of dollars developing systems of machine translation…. [However], it was finally concluded that the only reliable, and ultimately the fastest, translator is a human being deeply conversant not only with the language but with the subject as well. The computers could spew out yards of print-out but they meant very little. The words and some of the grammar were all there, but the sense was distorted.

Consequently, Hall (1976, 86) concludes:
The problem lies not in the linguistic code, but in the context, which carries varying proportions of the meaning. Without context, the code is incomplete since it encompasses only part of the message.

Hall’s point here is that to understand what is literally said involves not only knowing the meaning of words themselves in an utterance, one must know why these words are used in this way and in this particular circumstance. Moreover, by using the phrase ‘without context, the code is incomplete’, Hall suggests that in order to understand a speaker’s meaning in an utterance, one must look simultaneously at the meaning, the words and context in which an utterance takes place. This further suggests that understanding the context is the key to understanding communication within a culture.

In arguing that understanding the context is crucial to communication, Hall defines the notion of context in the following way:

[Context] is information that surrounds an event; it is inextricably bound up with the meaning of the event (Hall and Hall 1990, 9).

However, Hall does not clarify the surrounding information that constitutes the context, but distinguishes between ‘internalized contexting’ and ‘external contexting’ (Hall 1976, 95). In making this distinction, Hall argues that the former refers to schematic constructs or background knowledge stored in people’s brains, while the latter depends on the use of deixis (i.e. time and place of an utterance).

According to Hall (1976, 95), contexting is the process of how context is drawn upon in order to understand an event. He argues that there are differences in drawing upon contextual information between high and low context cultures, in that HC cultures
draw upon ‘internalized’ information whilst LC cultures draw upon ‘external’ information. By formulating this argument, Hall seems to imply that the differences in drawing upon these two types of information exist before the process of interpretation takes place. Such an implication causes much confusion among Hall’s followers. I will show later in Section 2.2.2.3, while adopting Hall’s approach to theorising cultural differences, scholars focusing on culture and communication tend to see context as a fixed feature that pre-exists an interpretation process. Because of this, they are unable to explain how meaning is generated in a specific context.

While stressing the differences in depending on contextual information between different cultures, Hall (1976) goes on to argue that it is essential for people from different cultures to understand these differences. He states that when people with distinct cultural backgrounds interact with each other, a ‘failure to take contexting differences into account can cause problems’ (Hall 1976, 113).

To illustrate this point, Hall (1976, 113) uses the following example:

People raised in high-context systems expect more of others than do the participants in low-context systems. When talking about something that they have in their minds, a high-context individual will expect his [sic] interlocutor to know what’s bothering him [sic], so that he [sic] doesn’t have to be specific. The result is that he [sic] will talk around and around the point, in effect putting all the pieces in place except the crucial one.

In the above quotation, although Hall does not explicitly state that communication style of a HC culture is indirect, the distinctive characteristics identified throughout Hall’s explanation include: ‘he will talk around and around the point, in effect putting
all the pieces in place except the crucial one’. This suggests that what Hall actually argues here is that there is a correlation between high context cultures and indirectness. In fact, this is how it has been interpreted and widely accepted by subsequent scholarship (e.g. Adair et al. 2001; Brew and Cairns 2004; Cohen 1991; Fujishin 2007; Gao 1998; Gao and Ting-Toomey 1998; Gudykunst 1998c; Hammer 2005; Hecht et al. 1993; Kapoor et al. 2003; Nelson et al. 2002; Pekerti and Thomas 2003; Ting-Toomey 1999; Trubisky et al. 1991).

In the next section, I review four studies I am citing here in further detail, so as to argue that relevant studies make claims that culture is closely connected to communication style used by members of that culture; however, they do not actually explore how the connection is made.

2.2.2.2 Evaluation of studies applying Hall’s approach

The first study I review is carried out by Fujishin (2007), who examines differences between Japan, America and England in the use of communication style in a business context. According to Fujishin (2007, 69):

In a low-context style, verbal communication is very direct, precise, explicit and literal…. [In HC cultures] verbal communication is indirect, subtle, implicit and figurative…. you are expected to read between the lines and understand what the speaker is intending to communicate without being told or instructed with explicit details.

To support this argument, Fujishin cites the following anecdote as evidence:
In response to a question of whether one wants to do business with another in a business context, a negotiator from a HC culture like Japan tends to say something like (b) in order to express a refusal, whereas a negotiator from a LC culture like America and England tends to say something like (a) to express the same meaning.

**Direct style:**

(a) No.

**Indirect style:**

(b) You have a good product.

(Fujishin 2007, 69).

That a Japanese negotiator expresses a refusal in such a way, as Fujishin (2007, 69-70) claims, ‘is understood in the context of Japanese business… [Because] it would be considered rude, or offensive to be too direct, explicit, inquisitive or verbally persistent’. The point Fujishin (2007) makes here is therefore that the style used by the negotiator from America or England is direct, whereas the style used by the Japanese negotiator is indirect. This indicates that what Fujishin actually argues here is that culture has an impact on how utterances are produced and interpreted.

This study appears to chart a correlation between culture and communication style used by members of that culture. However, Fujishin takes the correlation to be an explanation, and the whole explanation is clearly predicated on the assumption that Japanese negotiators communicate indirectly because they are from high context cultures or that negotiators from America and England communicate directly because they are from low context cultures. This explanation is in fact an example of what Cameron calls the ‘correlation fallacy’ (1990, 85). According to Cameron (1990, 85),
a ‘correlation fallacy’ refers to the assumption that ‘the purported explanation does not in fact explain anything’. For example, if someone explains the correlation between a speaker’s use of language and her social identity, then he or she is expected to explain how the speaker’s use of language reflects her social status. This is because, as Cameron (1990, 85) argues, to explain the correlation is to ‘ask in virtue of what the correlation might hold’. Any account which does not go on to take this further step has fallen into ‘the correlational fallacy’ (Cameron 1990, 85). I argue that the study by Fujishin (2007) is a case in point. My point is that although Fujishin makes the claim that there is a correlation between culture and communication style, he does not provide any information to indicate how the correlation is made. That is, he does not actually show how culture has an impact on the way people produce and interpret an utterance in a specific context. In the absence of this further level of information, the claim Fujishin makes in this study that culture is closely related to communication style can only be considered speculative, since it is not justified with evidence.

The problem indicated in Fujishin’s work is also revealed in a number of other studies which address cultural difference in communication. The second study I review is carried out by Pekerti and Thomas (2003). Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Hall (1976) and Hofstede (1980), Pekerti and Thomas’ study seeks to account for differences in styles in an intercultural interaction between participants from Eastern Asia and those from Anglo-European New-Zealand (i.e Pakeha), two cultures regarded as collectivistic (HC) and individualistic (LC) according to Hofstede (1980) and Hall (1976). In this account, Pakerti and Thomas first claim that East Asians and New Zealanders differ, in that the former has a tendency to use indirect style, whilst
the later prefers to use direct style. They then test whether individuals from the two cultures in the intercultural interaction ‘will alter their communication styles to be more like that of the other cultural participants’ or ‘to be more representative of their own cultures’ (Pakerti and Thomas 2003, 142). This indicates that the participants of the study are at least bicultural individuals, living in an ethnically diverse environment.

In order to do the test, Pekerti and Thomas videotaped an experimental task, in which participants were asked to complete a consensus decision-making task that required communication with one other participant. On the basis of their analysis of the observed behaviours of the participants, Pekerti and Thomas argue that

"Overall, the results of our analysis provide support for hypothesis … [that there are] cultural differences in communication styles, as indicated by both frequency and intensity of behaviour, were evident across cultures. An idiocentric communication style was dominant for Pakeha. That is, they were more expressive, dominant, aggressive, opinionated, and argumentative…In contrast, a sociocentric style was dominant for Asians. They were more accommodating, avoided arguments, and were more inclined to shift opinions (2003, 145)."

Pekerti and Thomas (2003, 141) use the terms ‘sociocentric’ and ‘idiocentric’ in their account. Since they apply the former to behaviours indicated by ‘high-context, and indirect actions’, and the latter to behaviours indicated by ‘low-context, direct actions’, I understand that the two terms refer to the same notions as indirect and direct styles, as proposed by other culture and communication studies. For ease of
reference, I show the differences in the use of communication styles between the cultures in consideration that this study claims as follows:

**Direct style (New Zealanders)**

(a) They were more expressive, dominant, aggressive, opinionated, and argumentative.

**Indirect style (East Asians)**

(b) They were more accommodating, avoided arguments, and were more inclined to shift opinions.

(Pekerti and Thomas 2003, 149)

It should be apparent that by categorising (a) as behaviours (of New Zealanders) that reflect the use of direct style, and (b) as behaviours (of East Asians) that reflect the use of indirect style, Pekerti and Thomas suggest that there is a strong correlation between culture and communication style reflected in a specific behaviour of members in that culture. However, similar to that of Fujishin (2007), Pekerti and Thomas’ explanations for the correlation are clearly predicted on the assumption that the communicative behaviours of East Asians reflect the use of indirect style because they are from collectivistic (HC) cultures, or that communicative behaviours of New Zealanders reflect the use of indirect style because they are from an individualistic (LC) culture. There is no specific data offered which would give a clear indication of how culture and the use of communication style are connected. Therefore, this is another example of ‘the correlational fallacy’ (Cameron 1990, 85). I argue that the reason that Pekerti and Thomas (2003) do not in fact explain how culture and communication style are connected is a direct consequence of their methodology. In their methodology, people who belong to a culture are a homogeneous group, and
therefore those who have been exposed extensively to two different cultures, namely, bicultural individuals, are not included. Consequently, when bicultural individuals are involved in a study, this methodology does not enable authors to explain how culture might inform the behaviours of the bicultural individuals. I argue that in the era of rapid globalization, it is an increasing phenomenon that more and more people have become bicultural. On this premise, if researchers who focus on cultural differences in communication address cultural differences solely from the perspective of a culture as a homogeneous group, only a very limited explanation of cultural difference in communication can be expected. Only when bicultural individuals are taken into account, can potential differences in communication between cultures be explained more fully. I also argue that the limitations imposed by Pekerti and Thomas’ account can be avoided if their study were to draw on an alternative approach to culture: Hong’s (2009) dynamic constructivist view of culture. Since Pekerti and Thomas do not actually provide the level of information about how culture and communication style are connected, they are therefore unable to justify their claim, namely that there is a correlation between culture and communication style.

A third example may be seen in the work of Adair and Brett (2004, 162), who claim that communication style of HC cultures is indirect, whereas communication style of LC cultures is direct. To support this claim, Adair and Brett use a conversation between a seller from a HC culture such as Japan or China, and a buyer from a LC culture such as USA or Germany. Adair and Brett (2004) argue that in the context of business negotiation, in response to a question of whether a seller wants to sell his or her product at the price being offered, the seller from a high-context culture tends to
say something like (a). Upon hearing (a), a buyer from low context cultures tends to respond by saying something like (b).

**Indirect style – A HC culture**

(a) We are an award-winning film studio and therefore get higher prices for our production.

**Direct style – A LC culture**

(b) Even though your studio has won awards for its film series, you’ve moved this series into syndication a year early, so you cannot expect a high price under those market conditions.

(Adair and Brett 2004, 165)

According to Adair and Brett, by saying (a), the seller indirectly communicates that the price of the product is too low to be accepted; by saying (b) the buyer is making a direct refusal to offer a higher price for the product.

In arguing that a negotiator from a HC culture is using an indirect style, whereas a negotiator from a LC culture is using a direct style, Adair and Brett attempt to make the point that there is a correlation between culture and the use of communication style. However, I argue that in order to understand similarities or differences in the use of style across cultures, it is necessary to have a way of talking about how culture is related to communication style. It does not make any sense to say, as Adair and Brett actually do here, that negotiators from USA and Germany use direct style because they are from LC cultures or that negotiators from Japan and China use indirect style because they are from HC cultures. This does not tell us how, or if, culture and communication style are linked. If Adair and Brett are correct, then there
must be some aspects of the cultures in USA and Germany or Japan and China that are different and this difference, in turn, explains why negotiators from USA and Germany communicate indirectly and people from Japan and China communicate directly. Therefore, while Adair and Brett offer interesting data, without this further level of information, their claim that there is a correlation between culture and communication style is not supported with convincing evidence. As a result, Adair and Brett’s (2004) work also falls into the category of ‘the correlational fallacy’ (Cameron 1990, 85).

A fourth example I consider is that of Neuliep (2006, 61), who argues that a person in a low-context culture uses ‘a direct style of communication whereas a high-context person prefers indirectness’. The evidence Neuliep uses to support this argument is the conversation between Mr. Hutchinson, the head of Information Technology (IT) within his organization, from a low context culture, and Mr. Wong, a lead computer programmer who was born and raised in Malaysia, a high-context culture. Therefore, although Neuliep does not acknowledge this, it is clear to me that Mr. Wong is a bicultural individual who is exposed to a culture foreign to his own. In what follows, I use only part of their conversation which I assume to be relevant to my analysis:

Mr. Hutchinson: The program looks good and passed the test run with only minor errors. When do you think you can put it into production? I don’t see any production schedule here. The changes need to go into the system by the end of the month. Is that possible? When do you want to go with this?

Mr. Wong: Maybe I should review the requirements.
Mr. Hutchinson: The errors were minor. Quality Control needs to know when it will go into production. Let’s set the production date now. Just tell me when you’ll fix the errors. I’ll tell QC.

Mr. Wong: Perhaps I can email you an estimate. I’ll talk to the team.

Mr. Hutchinson: Couldn’t you just tell me when you’ll have them fixed? Here, it’s no big deal. (Hands Mr. Wong the program) Don’t they seem like easy fixes?

(Neuliep 2006, 61)

On the evidence such as above, Neuliep (2006, 62) argues that

> When Mr. Wong indicates that setting a date is difficult and will require some expertise, he is indirectly telling Mr. Hutchinson that he is not in a position to make the decision on his own and would prefer to discuss with his team.

The point Neuliep makes here is that the style of members from LC cultures, represented by Mr. Hutchinson, is direct, whereas the style of members from HC cultures, represented by Mr. Wong, is indirect. This indicates that what Neuliep actually argues is that culture is correlated with communication style. However, rather like all the other studies I have discussed in this section, there is no specific evidence in this account to indicate how such a correlation is made. I argue that the reason that Neuliep does not explain how culture and communication style are correlated with each other is that Neuliep is limited by the methodology he employs. It should be clear that, similar to that of Pekerti and Thomas (2003) I discussed earlier, Neuliep’s account works on the assumption that people who belong to a specific culture follow a fixed set of norms and values. Therefore, those who have been exposed to two or more cultures are not taken into account. When bicultural individuals do appear in a study like the one carried out by Neuliep, the author feels unable to explain how
culture may inform communicative behaviours of the bicultural individuals. Again, I argue that if Neuliep adopted a dynamic constructivist approach to culture, the problem revealed in this study could be solved. Since Neuliep does not actually provide specific information to indicate how culture and communication style are connected, therefore, this is another example of a study not justifying its claim about the correlation between culture and communication style.

I have reviewed four studies that have sought to apply Hall’s approach to addressing cultural differences. Evidence suggests that studies have accepted Hall’s account that high context cultures are more indirect and low context cultures are more direct. However, they do not actually explore how culture and communication style are connected. On this basis, I have argued that the claims these studies make that there is a correlation between culture and communication style are not justified.

In the next section, I review literature that has extended Hall’s approach to the study of inference involved in understanding an utterance, in order to explain why the points I have made in this section about the lack of evidence regarding the correlation between culture and communication style are significant when studying the relationship between culture and communication.

### 2.2.2.3 Studies extending Hall’s approach to address differences in interpretations

My goal in this section is to review studies of culture and communication in order to argue that studies make the claim that there are differences in interpretation between people with distinct cultural backgrounds. However, they do not actually explain how culture impacts on interpretation.
Among those scholars who focus on theorising cultural differences according to styles, Adair and Brett (2004), Adair et al. (2001), Brett (2000, 2007), Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998), Gudykunst (1998b), Ting-Toomey (1999), take Hall’s argument one step further, by pointing out that communication style of HC cultures is indirect, and that hearers have to infer what a speaker intends to communicate in her utterances. In their view, style in LC cultures is direct, and hearers can derive the intention of a speaker by simply decoding what is said. When making these claims, although it is not made explicit, I argue that the terms they use, and the way in which they express their concern all imply that inference is only required for communication in HC cultures, but is not involved in identifying a speaker’s intention for hearers in LC cultures. For example, Ting-Toomey (1999, 100-101) claims that

[LC] refers to communication patterns of direct verbal mode…, the speaker is expected to be responsible for constructing a clear, persuasive message that the listener can decode easily. [HC] refers to communication patterns of indirect verbal mode …the receiver or interpreter of the message assumes the responsibility to infer the hidden or contextual meaning of the message.

Ting-Toomey’s point here is that hearers in HC cultures need to ‘infer’ the meaning of the message. In comparison, she uses the expression ‘to decode’ to describe the way through which hearers in LC cultures interpret ‘a clear, persuasive message’. Drawing on recent developments in pragmatics showing that decoding is the recovery of a message that is made available (i.e. recovering the phonetic representation of the sentence uttered and decoding it into the associated semantic representation), and it cannot account for how assumptions are communicated, I argue that if a speaker’s message is clearly constructed, and what hearers do is just to ‘decode’ a message, this
means that hearers do not need to infer the meaning of a speaker. This is because within pragmatics, inferencing is seen as the process of working from a premise or evidence through reasoning to reach a conclusion (Sperber and Wilson 1995, Ch.2). More specifically, what Ting-Toomey suggests here is that an inferential process is only required for communication in HC cultures, but may not be required for communicators in LC cultures.

Similarly, Brett (2000), Adair et al. (2001) and Gudykunst (2004) use such terms as ‘explicit message’ (Brett 2000, 101), ‘accurate message’ (Adair et al. 2001, 372), and ‘direct, precise and clear message’ (Gudykunst 2004, 57) to describe the way in which speakers in LC cultures formulate their messages. This indicates that what these scholars suggest is that in LC cultures, the set of propositions or assumptions that a speaker is attempting to convey to her addressees are explicitly expressed by the words the speaker uses, and the intention of the speaker can simply be decoded. As a result, inference becomes unnecessary.

To illustrate the point that inference is only involved in understanding communication in HC cultures, I now use the following data from Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998, 76, also used in Ting-Toomey 1999, 104):

**Scene 1**

American 1: We’re going to New Orleans this weekend.
American 2: What fun! I wish we were going with you. How long are you going to be there? [If she wants a ride, she will ask.]
American 1: Three days. By the way, we may need a ride to the airport. Do you think you can take us?
American 2: Sure. What time?
American 1: 10:30 p.m. this coming Saturday.
Scene 2

Chinese 1: We’re going to New Orleans this weekend.
Chinese 2: What fun! I wish we were going with you. How long are you going to be there?
Chinese 1: Three days [I hope she’ll offer me a ride to the airport].
Chinese 2: [She may want me to give her a ride] Do you need a ride to the airport? I’ll take you.
Chinese 1: Are you sure it’s not too much trouble?
Chinese 2: It’s no trouble at all

The above example consists of a pair of contrastive ‘airport ride request’ scenes between two Chinese and two Americans. In Scene 1, the way the Americans ask for a favour, according to Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998, 76), ‘is reflective of its low-context communication character’, in that their statements are ‘clear and direct’ and therefore ‘reveal the intention of the speaker’. What is implied here is that inferential work on the part of a hearer is unnecessary. However, I feel that the claim Gao and Ting-Toomey make is contradictory in some way. On the one hand, they assume that the process of inference is not required. On the other hand, they attribute their own inferred meaning If she wants a ride, she will ask to the utterances produced by American 2, as shown in the brackets. What this indicates is that understanding an utterance produced by an American does, indeed, need inference. Moreover, although Gao and Ting-Toomey attribute their own inferred meaning to the utterance, there is no evidence to indicate how that inference is drawn. I argue and I will explain later that all these problems are caused by the methodology Gao and Ting-Toomey employed in this study.

If we accept that only HC communication requires a process of inference, whereas LC communication does not, this may predict that in LC cultures, the process of meaning
construction is seen as self-evident. However, a fundamental tenet of pragmatics, as pointed out by many researchers in the past, is that interpretation is not a self-evident matter. For example, writing over thirty years ago, Wunderlinch (1980, 298) argues that it is not always clear what the meaning of the words and phrases in a sentence actually is, because their meaning often depends on the context of the utterance. This is significant insofar as where the meaning of an utterance is taken to be self-evident, this means that a hearer does not need to engage with the context in which meaning is produced. The implication is that without reference to contextual information, the hearer would automatically know the intended meaning of the utterance. This is highly problematic from the perspective of pragmatics. My point is that the reason that scholars like Gao and Ting-Toomey make the assumption about LC cultures not relying on inference is a consequence of their methodology, which is premised on the assumption that culture is a fixed set of values and norms, and that the differences in drawing upon the assumptions about these values in the process of communication exist before any communication takes place. In other words, context in which an utterance is produced is determined in advance of the process of interpretation. Because of this, this methodology does not allow an analyst to explain how meaning is generated in a specific context. In order for an analyst to explain how meaning is generated in a specific context, we need a methodology that allows us to address the dynamics of meaning generation. Without employing such a methodology, Gao and Ting-Toomey’s aim of addressing differences between HC and LC cultures cannot provide evidence which would make their account explanatory.

The limitations of Gao and Ting-Toomey’s methodology are also revealed in Scene 2, where Chinese 1 does not directly express his or her concern over the ride to the
airport. According to Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998, 77), ‘in Chinese culture, such requests for help are likely to be implied rather than stated explicitly and directly’. The point Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998) make is that the way in which Chinese ask a favour is a typical indirect style of communication because the speaker’s actual intention is ‘camouflaged’. In arguing this, they suggest that since the intention of asking a favour is implied, hearers need to undertake some inferential work in order to identify this intention. Gao and Ting-Toomey go on to argue that the differences between Americans and Chinese in interpreting a speaker’s meaning in this particular context are caused by the differences in their respective cultures, in that ‘north Americans believe in the need for individual autonomy, whereas Chinese hold that a direct request often poses an undesirable imposition, which is damaging to the harmonious human relationship’ (1998, 77). This seems to suggest that people from the same culture will generate the same interpretation for the same utterance. However, as I will show in the following chapter, a single utterance will generate different interpretations for different hearers.

Whilst arguing that differences in interpretation between Chinese and Americans in this context may be attributed to differences in their respective cultures, Gao and Ting-Toomey appear to assume that when interlocutors interpret each other’s utterances, they draw on a separate set of assumptions, which in this case appear to be based on their existing cultural knowledge which informs them of what to expect and how to behave in a particular situation. For example, if a Chinese interlocutor hears the utterance ‘we are going to New Orleans this weekend’, she or he would then make the assumption that ‘she may want me to give her a ride, and even if she has such a request for help, it would not be polite for her to ask, therefore I need to ask in order
to show respect’. This interpretation is supported by the subsequent question ‘do you need a ride to the airport’ raised by Chinese 2. However, if an American interlocutor hears the same propositional content of the utterance, she or he would make the assumption that ‘they will have a great time in New Orleans’, and this interpretation is supported by the utterance ‘what fun’ produced by American 2. Such differences in interpretation, according to Gao and Ting-Toomey, result from differences in interlocutors’ cultural backgrounds. This is significant, in that in making this argument, Gao and Ting-Toomey have pointed to a correlation between cultures and differences in interpretation.

If we accept the claim made by Gao and Ting-Toomey that differences in interpretation of a given utterance between people from different cultures are indeed caused by cultures, this then raises the question of how culture impacts on interpretation. However, Gao and Ting-Toomey do not actually address this. I argue that, this, again, is constrained by their methodology, which is premised on the assumption that the context in which an utterance is determined in advance of the process of interpretation.

Therefore, although Gao and Ting-Toomey make an interesting point about differences in interpretation between cultures, their account still has limitations, in that: (a) they do not acknowledge that the process of inference is required for all communication of cultures that have been characterised as HC and LC, (b) they do not acknowledge that an utterance will generate different interpretations for different hearers, (c) they do not explain the process of how a hearer undertakes the inferential process despite their claim that understanding communication in HC cultures involves inference, and (d) they do not provide any explanation for how culture impacts on
interpretation despite their claim that there are differences in interpretation between cultures. Without these levels of information, the argument this study makes, namely that there are variations in interpretation between people from diverse cultures, can only be considered as speculative, since it is not substantiated.

Studies that make the claim about the differences in interpretations between people with distinct cultural backgrounds are not limited to the one by Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998). A number of other culture and communication studies also adopt the same position. For example, in analysing diplomatic negotiation processes in different cultures, Cohen (2004) provides much evidence that the dispute between cultures ‘was clearly a classic cross-cultural clash between high- and low-context cultures’ (Cohen 2004, 39). One case from Cohen’s (2004, 39) data is the difference in interpretation of a set of utterances between Malaysia and Australia, two cultures that ‘are shown to be virtually polar opposites in their ranking’ on Hall’s high and low context continuum. According to Cohen (2004, 38-39), Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia, a major advocate of the idea of an ASEAN-type trading group (ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) refused to attend a trade summit in Seattle in November 1993 of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC), since he felt that the United States and its partners had been unenthusiastic about the idea he proposed. When asked about the Malaysian prime minister’s presence, Prime Minister Paul Keating of Australia gave the following reply:
I don’t know and I don’t care. I am sick of asking [sic] questions about Dr. Mahathir. Everyone has a chance to come here. If he didn’t come, that’s his business. The thing about it was there was just a very historic meeting. Please don’t ask me any more questions about Dr. Mahathir. I couldn’t care less, frankly, whether he comes or not (Cohen 2004, 39, emphasise original).

Cohen (2004, 41) argues that,

Aggressive behaviour, outspokenness, and crude directness are completely unacceptable [in Malaysia]. Unfortunately, these were precisely the qualities displayed by Prime Minister Keating in his ‘recalcitrants’ outburst. In this he was doing no more than acting in conformity with the accepted, low-context norms of Australian public life.

What Cohen actually claims here is that Malaysia prefers the use of an indirect style, whereas Australia is used to a more direct one.

Cohen (2004, 41) goes on to argue that for Malaysians, ‘Keating’s comments had humiliated Dr. Mahathir and the Malaysian nation’. In contrast, for Australians, in Keating’s words, his remarks ‘were not meant to be offensive’ (Cohen 2004, 41). This suggests that what Cohen actually argues here is that there are differences between the two countries in their interpretation of Keating’s remarks.

It may be assumed that when making the above argument, Cohen seems to assume that when people from different cultures interpret Keating’s utterance, they draw on a separate set of assumptions, which in this case appear to be based on their respective cultural knowledge which informs them of what to expect in this particular situation.
For example, according to Cohen (2004, 41), if a Malaysian hears the utterance *I don’t know and I don’t care about Malaysia’s prime minister’s presence*, the Malaysian would make the assumption that this was to insult the prime minister of Malaysia and Malaysia as a country, and if an Australian hears the same propositional content of the utterance, the Australian would make the assumption that this kind of outspoken language is acceptable in Australian society. Such differences in interpretation, according to Cohen, are caused by cultures. Moreover, by arguing that there are differences in interpretation of Keating’s utterances, Cohen, like Gao and Ting-Toomey, suggests that people from the same culture will produce the same interpretation for the same utterance.

If we accept Cohen’s claim that there are variations in interpretation between people from different cultures, this also raises the question of how culture impacts on interpretation. However, Cohen leaves this unexplained.

The problems that arise from Cohen’s work are also revealed in studies carried out respectively by Ting-Toomey (1999) and Scollon and Scollon (1995). For example, Ting-Toomey (1999, 125) argues that in intercultural communication between Japanese and Westerners, intercultural misunderstanding can easily occur when the Japanese make the following utterance:

Japanese: *hai, hai*  (Ting-Toomey 1999, 125).

According to Ting-Toomey, if a Japanese hears the above ‘vocal pause-filler cues’ (Ting-Toomey 1999, 125) such as ‘*hai, hai*’, the initial assumption the Japanese is expected to make is that the speaker is signalling ‘*I am hearing you*’. Since the literal translation of ‘*hai, hai*’ means ‘yes’ to Westerners, if a Westerner hears ‘*hai, hai*’, the
immediate assumption the Westerner may make is that the Japanese has actually signalled ‘yes’ to a contract agreement. Such differences in interpretation, as Ting-Toomey (1999) argues, result from differences in interlocutors’ cultural backgrounds. However, Ting-Toomey does not address how the differences in interpretation actually occur. In other words, Ting-Toomey does not explain how culture impacts on interpretation.

Similarly, Scollon and Scollon (1995, 5) use the following anecdote to illustrate the differences in interpretation between a Westerner and an Asian:

Mr. Wong is an Asian and Mr. Richardson is a Westerner, and they have a conversation together. Mr. Richardson has enjoyed this conversation and when they are ready to part he says to Mr. Wong that they should get together to have lunch sometime. In response to Mr. Richardson, Mr. Wong says that he would enjoy this. After a few weeks Mr. Wong begins to feel that Mr. Richardson has been rather insincere, because he has not followed up his invitation to lunch with a specific time and place.

According to Scollon and Scollon, the source of the problem between Mr. Wong and Mr. Richardson is the difference expected by Asians and Westerners in this particular context. For Asians like Mr. Wong, they assume that ‘this mention of lunch at the end of the conversation is of some importance to Mr. Richardson’, and they would also assume that ‘Mr. Richardson is seriously making an invitation to lunch’. However, for Westerners like Mr. Richardson, the mention of lunch ‘does not signify any more than that he has enjoyed his conversation with Mr. Wong’, and is ‘just a conventional way of parting with good feelings towards the other’ (Scollon and Scollon 1995, 5).
An issue that arises from Scollon and Scollon’s above example is that the data are an indirect report of utterances, rather than actual utterances, made by Mr. Wong and Mr. Richardson, therefore, the validity of such data is not established. However, the point that Scollon and Scollon make here is significant, in that they point to ‘the difference in discourse patterns expected’ by people with distinct cultural backgrounds. What this implies is that a difference in cultures has caused differences in interpretation of a specific utterance. However, Scollon and Scollon do not explain how culture impacts on interpretation. Therefore, Scollon and Scollon (1995), as well as all the other scholars I have discussed in this section, do not provide clear evidence to justify their claim that there are differences in interpretation of a given utterance between people with distinct cultural backgrounds.

To sum up, I have reviewed four studies that have moved from addressing cultural differences according to styles to the focus on differences in interpretation. I have shown that these studies share the same problems, in that they make claims about the differences in interpretation, but do not explain how culture impacts on interpretation.

2.2.2.4 Summary

In this section, I have reviewed two strands of scholarship based on Hall’s approach to address cultural differences in communication. I have shown that both lines of literature have limitations in explaining the relationship between culture and communication: (a) studies make claims that culture is closely related to the use of communication style (e.g. Fujishin 2007; Adair and Brett 2004; Pekerti and Thomas 2003; Neuliep 2006), however, they do not actually explore how culture and communication style are linked, and (b) studies make claims about the differences in interpretation between people with distinct cultural backgrounds (e.g. Cohen 2004;
Gao and Ting-Toomey 1998; Ting-Toomey 1999; Scollon and Scollon 1995), however, explanations for how culture impacts on interpretation are omitted.

In the next section, I conclude this part of the literature review by summarising the arguments I have set up in this section, in order to argue that the limitations indicated in the literature can be avoided if we adopt a different theory and use a different method for analysis.

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reviewed the available studies on culture and communication which have applied the two key approaches proposed respectively by Hall (1976) and Hofstede (1980, 1991) to addressing cultural differences. Based on my literature review, I have set up the following two arguments in relation to the issues being reviewed:

(a) Previous studies (e.g. Adair and Brett 2004; Brew and Cairns 2004; Cohen 2004; Ting-Toomey 1999) make claims about the use of direct and indirect style in individualistic (LC) and collectivistic (HC) cultures. However, they do not actually show, by using the theoretical criteria they have applied, how they come to categorise one style as being direct and another style as being indirect.

(b) Previous studies (e.g. Cohen 2004; Gao and Ting-Toomey 1998; Scollon and Scollon 1995; Ting-Toomey 1999) make claims about the differences in interpretation between people with distinct cultural backgrounds. However, they do not actually explain how culture impacts on interpretation of a given utterance.
I argue that the fundamental reason for the above limitations is that relevant studies are limited by the theories they apply and the methods of analysis they use. My study is designed to address these limitations by asking the following two questions:

(1) If we accept the claim that China is a collectivistic culture with a high context culture communication style, and Britain is an individualistic culture with a low context culture communication style, this would imply that the communication styles of speakers from these two cultures are indirect and direct respectively. However, as I indicated above, studies that make these claims do not actually show how an utterance comes to be characterised as direct or indirect.

This raises the question: can these claims be substantiated?

(2) If we accept the claim that differences in interpretation of a given utterance between people from different cultures are caused by differences in their cultural backgrounds, this would imply that it is culture as ‘a given meaning system [which] is widely shared among members of a cultural group’ (Hong and Mallorie 2004: 63) that has an impact on interpretation. However, as I indicated above, studies that make the claims do not actually explain how culture impacts on interpretation.

This raises the question: can these claims be substantiated?

I argue that a methodology based on Sperber and Wilson’s inferential model of communication makes it possible to address my first question, in that it might provide an account that uncovers the relationship between speakers as a social entity and their
use of communication style in a way that none of the existing studies of culture and communication can achieve.

I also argue that Sperber and Wilson’s (1986/1995) Relevance Theory allows a way of accounting for the hearer’s contribution to the interpretative process, which would be able to address my second question, in that it provides a fuller account of how interpretations are generated in a specific context, what contextual assumptions are generated, and consequently how culture might impact on interpretation of a given utterance.

In the chapter that follows, I show how Relevance Theory might help me to explain these socio-cultural phenomena, and therefore address the two questions I asked above.
Chapter Three: Relevance Theory

Introduction

In Chapter Two, I showed that studies of culture and communication (e.g. Gao and Ting-Toomey 1998; Cohen 2004; Ting-Toomey 1999; Scollon and Scollon 1995) make claims that differences in interpretation of a given utterance between people with distinct cultural backgrounds are caused by cultures. One of my aims in this chapter is to draw on Relevance Theory in order to argue that these claims can be addressed by focusing on the cognitive environments of the addressees. This is because, according to Sperber and Wilson (1995, 59), communication ‘is a matter of degree’ or ‘manifestness’. If hearers generate the same interpretations in response to an utterance, relevance theorists posit that there must be some degree of overlap in their cognitive environment, since hearers draw on this when generating contextual assumptions. If the above is accepted, then this would predict that people whose cognitive environments do not overlap with each other will interpret a given utterance in different ways.

In Chapter Two, I also showed that culture and communication literature (e.g. Fujishin 2007; Brew and Cairns 2004; Adair and Brett 2004; Ting-Toomey 1999; Pekerti and Thomas 2003) makes claims about the use of direct and indirect styles in individualistic (LC) and collectivistic (HC) cultures. My second aim in this chapter is to draw on Relevance Theory in order to argue that these claims can be addressed by focusing on markers of procedural meaning. This is because, according to Sperber and Wilson, all communication involves a mixture of decoding and inference, and therefore there is no such thing as direct communication. In order for a hearer to interpret the meaning a speaker is attempting to convey, relevance theorists posit that
the hearer has to be able to work out which aspects of context are relevant in generating such an interpretation. The argument of relevance theorists is that the search for a relevant context is guided by what they call ‘markers of procedural meaning’. If this is accepted, this will predict that markers of procedural meaning are therefore going to occur in all languages, including those that culture and communication literature has defined as using ‘direct style’. This is because if a style is direct, in this context, markers of procedural meaning will be redundant. The occurrence of markers of procedural meaning in an utterance will indicate that the hearer has to carry out inferential work, which in turn indicates that the utterance does not ‘encode’ the meaning the speaker is attempting to communicate.

In order to address these two arguments, I draw on two aspects of Relevance Theory that I feel are pertinent to the questions I asked at the end of Chapter Two. These are: a relevance-theoretic approach to the impact culture has on interpretation of a given utterance and a relevance-theoretic approach to communication style.

### 3.1 A relevance-theoretic approach to the impact culture has on interpretation

Relevance Theory argues that what a speaker communicates is a thought (or a proposition or an assumption) – a representation of the state of affairs the speaker takes the hearer to be presenting as true (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 2). An utterance, according to Sperber and Wilson (1995, 2), is a ‘physical stimulus’ that communicates a ‘thought’. The propositional form of an utterance resembles the propositional form of a thought it represents, this is evident in Sperber and Wilson’s remarks below:
Communication can be successful without resulting in an exact duplication of thoughts in communicator and audience. We see communication as a matter of enlarging mutual cognitive environments, not of duplicating thoughts (1995, 193).

I will provide some detailed explanation of the term ‘cognitive environment’ in Section 3.1.2. What I want to suggest now is that the argument Sperber and Wilson make above is that what a speaker means on a particular occasion is not exhausted by the proposition she is taken to have expressed. In other words, what a speaker conveys in an utterance is a set of propositions or assumptions, and the proposition expressed directly through the meanings of the words a speaker uses is merely a piece of evidence that a hearer uses in order to infer the proposition intended by the speaker.

In Section 2.2.2.3, I have shown that studies by Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998), Cohen (2004), Ting-Toomey (1999) as well as Scollon and Scollon (1995) argue that there can be differences in the interpretation of a given utterance between people with distinct cultural backgrounds. ‘A given utterance’ in the context of cross-cultural communication is often spoken in two or more different languages. For example, when a native speaker of English produces an utterance ‘hello’, the propositional content of the utterance is equivalent to that of the utterance ‘你好’ made by a native speaker of Chinese. Therefore, what I am talking about when referring to ‘a given utterance’ is the case where the propositional content is the same in utterances in two or more languages. I have also shown that these studies do not justify their claim by explaining how culture has an impact on interpretation of the propositional content of an utterance within a specific context. The lack of such an explanation can be addressed by Sperber and Wilson’s (1995) inferential model of communication,
which provides a way of accounting for these socio-cultural phenomena from a relevance theoretic perspective.

My goal in this section is to draw on the argument postulated by Sperber and Wilson, namely that communication is a matter of degree, in order to argue that the impact a culture has on interpretation can be addressed by focusing on the cognitive environments of the addressees. In order to make this argument, this section begins with a brief introduction to the relevance theoretic approach to communication.

3.1.1 The inferential approach to communication

In Section 2.2.2.3, I have shown that scholars in the field of culture and communication (e.g. Adair and Brett 2004; Adair et al. 2001; Brett 2000, 2007; Gao and Ting-Toomey 1998; Gudykunst 1998b; Ting-Toomey 1999) claim that a process of inference is only required for communication in HC cultures, and it is not necessary for communication in LC cultures. What these other theorists claim but I disagree with is that the intention of a speaker from LC cultures can be decoded. According to Relevance Theory,

The addressee can neither decode nor deduce the communicator’s communicative intention. The best he can do is construct an assumption on the basis of the evidence provided by the communicator’s ostensive behaviour (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 65).

Therefore, from a relevance theoretic point of view, the process of inference is involved in all communication, in spite of the fact that, in Clark’s (2009a, 176) words, most people ‘never or rarely think about the fact that a large amount of what they understand from utterances is inferred rather than explicitly communicated’. In
relation to the issue of communication in individualistic (LC) and collectivistic (HC) cultures, this means that understanding an utterance produced by a speaker from both types of culture involves some degree of inference.

The idea that inference is necessary for all communication is evident in the argument made by Sperber and Wilson (1995, 3) that ‘communication can be achieved by coding and decoding messages, and it can be achieved by providing evidence for an intended inference’. In arguing this, they explain that the whole process of communication is based on ostension and inference, as in the following:

Inferential communication and ostension are one and the same process, but seen from two different points of view: that of the communicator who is involved in ostension and that of the audience who is involved in inference (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 54).

What Sperber and Wilson mean by ‘ostension’ is a ‘behaviour that makes manifest the intention to make something manifest’ (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 49). It is this ‘behaviour’ that provides two layers of information to be picked up by an audience if any communication is to take place. These two layers of information are: (a) informative intention as evidence, and (b) the intention to communicate that evidence. According to Relevance Theory, the latter (i.e. the communicative intention) is to make manifest the former (i.e. informative intention). Or in Sperber and Wilson’s (1995, 155) own words:
The communicator produces a stimulus (e.g. an utterance) which makes it mutually manifest to communicator and audience that the communicator intends, by means of this stimulus, to make manifest or more manifest to the audience a set of assumptions.

What this means, as I explained briefly earlier in this section, and in Sperber and Wilson’s (1995, 27) own words, is that

[T]he linguistic meaning of an uttered sentence falls short of encoding what the speaker means: it merely helps the audience infer what she means. The output of decoding is correctly treated by the audience as a piece of evidence about the communicator's intention.

In relation to my discussion of culture and communication in Chapter Two, the above claim indicates that an utterance produced by a speaker from either individualistic (LC) cultures or collectivist (HC) cultures is merely a piece of evidence of the speaker’s assumption or ‘thought’ that a hearer uses in producing an interpretation. This implies that hearers of both types of cultures need to use an utterance as evidence to draw some degree of inference in order to identify the meaning intended by a speaker.

Moreover, in explaining that an utterance is a piece of evidence, Sperber and Wilson are suggesting that addressees assume that, in claiming their attention through ostensive behaviour, communicators have something of relevance to impart to their addressees, and this is evident in Sperber and Wilson’s remark below:
Ostensive behaviour provides evidence of one’s thoughts. It succeeds in doing so because it implies a guarantee of relevance. It implies such a guarantee because humans automatically turn their attention to what seems most relevant to them (1995, 50).

The ‘guarantee’ used by Sperber and Wilson in the above quotation is about the relevance of what is communicated, in that hearers make the assumption that what is said will be relevant to them, and because of that assumption, they will undergo a process of utterance interpretation. Therefore, the point Sperber and Wilson make here is that it is the hearers’ assumption that what is said will be relevant to them that triggers the process of utterance interpretation. Without such an assumption, a hearer would not be motivated to interpret the utterance.

As indicated above, Sperber and Wilson argue that a communicator who produces a stimulus intends ‘to make manifest or more manifest to the audience a set of assumptions’ (1995, 155). In saying this, Sperber and Wilson are suggesting that communication is a matter of degree. This is explained more fully when they propose that ‘an utterance which explicitly expresses one thought may implicitly convey others’ (1995, 11). That is, what is said by a speaker might not actually be what the speaker means. An example would be the implications of what a Japanese negotiator says to a product supplier in a business context in the case of Fujishin (2007), the example I cited in Section 2.2.2.2, as illustrated below:

[3.1]

A Japanese negotiator: you have a good product.
According to Sperber and Wilson (1995, 56), there is no precise assumption, apart from the one explicitly expressed, which in this case the Japanese negotiator can be said to have intended the interlocutors to share. Yet this negotiator clearly intends the product supplier to draw not merely any relevant conclusion, but a specifically intended one. Therefore, as Sperber and Wilson argue (1995, 59), it is not that an assumption is either communicated or not communicated, it would be more appropriate to say that there is a set of assumptions which as a result of communication become manifest or more manifest to the hearer in varying degree. Manifest assumptions, according to Sperber and Wilson (1995, 39), are facts that individuals are capable of representing mentally and accepting as true, or probably true. Therefore, manifestness is seen as a matter of degree and which assumptions are more likely to be accessible to someone at a particular time will depend on this individual’s physical environment and cognitive abilities. For Sperber and Wilson, to be manifest ‘is to be perceptible or inferable’ (1995, 39). It may be assumed that in this particular case, what is made strongly manifest to the product supplier is that s/he has a good product. What is less manifest to the product supplier is what this indicates about what the Japanese negotiator plans to do with this product (e.g. to buy or not to buy). Hence, communication is a matter of degree.

To sum up, in this section, I have shown that, unlike studies of culture and communication which assume that the process of inference is only required for communication in HC cultures, what Sperber and Wilson posit is that all communication is a matter of degree, and therefore all communication involves a process of decoding and inference. If Sperber and Wilson are correct, this will
indicate that communication of both HC and LC cultures requires a hearer to draw on a degree of inference in order to recognise the intention of a speaker.

In the next section, I show, by drawing on Relevance Theory, how the argument that communication is a matter of degree informs my current research on the impact that a culture has on interpretation.

3.1.2 Cognitive environment

In the previous section, I suggested that within Relevance Theory, communication is seen as a matter of degree. This is based on Sperber and Wilson’s argument that a communicator’s informative intention is not to modify the ‘thought’ but the cognitive environment of the addressee, ‘hoping that its (i.e. a stimulus’) perception by members of the audience will lead to a modification of their cognitive environment and trigger some cognitive processes’ (1995, 150).

According to Sperber and Wilson (1995, 39), ‘a cognitive environment of an individual is a set of facts that are manifest to him’. The total cognitive environment of a person consists of all the information accessible to the person, either from perception, memory or by inference. In defining this, Sperber and Wilson point out that this characterisation does not only hold for facts, but for all kinds of assumptions, whether ‘true’ or ‘false’, because

    From a cognitive point of view, mistaken assumptions can be indistinguishable from genuine factual knowledge, just as optical illusions can be indistinguishable from true sight (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 39).
Moreover, they argue that for the comprehension of a particular utterance, not all of the infinite number of assumptions that make up an individual’s cognitive environment are used. What an individual has access to is merely the subset of all the existing assumptions manifest to the individual. Within Relevance Theory, the subset of information is called ‘context’ or ‘a contextual assumption’ (or a set of contextual assumptions) (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 15-16). In explaining context, Sperber and Wilson argue that context is not fixed or given in advance of the comprehension process, but a product that results from the dynamic process of selecting. Viewing the context as a product of dynamic process of selecting adds an extra level of explanation that helps to account for the view held by studies of culture and communication that context is given or fixed before the process of interpretation takes place. As I have shown in Section 2.2.2.1, when Hall argues that there are differences in drawing upon contextual information (i.e internalised or external information) between high and low context cultures, Hall seems to imply that within an act of communication, the difference in drawing upon contextual information exists before the process of interpretation takes place. Because of this, as I showed later in Section 2.2.2.3, when Hall’s followers (e.g. Cohen 2004; Gao and Ting-Toomey 1998; Ting-Toomey 1999; Scollon and Scollon 1995) adopt Hall’s approach to address cultural differences, they assume that context in which an utterance is produced is determined before the comprehension process gets under way. Consequently, a methodology predicated on such an assumption does not allow these scholars to be able to address how meaning is generated in a specific context, to the extent that they assume that the meaning of an utterance is self-evident, and even without engaging in the context in which an utterance is produced, one would automatically know the intended meaning of that utterance.
However, a model premised on the assumption that context is a product that results from the dynamic process of selecting, as Sperber and Wilson argue here, provides a solution to the apparent problem encountered by these scholars, in that it addresses the question of how, if context is not predetermined, the addressee comes to select a context (from either encyclopaedic memory, previous utterances or from the immediate physical environment) which bears out the guarantee of relevance of the utterance. This is evident in the description by Sperber and Wilson below:

[P]eople hope that the assumption being processed is relevant (or else they would not bother to process it at all), and they try to select a context which will justify their hope: a context which will maximise relevance. In verbal comprehension in particular, it is relevance which is treated as given, and context which is treated as a variable (1995, 142).

The claim that the choice of context is driven by the principle of relevance is based on Sperber and Wilson’s argument that ‘human cognition is relevance-oriented’ (1995, 46). When it comes to communication, it is also relevance-driven, in that people only automatically turn their attention to what seems most relevant to them in order to modify and improve an overall representation of the world. What this indicates is that if an utterance is perceived by a hearer to be relevant, it is always the result of the interaction between a stimulus and the cognitive environment of the hearer. According to Sperber and Wilson, an improvement in an individual’s representation of the world is the consequence of inference. This implies that if a hearer does not start from the assumption that a speaker’s ostensive stimulus is relevant to him, then his inferential process will not be triggered. Consequently, the speaker cannot modify the hearer’s cognitive environment by means of this stimulus. To achieve relevance, a
stimulus processed in a cognitive environment (i.e. context) should have at least one ‘contextual effect’, since within Relevance Theory,

[H]aving contextual effects is a necessary condition for relevance, and …other things being equal, the greater the contextual effects, the greater the relevance (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 119).

In explaining the relationship between relevance and contextual effects, Sperber and Wilson (1995, 144) also argue that the processing of the stimulus costs energy, and the benefits of the effects are always balanced against the effort it takes to process them. Relevance, then, decreases to the extent that the effort invested in interpreting the stimulus is large. Consequently, relevance is always a function of a cost-benefit balance. In relation to my discussion of the airport ride request, it might be easy to assume that, for a Chinese interlocutor, the immediate contextual assumptions, made manifest by the utterance ‘We’re going to New Orleans this weekend’ are that (a) if the speaker is going to New Orleans this weekend, she may want me to give her a ride; and (b) even if she would like a ride, it would not be polite to request one. Processed in the context containing the assumptions (a-b), the utterance would yield the contextual effect (c) I need to ask if she needs a ride in order to show respect. In this scenario, it is hard for the Chinese interlocutor to pin down what other interpretation would be relevant enough to justify the speaker’s utterance, and the interpretation (c) is basically the only possible one. Therefore, the utterance achieves the best possible balance of effort against effect, in that it achieves an adequate range of contextual effects for no unjustifiable effort (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 156). In Sperber and Wilson’s (1995, 153) terms, the interlocutor has optimally processed the assumption (i.e. the utterance).
In the next section, I show, by drawing on Relevance Theory, how cognitive environment relates to interpretation.

3.1.3 Cognitive environment relates to interpretation

In section 2.2.2.3, I have shown that scholars in the area of culture and communication (e.g. Adair and Brett 2004; Adair et al. 2001; Gao and Ting-Toomey 1998; Gudykunst 2004; Ting-Toomey 1999) claim that communication in HC cultures requires some degree of inference, however, they do not make clear how an analyst or a hearer draws the inference (see my discussion of the two ‘airport ride request’ scenes in Section 2.2.2.3). If the arguments of Sperber and Wilson’s Relevance Theory are accepted, then the hearer’s process of inference is to be carried out based on the following ‘deductive device’:

\[ \text{A} \text{ deduction based on the union of new information } P \text{ and old information } C \text{ is a contextualization of } P \text{ in } C \text{ (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 108).} \]

Sperber and Wilson distinguish between ‘new’ and ‘old’ information in this way: the former refers to perceptual information including visual, auditory and linguistic perception, while the latter refers to the assumptions which the deductive device has processed and stored in encyclopaedic memory. The latter provides a contextual background against which the former is interpreted. The derivation of new information, according to Sperber and Wilson, is spontaneous, automatic and unconscious, and it yields conclusions in the cognitive environments of an audience when the audience processes new information that either strengthens, or contradicts and eliminates, or combines with the existing assumptions the audience holds. The point Sperber and Wilson make here is therefore that the conclusion, also termed ‘a
contextual implication’ or ‘a contextual effect’ (1995, 109), is deducible from new information and old information together, but from neither new nor old information alone. What this adds to the ‘airport ride request’ scene is that upon hearing the utterance – the new information (or the shared propositional content of the utterance) we are going to New Orleans this weekend, each interlocutor is expected to activate a contextual assumption (or a set of assumptions) – old information in his or her cognitive environment made manifest by the utterance. For Chinese interlocutors, the immediate contextual assumptions activated by the utterance may include something like: she may want me to give her a ride, and even if she would like a ride, it would not be polite to request one. A synthesis of new and old information would lead the Chinese interlocutor to draw the conclusion that I have to ask if she wants me to give her a ride in order to show respect. For American interlocutors, in contrast, the immediate contextual assumptions activated by the utterance may be something like: the speaker is initiating a small talk. By combining the old and new information, the American interlocutors would draw the conclusion that I have to say something to maintain the conversation. As a result, the process of how hearers from different cultures interpret the airport ride request scene becomes clear. As my analysis has shown, both American and Chinese interlocutors appear to draw on their respective cultural specific assumptions to interpret what the speaker has said. This indicates that there is a strong connection between culture and interpretation.

As I have shown in Section 2.2.1.2, when culture and communication studies address cultural differences, they tend to assume that what counts as direct and indirect is self-evident. However, the above illustration indicates how it is that a single utterance can be interpreted differently. As I have shown above, the meaning of an utterance cannot
be generated if a hearer does not make the new information interact with information already in his cognitive environment (i.e. old information) by either strengthening, or contradicting and eliminating, or combining with the existing assumptions the hearer holds.

What the above illustration also indicates is that the notion of the cognitive environment is central to Sperber and Wilson’s Relevance Theory, in that it is part of the Mandarin Chinese speaker’s cognitive environment that asking for a ride is not polite.

Whilst emphasising the importance of cognitive environment in an act of communication, Sperber and Wilson (1995, 41) also argue that ‘the same facts and assumptions may be manifest in the cognitive environments of two different people’. In this case, the two people can have a mutual cognitive environment (what actually intersects in the cognitive environments of two people), but it would be impossible for the two people to have exactly identical cognitive environments. Sperber and Wilson argue that

[T]o say that two people share a cognitive environment does not imply that they make the same assumptions: merely that they are capable of doing so (1995, 41).

This suggests that what Sperber and Wilson actually postulate is therefore that in order for hearers to generate the same contextual implications in response to an utterance, there must be some degree of overlap in their cognitive environments, since hearers draw on this when generating contextual assumptions.
If Sperber and Wilson are correct, the above postulate would predict that people whose cognitive environments do not overlap with each other will interpret the propositional content of an utterance in different ways. It is reasonable to argue that people who have been brought up in China do not overlap in their cognitive environments with people who have been brought up in Britain. As a result, according to Sperber and Wilson (1995, 38), ‘they can construct different representations and make different inferences’. When interpreting ‘a given utterance’, Chinese and English hearers will interpret it in different ways, in that they may activate contextual assumptions that are available to hearers of one culture alone, but may not be available to hearers of another culture under study. In relation to the airport ride examples I have just discussed, this means that because Chinese and American interlocutors activate different contextual assumptions in response to the utterance ‘We’re going to New Orleans this weekend’, they interpret the utterance in different ways. For Chinese, asking for a ride is not polite. In contrast, for Americans, the speaker is merely initiating small talk. Consequently, they interpret the propositional content of the utterance in different ways: for Chinese, the hearer needs to ask if the speaker needs a ride to the airport in order to show respect; for Americans, the hearer needs to maintain the conversation.

If this is true, then the question I asked at the end of Chapter two of how culture has an impact on interpretation of ‘a given utterance’ can be addressed by focusing on the contextual assumptions activated in response to the utterance. This is because, if hearers of either culture activate contextual assumptions that are available to hearers of one culture alone, but may not be available to hearers of another culture under study, this means that culture has a direct impact on the interpretation. This, in turn,
indicates that cultural differences between China and Britain are realised through activating different contextual assumptions in response to an utterance.

3.1.4 Summary

In this section, by drawing on the argument Sperber and Wilson make that communication is a matter of degree, I have argued that the question of how culture impacts on interpretation can be addressed by focusing on contextual assumptions activated in response to an utterance. I have shown that if different contextual assumptions are activated in response to an utterance that expresses the same propositional content, then culture has a direct impact on interpretation.

3.2 A relevance-theoretic approach to communication styles

In Section 2.3, on the basis of my literature review, I have argued that although earlier studies of culture and communication (e.g. Cohen 2004; Brew and Cairns 2004; Adair and Brett 2004; Ting-Toomey 1999) make claims about the use of direct and indirect style in individualistic (LC) and collectivistic (HC) cultures, they do not actually explain the criteria they are applying to categorise one style as being direct and another style as being indirect. The problems faced by these studies can be resolved by the adoption of Sperber and Wilson’s inferential model of communication, which suggests a relevance-theoretical solution.

My goal in this section is to draw on Sperber and Wilson’s argument that there is no such thing as direct communication, in order to argue that the claims that cultures can be distinguished according to direct and indirect style can be addressed by focusing on markers of procedural meaning. In order to make this argument, I draw on those aspects of Relevance Theory that I feel are relevant to the issue of communication
style. These are also the aspects of Relevance Theory that I feel are the most significant to my subsequent illustration of the way Relevance Theory can be applied in my analysis of communication style. They are: (a) a relevance-theoretic approach to explicit and implicit communication, and (b) a relevance theoretic approach to procedural meaning.

3.2.1 A relevance-theoretic approach to explicit and implicit communication

In Section 2.2.1.2, I have shown that the literature of culture and communication uses the distinction between direct and indirect style as a way to theorise cultural differences. However, Sperber and Wilson provide an account that problematises this distinction.

As indicated in Section 3.1.1, according to Sperber and Wilson, communication is a matter of degree or manifestness. They argue that ‘no assumption is simply decoded, and that the recovery of any assumption requires an element of inference’ (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 182). This indicates that all communication is indirect, because it all involves a degree of inference.

In arguing this, Sperber and Wilson offer an account that explains the distinction between explicit and implicit communication from a relevance-theoretic perspective. To understand this distinction, it is firstly necessary to deal with another dichotomy they identify, namely between conceptual and procedural information.
According to Wilson and Sperber:

An utterance can be expected to encode two basic types of information: representational and computational, or conceptual and procedural – that is, information about the representations to be manipulated, and information about how to manipulate them (1993, 2).

The distinction between conceptual and procedural encoding is introduced by Blakemore (1987) to account for the meaning of discourse connectives. According to her analysis, these particles do not encode concepts, and do not contribute to the truth-conditional content of an utterance, but encode instructions that guide hearers towards the intended interpretation. A procedural expression is, therefore, a linguistic device that functions as a procedural constraint on the interpretation process being carried out on the part of the hearer by restricting the range of possible interpretations. I will discuss procedural meaning in more detail in Section 3.2.2. What I want to suggest now is that within the framework of Relevance Theory, inferential processes are not limited to the identification of what is implicitly communicated, but also take place in the determination of what is explicitly communicated. This indicates that the identification of explicit content of an utterance is equally inferential. This is because, as Sperber and Wilson (1995, 193) argue, sentences are abstract concepts, and their meanings are a set of semantic representations which are incomplete logical forms. Before sentences can have truth conditions, their logical forms must be developed and inferentially completed.
In explaining this, Sperber and Wilson argue that all communicated assumptions fall into one of the two types of categories: either explicit communication (or explicatures) or implicit communication (or implicatures), as follows:

An assumption communicated by an utterance $U$ is explicit if and only if it is a development of a logical form encoded by $U$. On the analogy of ‘implicature’, we will call an explicitly communicated assumption an explicature. Any assumption communicated, but not explicitly so, is implicitly communicated: it is an implicature (1995, 182).

More specifically, ‘a development of a logical form encoded by $U$’ within Relevance Theory is derived by going through pragmatic processes such as disambiguation, reference assignment and enrichment. This indicates that what is explicitly communicated is never fully propositional, the processes that lead to the recovery of the explicature (i.e. a complete proposition) are not just decoding, but a mixture of linguistic decoding and pragmatic inference. In fact, this is how it has been theorised in Relevance Theory, as follows:

An explicature is a combination of linguistically encoded and contextually inferred conceptual features. The smaller the relative contribution of the contextual features, the more explicit the explicature will be, and inversely. Explicitness … is both classificatory and comparative: a communicated assumption is either an explicature or an implicature, but an explicature is explicit to a greater or lesser degree (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 182).

While arguing that ‘an explicature is explicit to a greater or lesser degree’, Sperber and Wilson also make the point that a proposition (or a thought) may be more or less
strongly communicated, with indeterminate cases between them. Consequently, implicatures are more or less determinate with a varying degree of strength.

By emphasising that the decoded information must always, to some degree, be combined with contextual information as shown in the above quotation, Sperber and Wilson are suggesting that even explicatures must, in the last resort, be inferred. An illustration of the recovery of explicatures can be seen in Sperber and Wilson’s example of what Mary says to Peter below:

[3.2]

Mary: It’ll get cold.

(Sperber and Wilson 1995, 177).

According to Sperber and Wilson, Mary’s utterance must be ‘enriched in various ways to yield the propositional form expressed by the utterance’ (1995, 179). For example, Peter must decide, among other things, what ‘it’ refers to (e.g. a meal, a corpse, or what?); how soon the future in which ‘it’ gets cold obtains (e.g. counts by minutes, hours, weeks, or what?); the propositional mood of Mary’s utterance (e.g. a declaration or a question?). Peter needs to solve all these problems (via reference-assignment, disambiguation, recovery of propositional mood etc.) by combining the assumption of the utterance with relevant contextual information. In this case, the relevant contextual information may include, for example, Peter’s awareness of Mary having cooked dinner, and his knowledge of intonation patterns. The result of all this inference is that it is mutually manifest that Mary intended Peter to infer, say, that ‘the dinner will get cold very soon’ (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 176-181). Sperber and Wilson count all this part as the explicit content of Mary’s original utterance.
However, in the situation described above, it is more likely that Peter further infers that Mary wants him to come and eat dinner at once, and it is mutually manifest that it is the last derivation that makes Mary’s utterance worth Peter’s attention, to the extent that Peter processes Mary’s whole utterance. According to Sperber and Wilson, the last derivation, however, is not part of the explicit content of an utterance, but part of the implicit content of Mary’s utterance, or an ‘implicature’ in the relevance theoretic terminology, because it is ‘recovered by reference to the speaker’s manifest expectations about how her utterance should achieve optimal relevance’ (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 194). In relation to the issue I have raised earlier about ‘a given utterance’ being interpreted differently in the context of Chinese and British culture, what I mean by ‘a given utterance’ is actually that it is the case where an explicature is potentially the same in a MC utterance and a BE utterance. In other words, since the propositional content of what is said does not capture all of the assumptions that the speaker is attempting to convey to a hearer, when hearers from both China and Britain hear an utterance that expresses potentially the same explicature, they ‘will develop the linguistically encoded logical form to work out what proposition (or propositions) it represents’ (Clark 1996, 164, emphasis original).

At this point of the argument, therefore, the significance of Sperber and Wilson’s notion of explicatures should become more apparent. What they actually argue is that if even the recovery of an explicature needs some inferential work, there is no such thing as explicit communication at all in any communication. If Sperber and Wilson are correct, then all communication is indirect, because it always requires a degree of inference. In relation to the issue of communication styles as a way of theorising cultural differences, what Sperber and Wilson’s argument indicate is that the
distinction between direct and indirect communication on which culture and communication studies are based so as to address cultural differences, as I have indicated on several occasions, does not exist within Relevance Theory.

While rejecting the direct and indirect distinction, Sperber and Wilson offer an alternative account, which allows me to address the issue of communication style from a relevance theoretical perspective. In the next section, by drawing on Relevance Theory, I show how Sperber and Wilson’s argument that there is no such thing as direct communication informs my current research on communication style used by MC and BE speakers.

### 3.2.2 A relevance-theoretic approach to procedural meaning

As suggested in Section 3.2.1, Sperber and Wilson formulate the view that there is no such thing as explicit communication at all in any communication. In arguing this, they go on to claim that ‘every utterance has a variety of possible interpretations, all compatible with the information that is linguistically encoded’ (Wilson and Sperber 1998, 8), this is

> Precisely because utterance interpretation is not a simple matter of decoding, but a fallible process of hypothesis formation and evaluation, there is no guarantee that the interpretation that satisfies the hearer’s expectation of relevance will be correct, i.e. the intended one (Wilson 1994, 47, emphasise original).

However, from the standpoint of Relevance Theory, a hearer does not need to consider an infinite number of possible interpretations and then decide on the right one. This is because in order to help hearers interpret every utterance in the most accessible context that yields adequate contextual effects for no unjustifiable effort
(Sperber and Wilson 1995, §3.1-2), a speaker aiming at relevance may use linguistic devices to direct a hearer towards the intended interpretation, by making a certain set of assumptions immediately assessable.

Procedural information is a term attributed to Blakemore (1987), who argues that procedural information includes constraints on all aspects of inferential processing. In support of Blakemore, Wilson and Sperber (1993, 11) offer the following explanation:

[Procedural information does] not contribute to the truth conditions of utterances, but constrain[s] the inferential phase of comprehension by indicating the type of inference process that the hearer is expected to go through…it contribute[s] to relevance by guiding the hearer towards the intended contextual effects, hence reducing the overall effort required.

If this is true, then what procedural encoding does is to encode instructions, rather than to encode concepts in utterance interpretation, by providing hearers with the optimally relevant information to facilitate their inferential process.

As indicated in Section 3.2.1, within the framework of Relevance Theory, an explicature is explicit to a greater or lesser degree. Since a proposition (or a thought) may be more or less strongly communicated, with indeterminate cases between them, and consequently, implicatures are more or less determinate, with a varying degree of strength. If such views are accepted, this would predict that in the situation where an assumption is made strongly manifest to both a speaker and a hearer, the frequency of occurrence of markers of procedural meaning will be low. Conversely, in a situation where an assumption is made manifest weakly, the frequency of occurrence of markers of procedural meaning will be high. It follows that in the latter situation, if a
speaker does not succeed in indicating, by means of markers of procedural meaning, that what she has to impart is relevant to a hearer, according to Relevance Theory, the hearer will not interpret what the speaker means by what she says. In other words, the hearer’s inferential process will not be triggered. However, in the view of Relevance Theory, a speaker’s communicative intention is to have her intention fulfilled or recognised (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 30). To this extent, as Sperber and Wilson (1995, 251) argue, a speaker actively helps hearers, based on her estimation of the hearer’s cognitive abilities and contextual resources, by formulating her utterance in such a way that the first acceptable line of interpretation to occur to the hearer is the one intended by the speaker. This perspective is also reflected in the argument Sperber and Wilson make about a speaker’s choice of style below:

In aiming at relevance, the speaker must make some assumptions about the hearer’s cognitive abilities and contextual resources, which will necessarily be reflected in the way she communicates, and in particular in what she chooses to make explicit and what she chooses to leave implicit (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 218).

The point Sperber and Wilson make here is that the style of a speaker is a consequence of the speaker’s aim of producing an utterance consistent with the principle of relevance. What Sperber and Wilson actually argue here is therefore that a speaker aiming at relevance must use markers of procedural meaning to guide hearers, in order for hearers to generate the contextual implications intended by the speaker.
In Chapter Two, I have shown that earlier studies of culture and communication argue that cultures can be distinguished according to the use of direct and indirect styles. However, I have also shown that relevant studies do not actually explain how a set of utterances might be characterised as being direct or indirect. On this basis, at the end of Chapter Two, I asked the question of whether their claims can be substantiated. In the light of my above discussion about the relevance-theoretic approach to markers of procedural meaning, I argue that the claims about the use of direct and indirect styles used in different cultures can be addressed by focusing on markers of procedural meaning. My study is designed to investigate whether or not there are similarities or differences in the use of communication styles in individualistic and collectivistic cultures by focusing on China and Britain. Applying Relevance Theory to my study, I argue that if there is evidence that MC and BE speakers ever use markers of procedural meaning in their utterances to guide the interpretation process, this would indicate that both MC and BE hearers have to carry out inferential work, which in turn indicates that the styles of the two sets of speakers are both indirect. Therefore, if we aim to examine whether or not there are similarities or differences in the use of style between MC speakers and BE speakers, what we need to do now is to look for evidence to indicate whether or not the two sets of speakers ever use markers of procedural meaning to guide a hearer’s interpretation process. However, before I come to this, in what follows I briefly discuss the kind of markers of procedural meaning earlier studies have pointed to.

Thus far, linguistic resources that have been analysed in procedural meaning include prosody (e.g. Wilson and Wharton 2006; House 2006), discourse connectives (e.g. Blakemore 1987, 2002), pronouns, mood indicators and discourse particles (e.g.
Wilson and Sperber 1993; König 1991). However, two that are considered to be particularly effective in imposing procedural constraints on implicatures are prosody (e.g. Wilson and Wharton 2006; House 2006) and discourse connectives (e.g. Blakemore 1992, 2002). In order to examine whether or not there are differences or similarities between MC speakers and BE speakers in terms of communication style, I restrict my focus to those linguistic resources that have been examined to trigger implicatures. I therefore examine whether prosody and discourse connectives are used by MC and BE speakers to guide the interpretation process.

My focus on these two markers is motivated by two factors. Firstly, prosodic features, in particular stress and intonation, have been analysed under the rubric of procedural meaning by many scholars (e.g. Baltazani 2006; Blakemore 1987, 2002; Clark 2007; Escandell Vidal 1996; Fretheim 1998; House 2006; Wichmann and Blakemore 2006; Wilson and Wharton 2006). All these writers acknowledge that one of the important functions of prosody is to provide procedural information to a hearer for interpreting an utterance. For example, Wichmann and Blakemore (2006, 1537-8) argue that

[P]rosody plays an important role in many languages in the structuring of information within discourse, by lending its psychological salience to certain syllables, and manipulating rules in order to indicate broad and narrow focus.

If the above view is accepted, it is possible that prosody is used by both MC and BE speakers to encode procedural information ‘in order to indicate broad and narrow focus’ (Wichmann and Blakemore 2006, 1538). If this is the case, then the occurrence of prosody in the utterances produced by the two sets of speakers would provide
strong evidence to show that the styles used by MC speakers and BE speakers are both indirect.

The second factor is to do with discourse connectives. It is generally acknowledged that while interpreting an utterance, we should not merely restrict our focus to the proposition expressed by every single utterance, but should accommodate the role that discourse connectives play, by extending our focus into a discourse unit larger than a sentence, because

What is communicated in discourse is more than the semantic and pragmatic meaning of the individual clauses. Part of the meaning of discourse is the relationship between sentences and larger discourse units …Discourse connectives are then claimed to indicate that two units of discourse stand in a particular coherence relation (Unger 1996, 410).

More importantly, as I indicated earlier in this section, relevance scholars see discourse connectives as types of linguistic expressions that do not contribute to the truth conditional content of utterances that contain them, but rather, indicate how the relevance of one discourse segment is dependent on another. This means that discourse connectives ‘impose constraints on relevance by virtue of the inferential connections they express’ (Blakemore 1987, 141). Discourse connectives with such a property, according to Blakemore (1987, 2002), must be analysed as encoding procedural information rather than conceptual information.

Moreover, it has been argued (e.g. Unger 1996; Feng 2008) that all languages have a certain set of connectives that correspond in function to encode procedural meaning. For example, Feng (2008, 1687) argues that
In English and perhaps all other languages, there is a class of expressions which has been generally characterized as semantically non-truth-conditional and syntactically peripheral...A multiple array of terms have been used...However, recently it seems to be narrowing down to ‘pragmatic marker’ or ‘discourse markers’.

If Feng’s view is accepted, this would predict that MC and BE must have the same set of connectives that enjoy the property of ‘non-truth-conditional’ (Feng 2008, 1687), and therefore encode procedural meaning in the process of interpretation. If this is true, then the occurrence of discourse connectives in the two languages will also be strong evidence that the styles of MC and BE speakers are both indirect.

To sum up, in this section, drawing on the argument in Relevance Theory that there is no such thing as direct communication, I have argued that the claim made by existing studies of culture and communication, namely that cultures can be distinguished according to direct and indirect styles, can be addressed by focusing on markers of procedural meaning. I have also argued that my study is designed to investigate whether or not there are similarities or differences in communication styles used in China and Britain by focusing on prosody and discourse connectives as markers of procedural meaning.

In the next section, I review relevant literature in order to argue that there is already evidence that both MC and BE speakers appear to rely on prosody and discourse connectives to encode procedural information in an act of communication.
3.2.3 Markers of procedural meaning in the two languages

In this section, by reviewing the literature of prosody and discourse connectives, I aim to show that (a) there is evidence that stress and intonation appear to encode procedural information in BE, and that although the tone language features of MC determine that tone cannot be used to encode procedural information, stress does appear to encode procedural meaning in MC, and (b) discourse connectives are used by both sets of speakers to guide the interpretation process.

3.2.3.1 Prosody in the two languages

In order to show that both MC and BE use prosody to encode procedural information, I first review literature on English prosody, followed by my evaluation of scholarship on Chinese prosody.

Prosody in English

Cruttenden (1997, 172) points out that prosodic features ‘refer to vocal effects’ of a speech, and they are generally taken to include such major features as intonation, stress and tone. Specifically, Cruttenden (1986, 8) claims that ‘intonation’ refers to ‘a feature of phrases or sentences’. A number of other phonology theorists (e.g. Gussenhoven 2004, 22; Warren et al. 1995, 458) have provided a more detailed description of what intonation is, and argued that English intonation can be represented by a linear sequence of pitch accents and a boundary tone, which in effect is a sequence of high and low tones. This indicates that ‘pitch accents’ and ‘boundary tones’ are treated as two independent prosodic features and the former is usually called stress, whilst the latter is called intonation.
According to Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg (1990, 272), stress in English is the ‘relative prominence of syllables in an utterance’. Similarly, Cruttenden (1986, 48) notes that at least in English, stress ‘is realised principally by pitch, length and loudness; of these, pitch is undoubtedly the most consistently used feature’. What these scholars imply is that stress is realised differently in different languages. Within the literature of phonology, it is generally acknowledged that stress is used either in words or in sentences, namely, word stress and sentence stress. Chen et al. (2001, 1681), for example, claim that word stress is assigned by lexical-phonological rules, and it ‘is concerned with the emphasis of individual syllables comprising a polysyllabic word’. Sentence stress has been defined as the most prominent words in a phrase or sentence and the stressed word is usually the most important in a phrase or a sentence. This suggests that the study of word stress and the study of sentence stress refer to different things. The former is grammar-focused, whereas the latter is meaning-focused. As I explained in Chapter two, my present study is primarily concerned with the way through which utterances are produced and interpreted in a specific context, and it is a meaning-focused study. Because of this, I restrict my discussion of stress to phrase or sentence stress, rather than word stress. Since stress, tone and intonation are commonly described as prosodic features, in the rest of my study, prosodic stress, stress or pitch accent will refer to sentence stress whenever they occur.

In the phonology literature, English stress has been discussed extensively to mark the information focus of a sentence (e.g. Dik 1997; Erteschik-Shir 1997; Lambrecht 1994; Selkirk 1995; Reinhart 1995; Szendrői 2004). The notion of ‘focus’ refers to the
‘information which is relatively the most important or salient in the given communicative setting’ (Dik 1997, 326). Specifically, Lambrecht (1994, 24) argues:

[I]n English the sentence accent can in principle ‘move’ from right to left, allowing for prosodic focus marking in any position in the sentence. Because of the importance of sentence accentuation in English, syntactic expression of information structure is often unnecessary in this language.

The point Lambrecht makes here is that prosody is often used to mark focus in English, and even when syntactic structure is used to mark focus, it is always accompanied by prosodic stress.

The idea that English stress marks the focus of an utterance is also reflected in the proposals given by some other scholars like Selkirk (1995), Reinhart (1995), Schwarzschild (1999) and Féry and Samek-Lodovici (2006). In their respective proposals as shown below, these scholars attempt to highlight the important role stress plays in marking focus of a sentence:

Selkirk (1995, 555):

Basic Focus Rule: An accented word is F(ocus)-marked.


Stress-Focus Correspondence Principle: The focus of a clause is a(ny) constituent containing the main stress of the intonational phrase, as determined by the stress rule.
Schwarzschild (1999, 173):

Focus: A Focus-marked phrase contains an accent.

Féry and Samek-Lodovici (2006, 135-6):

Stress-Focus: A focused phrase has the highest prosodic prominence in its focus domain.

As we may see, all the above scholars emphasise that the assignment of a stress (an accent) to a word entails the focus marking of that word. They all take the view that there is a direct link between prosody and the focus of an utterance. This indicates that one of the important functions of prosody is to mark information focus.

The fact that prosody has a function of marking information focus is also accounted for by Sperber and Wilson (1995) from a relevance theoretic perspective. They argue:

[S]tress is a sort of vocal equivalent of pointing, a natural means of drawing attention to one particular constituent in an utterance (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 203).

The example below is a brief illustration of how Sperber and Wilson’s approach may work:

[3.3]
Susan went off to see the FOOTBALL match (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 203).

Notice that in [3.3], capitalization ‘football’ to indicate ‘focal stress’ is supplied by Sperber and Wilson, who claim that a speaker who puts focal stress on ‘football’ may be intending to highlight that this is the focus of the utterance. They go on to argue
that ‘the focally stressed constituent rarely determines the unique focus', but that it is ‘to show how an actual focus is chosen from a range of potential foci' (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 203). This indicates that by stressing the word ‘football’, a speaker gives her audience instructions to infer that what Susan went off to see is FOOTBALL match, rather than other kinds of matches. Hearers are then directed by the stressed word to process the utterance in the context which is made accessible. Consequently, hearers’ processing effort is reduced.

Sperber and Wilson’s (1995, 203) above argument that stress is ‘a natural means of drawing attention to one particular constituent in an utterance’ has been applied by a number of scholars to the study of prosody as encoding procedural meaning (e.g. Clark and Wharton 2009; Fretheim 1998; House 1990, 2006; Imai 1998; Vandepitte 1989; Wilson and Wharton 2006). These theorists all take the view that prosody is a widely accepted linguistic device that is used not to encode conceptual meaning, but to provide instructions about how an utterance is to be processed.

In the light of the literature reviewed above, it is clear that English prosodic stress encodes procedural meaning. However, prosodic features used to mark procedural meaning in English are not limited to stress alone. The relevant literature (e.g. Clark 2007; Clark and Lindsey 1990; Escandell-Vidal 1998, 2002; House 2006) suggests that English intonation (i.e. pitch variations) is also used to perform this function, independently of stress. Clark (2007, 74), for example, argues that ‘intonational meaning is procedural, i.e. it encodes procedures which help to constrain or guide inferential processes’. Similarly, House (2006) claims that boundary high rising tone encodes procedural meaning in the process of utterance interpretation, as follows:
A procedural hypothesis concerning the high boundary tone (H%) itself is that it encodes an instruction to interpret the preceding phrase as part of a larger piece of structure… and indicating a wider context. The hearer must use her cognitive environment to make appropriate inferences about the speaker’s intentions, to work out what the wider context might be (House 2006, 1554).

To illustrate that intonation functions to encode procedural meaning, I use an example from House (2006, 1553) below:

[3.4]
\[\text{Coffee} \]
H* H H%

(H* stands for extra High, H stands for relatively High, and H% stands for high boundary tone).

House (2006) makes the point that the above utterance is realised with a rising tone, which may instruct the hearers to interpret it as a question, but in this particular case, a range of other interpretations is possible, depending on what is accessible in the context. House goes on to argue that the speaker may be in the process of making suggestions, where the high boundary merely signals non-finality, or that the speaker may also be using high rising tone to express uncertainty of the status of the current intonational phase, and the hearer will select the first interpretation that is relevant enough to yield cognitive effects. In arguing this, House is suggesting that in all these possible interpretations, what intonation does is to encode procedural information.
House’s view that intonation encodes procedural information is shared by a range of relevance theorists (e.g. Clark 2007; Escandell Vidal 1998; Fretheim 2002; Vandepitte 1989). Specifically, Wilson and Wharton (2006, 1571) comment that

The function of such ‘procedural’ expressions would be to facilitate the identification of the speaker’s meaning by narrowing the search space for inferential comprehension, increasing the salience of some hypotheses and eliminating others, thus reducing the overall effort required…both ‘natural’ (e.g. an angry tone) and properly linguistic prosodic singles (e.g. stress and intonation) are procedurals in this sense.

In the light of the arguments I have reviewed so far, it is clear that there is a great deal of evidence that intonation and stress are used to encode procedural meaning in English. Although syntactic structure is also one way of marking the information focus, evidence suggests that when it is used to perform such a function, it cannot do it independently, but must be accompanied by prosodic stress.

**Prosody in Chinese**

In the phonology literature, Chinese is a typical example of a tonal language with four lexical tones (not including the neutral tone) (e.g. Chao 1948, 1956, 1968; Lin 1965, 1988; Li and Thompson 1981; Howie 1976; Cruttenden 1997; Tench 1996). According to Cruttenden (1997, 8-9), tone is ‘a feature of lexicon, being described in terms of prescribed pitches for syllables or sequences of pitches for morphemes or words’. Unlike that of BE, whose pitch variations express syntactic and pragmatic meaning, in a tone language such as MC, the changes of pitch serve to distinguish word meaning. For example, what might seem to BE speakers to be a single MC
lexical item ‘ma’ means four different things, depending on the associated tone, as shown below:

Ma¹ (with high level pitch)         ‘mother’
Ma² (with high rising pitch)       ‘hemp’
Ma³ (with low, or falling then rising, pitch)       ‘horse’
Ma⁴ (with falling pitch)           ‘scold’


What the above literature suggests is that prosodic systems of MC and BE are typologically distinct, in that MC tone and BE intonation are two different types of pitch variations. The latter can be used to encode procedural meaning, while the former cannot. If such views are accepted, this would predict that speakers of MC and BE may use prosody in different ways. Consequently, prosody as a marker of procedural meaning may not be used in the same way in the two different language systems.

However, a considerable amount of literature suggests that English type stress is also present in the production of MC (e.g. Chao 1932; Chun 1982; Duanmu 2005; Grandour et al. 2007; Shen 1993; Xu 1999). Specifically, studies focusing on stress production in MC have shown that stress in MC is manifested by lengthening and duration (e.g. Shen 1993; Chao 1932; Chun 1982; Lin et al. 1984). For example, Shen (1993) reports that the role of duration is the most important cue to identify stress in MC. In a more recent study, Gandour et al. (2007, 95) offer the following remark to acknowledge the existence of sentence stress in MC:
Although Mandarin, a tone language, and English, a non-tone language, differ structurally in their use of prosody at the word level, both languages exploit prosody at the sentence level to distinguish sentence focus (sentence initial vs. sentence final position of contrastive stress) and sentence type (declarative vs. interrogative modality).

It should by now be clear that although MC is a tone language, it shares the property of having sentence stress with BE. It is less clear, however, whether stress is also used in MC ‘to distinguish sentence focus’ (Gandour et al. 2007).

Earlier in this section, I have shown that from a relevance theoretical perspective, stress is used to indicate procedural meaning in English by marking the focus of an utterance, in order to constrain a hearer’s interpretation process. In what follows, I review the relevant literature on Chinese prosody, in order to show that this is also the case for sentence stress in MC.

The notion of information focus in MC has been the concern of a number of researchers (e.g. Xu Yi 1999; Xu liejong 2004; Lapolla 1995; Zhang and Fang 1996). Most of them either explicitly state, or implicitly convey that the information focus of a MC sentence is projected in the sentence final position. Specifically, Xu’s (2004) study offers some useful insights into recent developments of how Chinese information focus is made manifest, and his insights have been cited by much subsequent literature (e.g. Cheung 2009; Li 2008; Kuo and Ramsay 2008; Schwarz 2009). According to Xu (2004, 280), a sentence final position in MC tends to be ‘the primary strategy’ of indicating focus, and stress is a compensatory device which needs to work in conjunction with the use of a non-default sentence position for it to
function as a marker of informational focus. Now I provide evidence from Xu’s (2004) account.

Xu’s (2004) account builds on the idea originally proposed by LaPolla (1995) that the focus position of Chinese is sentence final. This idea is later developed by Zhang and Fang (1996) who argue that whatever is in focus takes sentence final position. Xu (2004) argues that ‘compared with European languages it (i.e. MC) uses more syntax less phonology in focus realization’ (2004, 277). When Xu (2004) uses the term ‘sentence final position’, he takes into consideration the Chinese canonical order SVO and its relatively flexible word order, and argues that ‘Chinese is typologically a VO language, the directionality of embedding determines that this is the sentence-final position’ (2004, 280). This means that constituents of informational focus often take the sentence final position. As Xu (2004, 298) goes on to argue:

In Chinese the focused element should take the default focus position as far as possible. Once it is in this position, stress is not required. Phonological realization is a compensatory device where the expression intended to be focused cannot occur in the default position due to some structural reasons.

To illustrate his point, Xu uses the following examples:

[3.5]
(a) **Lao Wang** zuotian kai-guo jipuche.
(b) Lao Wang **zuotian** kai-guo jipuche.
(c) Lao Wang zuotian **kai**-guo jipuche.
(d) Lao Wang zuhotian kai-guo **jipuche**.
On the basis of the pronunciation provided by Xu (2004), I translate Xu’s above examples into the following:

Lao Wang zuotian kai-guo jipuche.

Old Wang yesterday drive jeep

Mr. Wang drove jeep yesterday.

By using the above examples, Xu (2004, 290) argues that just like its English counterpart, ‘Chinese also uses phonological means to mark focus’, and that each word of the above sentence can be uttered with more prominence, as indicated in boldface above. What Xu means is that (i) if Lao Wang is uttered with more prominence as shown in (a), the speaker gives her audience instructions that it is Lao Wang rather than somebody else that drove jeep yesterday. Similarly, (ii) if zuotian is uttered with more prominence as shown in (b), the speaker gives her audience instructions that it is yesterday rather than some other day that Lao Wang drove jeep; (iii) if kai is uttered with more prominence as shown in (c), the speaker gives her audience instructions that Lao Wang did have jeep driving experience yesterday; (iv) if jipuche is uttered with more prominence, the speaker gives her audience instructions that what Lao Wang drove yesterday is jeep rather than some other vehicles.

In arguing that ‘Chinese also uses phonological means to mark focus’, Xu (2004) also makes the point that the phonological manifestation of focus in Chinese is actually different to that of English, in that: (a) Chinese makes use of length and intensity rather than the rise and fall of pitch to indicate focus, and (b) phonological manifestation is not required in Chinese. With respect to the latter point, Xu (2004)
clarifies that when a sentence like \([3.5]\) is uttered out of blue, it normally takes the form of (e) as shown below, in which no constituent is more prominent than others.

(e) Lao Wang zuotian kai-guo jipuche.

The point Xu (2004) makes here is that if no constituent in a sentence is uttered with more prominent than others, the focus of this sentence should be in the sentence final.

That is, *jipuche* (i.e. jeep) is the focus of this utterance.

Xu goes on to argue that a sentence like (e) may sound ambiguous in terms of focus interpretation; however, ambiguity can be disambiguated when context is provided.

Based on his above examples, Xu (2004, 291) makes the following remarks:

> In fact, when it (a constituent carrying the information focus) takes the default focus position, stress is generally unnecessary….Stress is more likely to be used when the constituent intended to be in focus does not take this position.

What Xu suggests here is that when a focused element takes the sentence final position, no stress is available in the whole sentence, but when a focused element does not occur in the sentence final position, a speaker uses stress to mark the focus of an utterance. This indicates that MC *does* use stress to mark the focus of an utterance even though it happens when a focused constituent takes a non-final position.

In the light of the above evidence provided by Xu (2004), it would appear that prosodic stress is the linguistic resource that MC speakers draw on as markers of procedural meaning. As I have argued, my claim is that the occurrence of prosody in MC suggests that the communication style of MC speakers is indirect.
To sum up, I have reviewed the literature on Chinese and English prosody. There is evidence that speakers of both MC and BE use prosody to encode procedural meaning. This would imply that the communication styles of the two sets of speakers are both indirect.

In the next section, I review the literature on discourse connectives in order to provide evidence that discourse connectives are used in both MC and BE to encode procedural information.

3.2.3.2 Discourse connectives in the two languages

In Section 3.2.2, I have shown that within the framework of Relevance Theory, discourse connectives are seen as types of linguistic expressions that do not encode concepts, and therefore do not contribute to the truth conditional content of an utterance. Rather, they indicate how a speaker’s utterance is to be processed by directing a hearer towards the intended context. According to Blakemore (1987, 1992, 2002), one way of explaining the connectives in use is to analyse them as encoding procedural meaning, so as to impose constraints on a hearer’s interpretation process. This is because

Their sole function is to guide the interpretation process by specifying certain properties of context and contextual effects. In a relevance-based framework, where the aim is to minimise processing cost, the use of such expressions is to be expected (Blakemore 1987, 77; 1989, 21).

Although thus far, discourse connectives are widely accepted linguistic expressions that can be analyzed as encoding procedural meaning in larger discourse units, according to Blakemore (2003, 239),
Not all the expressions that have been classified as DMs (i.e. discourse markers, emphasise original) can be analysed as procedural constraints on relevance. For example, *besides, as a result*, and *in contrast* encode concepts and are constituents of propositional representations.

This indicates that from a relevance theoretical point of view, even though some expressions play a role in the way discourse is understood, they do not encode procedural meaning. To solve the issue of identifying discourse connectives with a procedural function, Blakemore (2002, 95; 1992, 138-141), on the basis of the cognitive effects they encode, classifies discourse connectives in the following three ways:

(a) It may allow the derivation of a contextual implication (e.g. *so, therefore*);

(b) It may strengthen an existing assumption (by providing better evidence for it) (e.g. *after all, moreover, furthermore*);

(c) It may contradict an existing assumption (e.g. *however, but, nevertheless*).

To illustrate how a cognitive effect is achieved in one of the ways mentioned above, I now use two examples from Blakemore, as follows:

[3.6]

David isn’t here. Barbara is in town (Blakemore 1992, 150).

In the above example, the connection between the two segments of the utterance is not explicitly signalled. The second segment can either be a conclusion drawn from the first segment or a reason for the state of affairs described in the first segment. Hearers need to decide which interpretation is intended by the speaker.
In interpreting the utterances in [3.7] and establishing the connections indicated by ‘so’ between the utterances (a) and (b), the hearer has to access the background information (c):

(c) Whenever David isn’t here, Barbara is in town (premise).

Thus, the presence of discourse connective so in (b) is used to achieve relevance by instructing the hearer to interpret (b) as a contextual implication derived from (a). That is, so is used to impose constraints on contextual assumptions needed for interpreting (a) and (b). As a result, the interpretation process the hearer needs to go through becomes easier.

Moreover, in explaining how discourse connectives are used to encode procedural information, Blakemore (1992, 85) claims that ‘even when two sentences are related by a cohesive tie, the hearer has to go beyond her linguistic resources to recover an interpretation’. The point Blakemore (1992) makes here is that even for those discourse relations that are explicitly signalled by the use of a connective like the one in example [3.7], hearers must infer the connectivity of content. However, the presence of the connectives would make their inference easier, and consequently, the hearers’ processing effort is decreased.
In my study, following Blakemore (1987, 1992, 2002), I restrict my consideration of discourse connectives to those that do not encode concepts, but encode procedural meaning, by indicating how an utterance is to be processed. In what follows, I adopt Blakemore’s (1987, 1992, 2002) approach to discourse connectives to identify Chinese counterparts that fall into the three categories defined above.

As indicated in Section 3.2.2, almost all languages have a range of lexical expressions that encode procedural constraints on utterance comprehension, Chinese is no exception. Although no studies have been found to systematically investigate Chinese discourse connectives from a relevance theoretical perspective, recent work by Feng (2008) provides a systematic description of Chinese pragmatic markers in general. Among the pragmatic markers Feng (2008) outlined, I take what Feng (2008) categorises as contrastive pragmatic markers (e.g. 但是 (i.e. but)), elaborative pragmatic markers (e.g. 并且 (i.e. moreover)) and inferential pragmatic markers (e.g. 所以 (i.e. so)) as being equivalent to the three categories of discourse connectives suggested by Blakemore (1992). I argue that these three types of Chinese pragmatic markers (in Feng’s terms) fit well into the categories classified by Blakemore, not merely because they ‘suggest a relation between messages’ (Feng 2008, 1707), but also because ‘they do not affect the truth conditions of a sentence that hosts them’ (Feng 2008, 1688). Therefore, I take them as a class of linguistic expressions that can encode procedural, rather than conceptual information in MC.

To sum up, I have reviewed the relevant literature on discourse connectives in BE and MC. Evidence suggests that discourse connectives are used by both speakers of MC and BE to encode procedural information to guide the interpretation process. The use
of discourse connectives in MC and BE suggests that the communication styles of the two sets of speakers are both indirect.

For ease of comparison, I now list discourse connectives in BE and their MC counterparts in the table below, according to the categories classified by Blakemore (2002, 95; 1992, 138-141).

Table 3.1 Discourse connectives in the two languages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English discourse connectives</th>
<th>Chinese equivalents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introducing a contextual implication</td>
<td>So, therefore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening an existing assumption</td>
<td>After all, moreover, furthermore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contradicting or eliminating an existing assumption</td>
<td>But, however</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.3.3 Summary

In this section, I have reviewed the relevant literature on prosody and discourse connectives with respect to MC and BE. Overall, evidence suggests that MC speakers and BE speakers have similarities in the use of linguistic devices to encode procedural meaning, in that they both rely on prosody and discourse connectives to guide a hearer’s interpretation process.

There is also evidence that in BE, intonation is used to mark procedural meaning, but the characteristic of a tone language determines that intonation is not used to encode procedural meaning in MC.
3.2.4 Summary

In this section, drawing on Relevance Theory, I have argued that the claims made by existing studies of culture and communication about the use of direct and indirect styles in different cultures can be addressed by focusing on markers of procedural meaning. I have also argued that according to my literature review, the communication styles of MC and BE speakers are both indirect, in that they both rely on markers of procedural meaning to guide the interpretation process.

In the next section, I conclude my literature review by specifying the research questions my current study is designed to address.

3.3 Conclusion

In Chapter Two, I showed that studies of culture and communication argue that cultures can be distinguished according to the use of direct and indirect style. However, such studies do not explain how one style can be categorised as being direct and another style can be categorised as being indirect. In Chapter Three, I have shown that speakers of MC and BE both rely on prosody and discourse connectives to guide the interpretation process. I have argued that this would suggest that both languages communicate indirectly.

In Chapter Two, I also showed that studies of culture and communication claim that Chinese and English draw different inferences from utterances that apparently express the same propositional content (e.g. I’m going to New Orleans for three days). However, they do not explain how culture has an impact on interpretation. In Chapter Three, I have shown that differences in interpretation may be explained by employing a relevance theoretic approach. Relevance theorists argue that for a single utterance to
generate the same meaning, hearers have to share a cognitive environment. If hearers are from different countries, they are likely to have different cognitive environments, and as a result, it is highly likely that they produce different interpretations of a given utterance.

Given that earlier studies of culture and communication tend to draw on invented examples and arguments, rather than empirical study, my study is designed to ask the following two research questions:

**Research Question (1):**

Is there evidence from actual language use that indicates that both MC and BE speakers use markers of procedural meaning?

**Research Question (2):**

Is there evidence that when interpreting naturally occurring conversations, hearers from different cultures do actually come up with different interpretations because they are drawing on a different cognitive environment?

I ask the first question because if my analysis indicates that this is the case, then both languages can be seen as using indirect forms of communication. This indicates that there is no direct connection between culture and the use of style. As a result, the direct and indirect distinction identified by studies of culture and communication needs to be rethought.

I ask the second question because if it is established that this is the case, it is significant in the light of existing scholarship, because this would indicate how the
limitations of existing culture and communication literature can be addressed by focusing on what hearers actually do in the process of communication.
Chapter Four: Research Procedure

Introduction
My goal in this chapter is to explain how I addressed the two research questions by describing in detail my research design and the process through which I carried out my current empirical research.

4.1 Research approach
My present thesis is a line of research designed within a cross-cultural paradigm, and it is part of the area of cross-cultural communication, in which China is contrasted with Britain in terms of how cultural differences are realised in actual language use, from the perspective of how an utterance is produced and interpreted. It also addresses how cross-cultural differences affect intercultural communication.

According to the literature on cross-cultural research methodology (e.g. van de Vijver and Leung 1997, Kumar 2005), a study with such an orientation means that my empirical data must be at least equivalent in terms of ‘structure’ and ‘unit’ of analysis (van de Vijver and Leung 1997, 8). Without these levels of equivalence, ‘no valid cross-cultural behaviour comparisons may be made’ (Berry 1969, 122, cited by Vargas-Reighley 2005, 74). Since my research aims to expose cultural differences in the process of verbal communication by focusing on China and Britain, my data must represent verbal communication styles used by people from the two cultures in their real life situations, and therefore, they must not be ‘elicited’ by a third party to ‘reach a particular goal’ designed by a researcher (Kasper 2000, 320). This also means that my role is that of ‘a passive observer’ (Kumar 2005, 120), in that I ‘do not get involved in the activities of the group’, but listen to and ‘record the activities as they
are performed’ (Kumar 2005, 120). The data I collect must reflect the effort ‘to observe how people talk when they are not being observed’ (Labov 1972, 209).

As I have argued in Chapter Two, there are aspects of cultural differences in communication which have not been discussed in the relevant literature, and yet are very significant in studying how cultural differences are realised in actual language use. My present study is designed to address these limitations, by ascertaining whether or not cultural differences between China and Britain can be distinguished according to the use of style, and investigating how culture impacts on interpretation of ‘a given utterance’ in a specific context. In order to achieve these aims, I undertook data collection, data transcribing, translation, as follows.

4.2 Collecting authentic data in radio discourse

Researchers on cross-cultural pragmatics (e.g Wolfson 1983; Beebe and Cummings 2006; Cohen 1996) argue that naturally occurring data are good data for cross-cultural research. According to Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993, cited by Cohen 1996, 391-2), the advantages of such data are that they are ‘not only spontaneous’, but also ‘reflect what the speakers say rather than what they think they would say’. Specifically, speakers in such data ‘are reacting to a natural situation rather than to a contrived and possibly unfamiliar situation’. What this indicates is that authenticity is an important feature of such data. It also indicates that if we use such data for cross-cultural communication study, they can reveal the real situation of interaction between a speaker and a hearer.

Kasper (2000, 317) argues that authentic discourse is motivated and structured by the participants’ rather than a researcher’s goal. By saying this, Kasper is suggesting that
authentic discourse can yield data that represent what people actually say in real life. Also, Kasper and Rose (2002, 80), in their discussion of cross-cultural pragmatic research, claim that institutional settings are valuable sources to collect authentic data. This suggests, as Kasper and Rover (2005, 325-6) argue, that compared to interpersonal talk and ordinary talk, institutional settings can ‘provide a more stable environment that lends itself particularly well to examine pragmatic development in authentic discourse’. In relation to my study of cultural differences in communication, what Kasper and Rover’s argument indicates is that data collected in institutional setting is better than either interpersonal or ordinary talk to enable me to examine the pragmatic development in the area of cross-cultural communication. Moreover, according to Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (2005, 1), what is distinctive about talk in institutional settings is that it ‘meets the field’s (i.e. interlanguage pragmatics) methodological requirements of comparability, predictable occurrence of pragmatic features, high rates of occurrence’. Since the aim of my data analysis is to compare communication patterns in two cultures, the talk in institutional setting meets the ‘methodological requirements of comparability’ (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford 2005:1). Therefore, I decided to take one form of institutional talk - radio phone-in talk shows as the object of my study because they are useful in achieving this aim.

4.2.1 Motivations for collecting radio data

My decision to collect radio discourse data was motivated by the following considerations. Firstly, up to now, a considerable body of research on authentic speech has focused on a variety of institutional contexts for cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics research; the range of issues addressed includes, for example, academic advising sessions by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993, 1996),
oral proficiency interviews by Young and He (1998), classroom interactions as cross-cultural encounters by Luk and Lin (2006), and cross-cultural interaction in medical setting by Cameron and Williams (1997). However, broadcast talk, as a specific type of institutional discourse (Hutchby 2006, 18; Tolson 2006, 25), has received little attention, in spite of the fact that it is a well-researched area for conversation analysis (e.g. Hutchby 1996, 2006; Scannell 1991; Heritage 1985; Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998). According to Drew and Heritage (1992, 1), talk in institutional settings encompasses both face-to-face interaction and the interaction over the telephone. Radio phone-in talk, as one subcategory of broadcast talk, obviously belongs to the latter. Media researchers (e.g. Scannell 1991, 9; Hutchby 2006, Ch.7) argue that this type of radio talk lies at the interface of the public and the private, or the institutional and interpersonal, and it therefore displays not only “a variety of features which formally liken it to everyday or ‘mundane’ conversation, [but also] more ‘institutional’ forms of verbal interaction” (Hutchby 1991, 119). Given the dual characteristics of radio phone-in talk, I believe that it could provide richer data than either institutional talk or interpersonal talk alone.

Secondly, according to conversation analysts (e.g Heritage and Maynard 2006, 14; Hutchby 2006, 28), institutional interaction may be structured in a more regular way, with components characteristically emerging in a particular order. For example, Hutchby (2006, 28) notes that ‘the most routinely structured segment of calls to a talk radio show is the opening sequence’. I therefore selected that form of talk because it would allow me to achieve ‘structural equivalence’ (van de Vijver and Leung 1997, 8) in cross-cultural comparisons.
Thirdly, in contrast to other types of talk on the radio, there was evidence to suggest that radio phone-in talk can be more representative of everyday talk, in that ‘the style of phone-in argument and the enjoyment of it are more like the style and enjoyment one finds in a familiar dinner table rant’ (Myers 2004, 181). The representative feature of radio talk is also expressed clearly by Scannell, as below:

The voices of radio…were and are heard in the context of household activities and other household voices, as part of the general social arrangements of households and their members. It is this that powerfully drives the communicative style and manner of broadcasting to approximate to the norms not of public forms of talk, but to those of ordinary, informal conversation, for this is overwhelmingly the preferred communicative style of interaction between people in the routine contexts of day-to-day life and especially in the places in which they live (1991, 3-4).

Using Scannell’s (1991) argument as the basis for my selection of examples of ‘the preferred communicative style of interaction between people in the routine contexts of day-to-day life’ in each culture (Scannell 1991: 4), I argue that this type of talk met my aims.

There was also evidence that collecting authentic data from radio discourse could provide one of the most reliable forms of data, with the least collecting effort. According to Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009, 278):
[G]aining access to data collection opportunities and finding respondents can be challenging for all researchers, but in cultural-comparative and cultural-interactional research it can be even more difficult, especially when comparable datasets are required.

In my view, these difficulties can be resolved if we collect authentic data from radio discourse. This is because, according to Hutchby (2006, 18), one of the key distinguishing features of broadcast talk is that “it is directed at an ‘overhearing’ audience separated from the talk site of production by space, frequently, by time”. What this indicates is that if a researcher wants to collect radio data, he or she does not need to negotiate access to the production site, nor does the researcher need to acquire permission from the institution for the recording. The researcher’s role is actually an ordinary overhearing audience. As long as the researcher tunes in the radio when the target programme is on air, recording can be done anywhere. Consequently, what Labov (1972, 209) calls ‘the observer’s paradox’, that is, ‘to observe how people talk when they are not being observed’, is resolved. Seen from the perspective that the researcher does not exert any influence on participants, data obtained in radio discourse must be highly reliable.

Given all of the substantial benefits, I argue that data collected from radio discourse provides a very useful data source for cross-cultural research. Thus, I decided to record two sets of radio talk show broadcast in China and Britain for my study.

In the next section, I explain how I ensured the comparability of my two sets of data.
4.2.2 Comparability of the two sets of data

As indicated earlier, my research is a cross-cultural comparative study in orientation, and therefore I took particular care to ensure that my data were sufficiently similar so as to allow me to make a cross-cultural comparison. In order to maximise the comparability of my data and ensure that the results appropriately reflected each cultural group’s actual situations, before my data collection took place, I adopted the following three-step procedure.

First, I restricted my focus of data to radio talk shows, in which callers phone in for advice with their problems, namely a radio advice talk show. In this way, I was able to ensure ‘structural equivalence’ (van de Vijver and Leung 1997, 7). That is, the same construct was measured in each cultural group.

Second, I restricted the problems about which callers phoned in for advice to issues related to family arguments, love relationships, personal dilemmas and everyday ups and downs. Such types of topic, as advertised respectively by London Biggest Conversation and Hong Mei Hot Line (see below), are usually regarded as suitable for adults only. In this way, I was able to ensure the ‘appropriateness of the item content’ (van de Vijver and Leung 1997, 18). That is, the range of issues covered in the topic measured was similar in each cultural group. I will explain why such a restriction matters in my subsequent genre discussion. Moreover, strong attention was also given to ‘unit equivalence’ (van de Vijver and Leung 1997, 8). That is, the ‘comparable units of analysis’ (Patton 2002, 493) were identical in the two cultural groups. I will discuss this issue in more detail in Section 4.4.3.
Thirdly, I carefully considered the matter of the genre involved in my study. According to the genre literature (e.g. Bhatia 1993, 13; Swales 1990, 58), a defining feature of a genre is its ‘communicative purpose’, and the same genre shares the same communicative purpose. In the light of insights gained from the genre literature, I regarded all of the host-caller interactions having the same ‘communicative purpose’ of seeking advice, as the same genre.

However, according to Hutchby (2006, 102), ‘genre of media talk itself comprises a variety of sub-types’, and radio advice talk show is just one type among the many. Specifically, DeCapua and Dunham (1993, 520) argue that

People who are seeking advice frequently turn to those who they feel might have insights into their problems, whether or not those individuals have credentials.

This indicates that the stage of giving advice may exhibit a variety of features which can be classified into different categories. For example, it has been argued that advice may be provided by ‘the expert who sits in the studio along with the show’s host’ (Hutchby 2006, 103), or by the non-expert host (DeCapua and Dunham 1993; Hutchby 2006), or by the overhearing audience who are encouraged to become involved in giving advice after hearing callers’ problems (Hutchby 2006, 103). However, as I explain later in Section 4.4.3, the issue of who is involved in giving advice after callers’ problems are made explicit is not directly relevant to my study, I therefore decided not to distinguish whether there were any differences in the way in which advice was given in my data. Of note, however, is that, according to Hutchby (2006, 103), some radio advice talk shows involve a third party (usually an expert) who is sitting in the studio along with the host. The presence of an expert may lead to
two phenomena. One of them is that the expert actively participates in the conversation, and consequently, the advice talk show turns out to be a three-party conversation rather than involving two individuals. Another phenomenon is that the expert plays the role of a hearer throughout host-caller conversation, but comes in to talk by giving advice when callers’ problems are made explicit. As a result, even though the expert sits in the studio, the advice talk show still remains a two-party conversation: either host-caller talk or expert-caller talk. For the purposes of my study, I restricted my focus to interaction of two parties – host-caller interaction only, regardless of whether an expert was present in the studio or not. Because of this consideration, any interactions with a third party were excluded.

In accordance with the above procedures, I collected a set of Chinese data and a set of English data. I chose three different shows in each data set, in order to ensure some degree of reliability. The Chinese data were collected from two radio phone-in shows broadcast in China. They were: Hong Mei Hot line and Late Night Chit-chat. The latter was hosted by two presenters in turn, respectively at the weekdays and at the weekends. Blakemore (1992, 177) argues that styles vary according to the forms speakers use to communicate their messages. I thus assumed that the stylistic preferences of the two hosts differed when they interacted with their hearers, and therefore I treated the show hosted by the two presenters as two distinct data sets. The English data were collected from three different radio phone-in shows broadcast in Britain. They were: Late Night Love and London’s Biggest Conversation (LBC). LBC is an umbrella concept encompassing all the programmes broadcast in LBC 97.3FM. There is no specific name for each show, and presenters are scheduled to host their respective programmes at a designated time slot. From LBC, I collected two
radio phone-in shows hosted respectively by two different presenters at different time slots. All of the radio phone-in shows I collected were broadcast online.

The entire Chinese sample consists of 45 host-caller talks and the English sample consists of 49 talks. Among the resulting collection of cases of host-caller talk, I selected a total of sixty cases that met the criteria I discussed earlier in this section, namely, ‘equivalence in structure’, ‘appropriateness of the item content’, the same genre, and interaction between host-caller only. The sixty cases consisted of an equal number (ten) of each talk show, which amounted to thirty cases included in each set of data. Those host-caller talks which I considered to influence the reliability of my study were deleted, including, for example, talks relating to different genres, wrong calls, and talks with a third party in conversations. In Table 4.1, I list the size of my data and the problem categories I assigned to the data:

**Table 4.1 Problems constructed in the two sets of data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>Chinese talks (30 calls)</th>
<th>English talks (30 calls)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Love relationship</td>
<td>(21)</td>
<td>Love relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family arguments</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>Personal dilemma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal dilemma</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>Child’s problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s partnership</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>Gay relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family problem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In what follows, I explain the instrument used for data collection.

### 4.2.3 Recording talk show online

In order to collect authentic data from host-caller talks with accuracy and high quality, I paid particular attention to ‘the technical quality of recording’ (Peräkylä 2004, 284).
In contrast with more conventional recording techniques such as tape recording or even video recording, it has been argued that online digital recording seems to be the best method to capture features of verbal speech for data analysis (e.g. Denscombe 2007, 195; Peräkylä 2004, 285; Edward 2003, 341). Since all of the radio talk shows were broadcast online, I recorded all of my data online by means of recording software, and then transferred them to computer hardware.

Apart from the advantage that online recording ‘achieves a naturalistic recording of events’ (Flick 2002, 167; 2007a, 284), and therefore can ensure ‘the accuracy and inclusiveness of recording’ (Peräkylä 2004, 283), this method has the unique characteristic by which, as long as one can get access to the internet, recording can be done anywhere. Because of this benefit, I recorded my Chinese data in Britain.

4.2.4 Summary

In this section, I have described in detail the procedure for collecting radio data. I have reported on the procedures I adopted to ensure the equivalence of my two sets of radio data, as well as the size of the data collected. I have also made clear the mechanical means that I used for recording.

In the next section, I explain the second type of data I collected for my study.

4.3 Collecting interview data

As indicated in Section 4.1, my study is designed to explore how cultural differences between China and Britain are realised in actual language use. As I showed in Chapter two, (a) the approaches adopted by studies of culture and communication tend to address cultural differences according to the use of direct and indirect style, however, they do not actually explain how they categorise one style as direct and another style
as indirect by focusing on how an utterance is produced and interpreted; (b) studies of culture and communication argue that there are differences in interpretation between people with different cultural backgrounds, however, they do not actually explain how culture has an impact on interpretation; (c) studies of culture and communication see culture as pre-existing the process of interpretation, therefore, they are unable to explain how meaning is generated in a context. Because of these limitations, there is no specific data to indicate how a hearer’s interpretation is generated within a specific context, and how culture impacts on interpretation. However, the relevance theoretic approach I adopt in my thesis allows the process of interpretation to be explained with more precision. In applying Relevance Theory to my study, my goal is to explain how meaning is generated in a specific context, and to make explicit what contextual assumptions are generated by hearers with different cultural backgrounds. My intention was to explore how culture impacts on interpretation.

In order to explain: (a) how actual hearers from China and Britain generate interpretations in the context of a radio advice talk show; (b) what contextual assumptions they draw on in the process of interpretation; and (c) whether or not they come up with different interpretations because they draw on different contextual assumptions, I collected interview data as follows.

### 4.3.1 Respondents

According to Rabiee (2004, 656), when exploring ‘personal issues the use of pre-existing groups might be advantageous, as there is already an extent of trust among the members of the group, which will encourage the expression of views’. Since the topics of radio programmes I focus in my study are highly personal, and issues such as the speakers’ sex life, love problems and everyday ups and downs might cause
strangers as well as myself, as a researcher, to feel embarrassed in the conversation, I
decided to choose two groups of acquaintances with distinct cultural backgrounds to
carry out ‘a focus group interview’ (Patton 2002, 385), the content of which was
approved by Loughborough University’s Ethical Advisory Sub-Committee.

In order to recruit two groups of acquaintances, I first contacted the Language Centre
at the University of Warwick, where I was one of the language tutors for two years.
After I explained the purpose for my interview to the students, nine English students
from two different levels of courses I was teaching indicated their interest in taking
part. Consequently, I chose five of them that were taking the same course to
participate. In a similar way, I chose three Chinese students I was familiar with from
the Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSA) of the University of
Warwick.

I called the first group the ‘English group’, which consisted of four English male
students and one English female student studying at the University of Warwick. They
knew each other as a result of taking a MC course together at the Language Centre at
the University of Warwick, and at the time of the interview, they were still on the
same course and could regularly meet in the centre. They were at least bi-cultural
individuals who have wide cultural knowledge, in that they were native speakers of
BE and they were learning MC as well as Chinese culture.

I called the second group the ‘Chinese group’, because it consisted of two Chinese
female students and one Chinese male student doing MA degrees at the University of
Warwick. They were friends who were all living in the same accommodation and who
cooked dinner and had dinner together at the weekend. They were also bicultural
individuals, in that they were native speakers of MC and had been exposed to British culture.

4.3.2 A focus group interview

My decision to work with a focus group was motivated by four reasons. Firstly, according to Patton (2002, 385) and Rabiee (2004, 655), a focus group interview is one of the best means to elicit the thoughts or cognitive processes that illuminate what is going on in a person’s head during the performance of a task. Since my interview was designed to explore how a hearer interpreted a caller’s utterance in the context of a radio advice talk show, I believed that the focus group interview could generate data that met my aim.

Secondly, I felt that one-to-one interaction may appear somewhat intimidating to the respondents, and may adversely affect their performance. I further believed that a focus group interview at the place where they met the most seemed to be the best way to avoid this.

Thirdly, I felt that this form of interview had the ability to generate group interaction, because the members of groups felt comfortable with each other, and therefore could fully engage in the discussion. As claimed by Krueger and Casey (2009, 4-5), rich data can only be generated if individuals in the group are prepared to engage fully in the discussion.

I also felt that a focus group interview with acquaintances may make the discussion between them as natural as possible, even though the participants were aware of the presence of a tape recorder. As Tannen (1984, 34) notes, ‘if there is a relatively large
number of participants who have ongoing social relationships, they soon forget the tape recorder’.

Given the above considerations, I believed that the focus group interview could draw out some fine points of interpretation within each group.

4.3.3 Research settings

The design of my interview settings for the two groups was similar, both for the purpose of eliciting what the respondents believed when they listened to the target radio programmes.

I interviewed the two groups separately. In each case, the group met at the place where they met the most: at the room of one of the students for the Chinese participants, and at one of the lecture rooms of the Language Centre for the English participants. In both cases, at the beginning of the interview, I asked my interviewees to sign the consent form. At the interview, I provided my participants with background information for the study, and reminded them that the conversation during the interview would be recorded, but their identity would remain confidential, and that I intend to provide them with a copy of the transcript for confirmation after the interview. Throughout the interview, I played extracts from the radio talk data, replaying the relevant sections so that my respondents could refresh their memories whenever they wished.

The recordings I played for each case consisted of six full host-caller conversations, three from each set of data. The reason I chose these conversations was that they met the criteria for cross-cultural comparison, as indicated in Section 4.2.2, and that they were also the materials I analysed in Chapter Six.
In both cases, the topics were controlled: after playing the recording of each programme, I asked the respondents two sets of questions. The first set focused on specific utterances heard from the programme. The reason for focusing on these utterances was that I felt that they draw on different cultural knowledge. The second set of questions focused on the entire conversation between the caller and the host. Here, I asked the respondents what problem they thought the caller wanted to solve. By asking this question, I aimed to investigate whether these respondents understood what the caller was saying in different ways. Where the target programmes were not broadcast in their mother tongue, I showed the respondents my transcripts and explained the relevant elements whenever needed.

Due to the complexity of the topics under investigations, the number of questions, and the number of participants, the time I spent in each group was somewhat different: my interview with the Chinese group lasted for an hour, but it lasted for an hour and a half when I interviewed the English group.

To ensure the quality of the interview content, in both cases, the interview was recorded by using a digital recorder.

4.3.4 Summary

In this section, I have described in detail the procedure of collecting my interview data. In the next section, I explain the method I used for data transcription and translation.

4.4 Data transcription and translation

My transcription process followed the approach of Conversation Analysis (CA) (e.g. Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998, Ch.3; Atkinson and Heritage 1984), because it was seen
to efficiently document the details and subtlety of the original host-caller talk as it occurred in the real life situation. As Hutchby (2006, 26) points out, the approach of CA:

> Enables broadcast talk researchers to draw out the unique features of broadcast talk, and to understand the active role played by participants themselves in establishing and maintaining the forms of talk (or speech exchange systems) that are characteristic of radio and television broadcasting.

Following Hutchby (2006), I took the view that the CA approach to transcribing data would allow me to capture ‘the unique features of broadcast talk’, which would enable me to build up an explanation of how cultural differences between China and Britain were realised in the context of the radio talk show. Therefore, I chose to use CA transcription techniques to transcribe data.

Since my present research is a cross-cultural comparative study, it also involves the issue of translation. I myself was responsible for the translation, and the transcripts of which were checked by a team of two bilinguals (see Section 4.6). In this way, I was able to ensure linguistic equivalence in terms of ‘connotations, naturalness and comprehensibility’ rather than merely semantics (van de Vijver and Leung 1997, 39).

In the next two subsections, for the purpose of transcription, translation and analysis, I explain the process through which I carried out the sequential numbering of my data, and the format I chose for transcription and translation.
4.4.1 Data sequence numbers

For ease of reference, I assigned each host-caller talk a case number. Each case number consists of three components, that is, it begins with an upper case letter C or E, followed by two numbers, and ends with two alphabetical letters in their upper case, such as C01LY, and E01GT.

The upper case letters C and E stand respectively for the Chinese and the English radio programmes.

The two numbers stand for the data numbering of the host-caller talk in a radio programme. For example, C01 in C01LY means that this is the host-caller talk number one of my Chinese data; E01 in E01GT indicates that this is the host-caller talk number one of my English data.

The two alphabetical letters are the initials of a host of each programme.

In light of the above, it is apparent that the examples of C01LY and E01GT suggest that they belong to two different sets of data. The former indicates that this is the Chinese host-caller talk number one, hosted by LY, while the latter refers to the English host-caller talk number one, hosted by GT.

4.4.2 The format of transcription and translation

In order to ensure consistency of the data used, I chose a ‘vertical format’ where I arranged utterances by different speakers in the order in which they were spoken (Edward 2003, 326). The reason for such a choice was not merely because this approach gave the impression of interdependence and equal dominance of speakers (Edward 2003, 326), but it also enabled me to simultaneously distinguish between
utterances produced by different speakers. I first transcribed a total of six complete recorded host-caller spontaneous interactions consisting of an equal number (three) of each set of data, one host-caller talk from each show. I used the six transcripts for two different purposes. In order to verify the comparability of my two sets of data (van de Vijver and Lung 1997, see Section 4.2.2), I first used them to compare ‘how these constructions are similar in function and how they are different’ (Myhill 2003, 170). For example, I used them to compare whether all the talks in which callers phoned in for help with their problems were within the scope of the issues I described in Section 4.2.2. If a caller was found to phone in with an issue beyond the scope of my focus, then this transcript was excluded. If my comparable transcripts met the criteria of comparability indicated in Section 4.2.2, I then used them to develop my coding criteria I set up to analyse data (see Sections 5.2 and 6.1). On the basis of all these, I transcribed my data selectively, in that I only transcribed the unit of host-caller talks which I regarded as my analytic focus (see Section 4.4.3).

I also determined the way in which my translations of Chinese materials were presented with particular care. In Chapter Three, I saw MC and BE as two different language systems, in that the former is a tone language system, whereas the latter is an intonation language. Where the two language systems are totally different, I believed that the best way to present Chinese materials seemed to be that ‘the researcher has to provide both morpheme-by-morpheme glosses and a free translation’ (Have 1999, 94). Therefore, I chose a three-line format to present my Chinese materials. That is: the materials are presented in Chinese language, but with first a ‘morpheme-by-morpheme gloss’, and then a translation into English
immediately below it, line by line. I now take one case from my data as an illustration:

[4.1]

Caller: 我 有 个 事情 想 求 你.
I have a thing want ask you
I wish you could help me.

Host: 啊 好 您 请 讲.
Ah ok you please talk
Ah please go ahead.

(C04LY)

In this way, I could ensure that I provide readers with ‘the original talk as faithfully as possible’; meanwhile I produced “a translation that seems ‘natural’ in the destination language” (Have 1999, 94).

In the next section, I describe my transcription and translation procedure.

### 4.4.3 Unit of transcription and translation

This section brings us back to the issue of ‘unit equivalence’ that I mentioned in Section 4.2.2. According to DeCapua and Dunham (1993, 521), in the context of a radio advice talk show, the reason that a caller makes a call to the show is to ‘state the problem or describe the situation which has prompted the call’. It has been acknowledged in the media literature (e.g. DeCapua and Dunham 1993, 521; Hutchby 2006, 103) that the overall process of constructing a problem includes the following three stages:
Stage A: Statement of problems;
Stage B: Clarification and negotiation;
Stage C: Giving advice.

DeCapua and Dunham (1993, 512) also argue that Stage B may not be operating in all cases, depending on whether callers come up with clearly expressed problems initially. This indicates that Stage A and Stage C are obligatory for all phone-in calls in this particular context. Since a caller’s constructing problems usually involves a process of interaction with a host, I decided to focus my analysis on the unit of host-caller talk in the process of constructing a problem in order to ensure comparability in analytical focus.

Despite my decision to choose Stage A as my focus of transcription and analysis, to date, there has been relatively little systematic study on its identification. The reason for this lack of focus is that ‘topical maintenance and shift [are] an extremely complex and subtle matter’ (Atkinson and Heritage 1984, 165), and ‘there are no simple or straightforward routes to the examination of topical flow’ (Atkinson and Heritage 1984, 165). However, there is a general approach applicable to call interactions of all kinds, proposed by Sacks (1992, 73), cited by Have (1999, 17), as follows:

[The reason-for-call] is, for non-intimates, an accountable action which has to be accounted for ‘by and large on the first opportunity to talk after greetings’.

In the context of a radio advice talk show, there is little doubt that this ‘accountable action’ refers to the one that a caller constructs her problems, taking place immediately after greeting. Thus, I transcribed a caller’s problem initiation starting from where the sequence of greeting ends.
Closely related to my focus on Stage A is the question of how we can identify the sequence of a caller’s constructing her problem. Hutchby (1991, 124) argues that ‘the work of topic introduction, in each call, is done by the caller’. This indicates that the fact that callers themselves automatically introduce their problems is a common phenomenon in the context of radio advice talk shows. However, still in the view of Hutchby (2006, 33):

Questions are a powerful interactional resource for the simple reason that the asking of a question places constraints on the discourse options available to its recipient.

What this quotation indicates is that the questions raised by a host are seen as a way through which a caller begins to construct her problem. In my study, I use Hutchby’s arguments as a basis for identifying the beginning of a caller’s constructing her problem. I take the view that topic introduction in host-caller talks involves the effort of two parties: a caller’s automatic introduction to her own problems, and also a host’s question as a helper. Consequently, I included a host’s question, if its function is to direct a caller to address her problems and if it occurs immediately after greeting, in my transcribing. For example, immediately after greeting, the cases as shown in [4.2] and [4.3] from my research were often heard on the show:

[4.2]

Caller: Hello Graham.
Host: I’m OK. Now, I believe you’re (.) you are seeing an older man, you’re twenty-four, he’s forty, yeah?
Caller: yeah, that’s right, yeah.

(E06GT)
[4.3]

Host: *Hello, there, what’s happening with you at the moment then?*

Caller: *well, we would, we were invited to my niece… for Christmas, she lives quite away from us.*

(E01JD)

It is clear from the above examples that the questions asked by the hosts in both cases take place immediately after greeting. They are also used as a guide to direct callers to the problems the callers are going to address. The fact that the two questions are to guide callers to their problems is supported by the callers’ immediate introduction to their problems. Therefore, I treated both questions as the beginning of Stage A in my transcribing.

Having established the beginning of my transcribing, I was then faced with the question of how to identify the ending of Stage A. DeCapua and Dunham (1993, 522) argue that ‘before advice givers actually give advice, there is often a long process of clarification and negotiation’. What this implies is that the unit of constructing a problem should end at the point where the problem is made explicit. For this purpose, I transcribed more utterances in the context of giving advice whenever it was necessary, until it was sufficient for me to justify that the problem was made explicit.

What I want to stress, finally, is that, in accordance with DeCapua and Dunham (1993, 521):

Some problems can be stated simply, others are more complex and may require considerable negotiation between speakers in an attempt to discover what the real problems are and what to do about them.
In order to ensure comparability of data, my transcriptions were, therefore, of unequal length. For those callers who came up with a specific request for advice, their transcripts are relatively short. For those callers who came up with less clear-cut statements of problems initially, ‘there is often a long process of clarification and exploration’ (DeCapua and Dunham 1993, 522). Consequently, their transcripts are equally long.

In the next section, I justify my prosody transcribing procedure.

4.4.4 Prosody

In Sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3.1, I showed that prosody is sometimes used by speakers to guide hearers in the process of interpretation. In order to capture those prosodic features that may possibly lead hearers to the identification of problems constructed by a caller in this particular context, I carefully considered the approach to transcribing prosodic features.

In the literature on prosody (e.g. Cruttenden 1997; Milroy and Gordon 2003), there are two approaches to transcribing prosodic features: the instrumental acoustic approach and the auditory approach. According to Milroy and Gordon (2003, 145), ‘the former involves the translation of the speech signal into a visual representation’ in order to measure ‘variations of acoustic energy contained in a speech signal’. The latter refers to judgment by human ears, with the aim of distinguishing certain prosodic features based on what is heard and interpreted by human listeners. It is the latter approach that I adopted to transcribe prosodic features in my thesis. More specifically, my study followed the major conventions for rendering the details of the prosodic features discussed in the current media publications. The transcript symbols
that I used in my study are adapted from the descriptions provided by Hutchby (2006, XI-XII) and Tolson (2006, 23).

My decision to use an auditory approach is motivated by two factors. Firstly, as I made clear in Section 3.2.2, one of the important functions of prosody is that it helps a hearer to interpret what a speaker intends to convey by altering ‘the salience of linguistically-possible interpretations’ (Wharton and Wilson 2006, 1560). In everyday interaction, a hearer must rely on his own judgment, based on what is heard by ears, in order to identify prosodic features which may lead him to recognise the meaning intended by a speaker. As I showed in Chapter Three, stress in English refers to the ‘relative prominence of syllables in an utterance’ (Pierrehumbert and Hirschberg 1990, 272), and intonation refers to ‘the use of changes in voice pitch (high or low)’ (Gramley and Paetzold 2003, 87). If a hearer hears that a speaker utters a particular word with a strong accent (i.e. stress), or that a speaker produces a specific phrase or a sentence with a higher or lower pitch (i.e. intonation), then that would be a measure. The hearer would then be phonetically guided to choose the correct context, and finally led to the contextual implications intended by the speaker.

Second, as indicated in Section 4.2.1, radio talk shows are targeted towards ordinary people, and it is the auditory approach, rather than the instrumental acoustic approach, that would allow ordinary people to make a judgment simply by ears as to what element is stressed, and whether the boundary tone is uttered with particular strength in order that they could be led to infer what a speaker intends to convey.
Following an auditory approach, I made all of the prosodic transcriptions of my two sets of data, and transcripts of which were checked by my two verifying teams (see Section 4.6).

4.4.5 The transcription and translation of interview Data

Although I recorded all my interviews with the two groups of students, I did not transcribe my participants’ responses to the questions listed in the focus group interview in the same way as my radio data. However, I listened to the recordings and examined closely the content of the participants’ discussions, in order to study whether or not the two groups drew on different contextual assumptions in response to an utterance that expresses the same propositional content, and whether or not they came up with different interpretations about the problems the callers were constructing because of different contextual assumptions they drew on. In order to illustrate the views of my respondents, I simply transcribed those details of their responses that allowed me to account for differences in contextual assumptions and differences in interpretation. More specifically, I used just four transcription symbols in what follows in order to facilitate understanding of my respondents’ speech:

. The utterance is uttered with a falling contour;
...
A longer than usual pause is heard;
? The utterance is uttered with a marked rising tone;
AA The utterance is uttered with an accent.

Since two members in the Chinese group were also the members of the bilingual team, in that they were involved in checking the accuracy of my translation of their responses to ensure the quality of my translation, I believed that the quality of my
translation of their responses could be guaranteed. Because of this, I did not present the translations of the responses given by the Chinese group in the same way as radio data, in that I merely provided the English translation for my analysis (see Chapter Six).

4.4.6 Summary

In this section, I have described my approach to transcribing radio data and interview data as well as my approach to translation. I have introduced the formats used in transcription and translation. I have reported that my respondents are all bicultural individuals who have been exposed to Chinese and British cultures. I have explained the unit of my analysis and justified the transcribing and translating procedures undertaken. I have also discussed my choice of auditory approach to prosodic transcription. In the next section, I describe the verification procedure that I adopted in my thesis.

4.5 Data verification procedure

My study adopted a data verification procedure ‘in order to guarantee validity’ of my cross cultural research (Flick 2007a, 374). This procedure consisted of three distinct stages. In what follows, I explain the stages in further details.

First, in order to ensure that my translations were as linguistically equivalent as possible, I adopted a ‘committee approach’ (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 2009, 275; van de Vijver and Leung 1997, 41). As van de Vijver and Leung (1997, 41) point out, a ‘bilingual committee approach’ is one of the best ways to ‘use judgmental evidence to establish linguistic equivalence’. Following this methodology, I organized two teams of bilinguals. The first team consisted of two bilinguals, with MC being their
native language and BE being their second language. The second team was composed of two bilinguals, with BE being their native language and MC being their second language. The members of the two teams were also the participants of my interview study. I call the first team the ‘Chinese team’ and the second team the ‘English team’. One of the tasks of the first team was to verify my translation. Of note, however, is that the members in the team were ‘not involved in the translation but only in a check of the accuracy of the translation’ (van de Vijver and Leung 1997, 40). This was because, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985, 314, cited by Flick 2007a, 33), ‘member checks are the most crucial technique for establishing credibility’. When team members found that certain concepts or meanings had no close linguistic or cultural equivalents in the target language, they would adopt a decentering approach (Brislin 1970, 2000) to remove ‘words and concepts in a source language (i.e. MC in my case) that are difficult to translate or are specific to a culture’ (van de Vijver and Leung 1997, 39). The specific procedures of such an approach, according to Eckhardt and Houston (2007, 101),

[I]nclude coming up with alternate interpretations of metaphoric and idiomatic expressions and synonyms for phrases and deciding which most appropriately represent what the original speaker was trying to get across.

I now take two examples from my data to illustrate how the decentering approach worked:
In the above exchange, the host and the caller are talking about the romantic relationship between the caller and her boyfriend. On the basis of my own understanding of Chinese culture, I assume that the host’s question, 他带你见他的朋友吗 (literally: does he take you to see his friends?), does not necessarily refer to the specific action of going to see the boyfriend’s friend, as said literally, but refers to the process by which an individual introduces his or her love partner to the individual’s friends. Consequently, I did not translate the question word for word, but as follows:

Has he introduced you as his girlfriend to his friends?

In this way, it can reflect Chinese understanding of what is said in this context.

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Has he introduced you as his girlfriend to his friends?

In this way, it can reflect Chinese understanding of what is said in this context.
In [4.5], the host’s question, 你有家了 (literally: do you have a family?), does not necessarily refer to the literal meaning that the caller has a family with family members. My own knowledge of Chinese culture assumes that by asking this question, the host is attempting to know whether or not the caller is already married. If the caller is married, then his relationship with his current girlfriend is morally wrong. Thus, in order to reveal Chinese understanding about what the host said in this context, I translated it into the following:

*Are you in a relationship with this girl or are you married?*

The second stage is to do with the verification of my transcription. In order to check the accuracy of my transcribing, I distributed each team a copy of transcripts, and asked both teams to listen to the recorded materials, make comparisons with my transcripts individually, and note down the errors between what was heard and what I transcribed. If transcription errors were noted by the teams, we discussed these together until we finally reached an agreement. My two teams were allocated to do the verification at different times, so that I could join them all the time. I decided a final version after a process of discussion with my two teams respectively. Moreover, the agreed checking and reporting procedures of my two teams also included checking the prosodic features in the host-caller conversations, by judging whether my identification of prosodic features was an accurate interpretation. For the additional activity, all of my verifiers were asked to write down their respective answers (yes/no) and reasons in terms of whether or not they agreed with my judgments.

The third stage is to do with evaluation of ‘trustworthiness’ of reported observations (Flick 2007b, 17). van de Vijver and Leung (1997, 40) claim that in a cross-cultural
study, ‘when a researcher does not speak the target language, he or she will need additional evidence to evaluate the quality of the committee’s work’. Since I speak both target languages, MC and BE, I also joined my two teams throughout the first two stages and discussed with them whenever errors were noted, therefore I believed that the ‘trustworthiness’ of those reported observations in the first two stages can be guaranteed. However, the additional activity of checking prosody was carried out independently by four verifiers. To ensure that this work was valid, I decided to conduct a validity study by asking the two team members follow-up questions. I designed a set of questions tailored to my verifiers, in order to examine whether the comments given in their written form would adequately reflect their opinions. The questions I asked included:

(a) *Do you agree or not that this phrase (or word) has been uttered with a stress?*

(b) *Do you agree or not that this phrase (or sentence) has been uttered with a higher (or lower) pitch?*

During the interview, I described again the additional activity, went over my data, and had my verifiers (now as interview subjects) orally present their opinions on their judgments. The subjects then reflected on the validity of the written comments they provided earlier. The interviews were audio taped with my subjects’ permission. The four subjects’ interview comments were then compared with their written ones. The focus of the comparison was on whether the opinions mentioned in the written form were also mentioned in the interview. That is, during the interview, when the subjects provided me with their oral comments, I checked their oral comments against their written responses provided earlier. When I found at some points that my subjects’
ideas in written form did not appear to match their oral comments, I described the discrepancy and asked the subjects to confirm whether it was still valid to them. At the end of the interview, the results of the interview protocol were compared with the written comments provided by the subjects, and listed in the table 4.2 below:

**Table 4.2 Validity check: Comparing interview responses with written comments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Subjects</th>
<th>Prosody judgement</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese (1)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese (2)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese average</td>
<td>96.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English (1)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English (2)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English average</td>
<td>98.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I: number of answers in the written materials that were also mentioned/acknowledged in the interview

W: number of answers in the written responses

%: ratio of I/W

As Table 4.2 has indicated, the interview protocol shows a very high validity across my two teams. Comparing the interview responses with the written responses, 96.67% of the answers given by the Chinese subjects and 98.3% of the answers given by the English subjects were also mentioned or acknowledged during the interview. The high percentage indicates that the written responses were representative of the subjects’ opinions.

However, Table 4.2 also shows that there are few cases (3.33% for Chinese subjects, and 1.7% for English subjects) where discrepancies were observed. After discussing
with my verifiers for their confirmation, I concluded that the small discrepancy observed between the written form and the interview was caused by ambiguity or oversimplification in a few written responses. For example, Chinese (2) accidentally wrote one of his responses *yes* in overlap with another answer *no*, to the extent that even he himself could not judge what he had written; English (1) oversimplified his writing in that he only put down a ‘dot’ as a response. As a result, he could not remember what this ‘dot’ meant.

Given the fact that the small discrepancy was caused by ambiguity and oversimplification in a few written responses, it therefore did not threaten the validity of reported observations.

### 4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the research procedure that I designed for my current empirical research. My design was carried out with reference to methodologies for studies in the area of cross-cultural research. I chose the qualitative approach for my study and used the method of online recording to collect my data. I used the technique of conversation analysis to transcribe the data collected from radio institutional settings, and adopted a decentering approach to translation. I also adopted a data verification procedure to guarantee the validity of my cross cultural research.

In the next chapter, I apply Relevance Theory to analysing the communication styles used by MC callers and BE callers.
Chapter Five: Communication Styles of Speakers of MC and BE

5.1 Introduction

In order to address Research Question (1), my goal in this chapter is to show that the communication styles of MC and BE are both indirect, in that utterances produced by callers from China and Britain require a great deal of inferential work on the part of a hearer, and that both sets of callers use markers of procedural meaning to guide the interpretation process.

As indicated at the beginning of Chapter Two, the aim of my study is to investigate how cultural differences are realised in everyday interaction from the perspective of how an utterance is produced and how the utterance is interpreted. In relation to how a caller’s utterance is produced and interpreted in the context of a radio advice talk show, my study is designed to examine whether or not there are any similarities or differences in the use of communication styles between MC callers and BE callers. From a relevance theoretical point of view, as my first research question states, this was to look for evidence of whether or not the two sets of callers ever use markers of procedural meaning to guide a hearer to identify the problem a caller is constructing.

For this purpose, as indicated in Sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3, I chose to focus only on prosody and the discourse connectives a caller may have used in constructing her problem. Consequently, my study does not identify all types of markers of procedural meaning a caller may have used; nor does my study examine all the cases of the same types of procedural meaning a caller may have used.

Specifically, following Sperber and Wilson (1995, 46), I use the term ‘contextual assumption’ or ‘a set of contextual assumptions’ to refer to the assumptions which are
brought to bear on the interpretation of an utterance in the context of a radio advice show. I use the term ‘contextual implication’ (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 109) to refer to ‘the contextual effect’ - the inferred conclusion drawn from the combination of the new information with some specific contextual assumptions (i.e. old information) that a hearer has access to that would give this new information some relevance for the hearer. I also follow Sperber and Wilson (1995, 37) by using a ‘premise’ to refer to a contextual assumption at the point where I aim to distinguish between explicatures and implicatures. Although within Relevance Theory, the terms of ‘an implicated assumption’ (or an implicated premise) and ‘an implicated conclusion’ are also used to refer to a contextual assumption and a contextual implication respectively (see for example, Sperber and Wilson 1995, 195; Wilson and Sperber 2002, 261), what these relevance scholars intend to highlight by using them is that both types of assumption should be regarded as the implicatures of an utterance. Since the aim of my study is not designed to establish differences in the two types of implicature, I therefore do not use them in my study.

Since within Relevance Theory, ‘the idea that an expression may encode procedural constraints on the inferential phase of comprehension was first put forward by Diane Blakemore’ (Wilson and Sperber 1993, 11), I also draw on Blakemore’s (1992, 2002) account of procedural information in my analysis.

In the following section, I apply Relevance Theory to the analysis of communication styles in my two sets of data.
5.2 Applying relevance theory to analysing communication styles

My goal in this section is to identify whether or not callers from China and Britain use prosody and discourse connectives to guide the interpretation process. Before my analysis, however, I would like to report on the procedure my analysis is designed to follow.

In order to present evidence found in my research, I analyse six extracts (see Appendix 2-4 and 8-10) taken from the interaction between host and caller. They consist of three extracts taken from each set of data, and each programme has one extract as a representative. In each of the six conversations, a caller constructs her problem until the host has acknowledged an understanding of what the problem is. In my study, when a caller constructs her problem, I assume that the set of propositions or assumptions the caller is attempting to convey to her audience in her utterance is the same in both cultures under study.

I begin my analysis of each of the six extracts with a brief summary of the problem a caller is constructing. The point of this summary is that it is based on my own understanding of what the caller means by what she is saying. According to Sperber and Wilson, individuals vary in their perceptual and cognitive abilities, or more specifically, in their understanding and inference ability, I am therefore assuming that a caller’s utterance can generate different interpretations for different hearers and the sense I make of an utterance is dependent on my own existing knowledge. I am aware that in the data analysis, the contextual assumptions I am providing are available to me as a bicultural hearer (I will explain more about my bicultural status in Chapter Six), they might not be available to a native speaker of MC, nor might they be available to a native speaker of BE. I am also aware that there may be cultural specific
assumptions being made. I will address the issue of the awareness of hearers’ drawing on cultural specific assumptions in some detail in Chapter Six. I argue that my interpretation can only represent my own understanding, rather than others. For example, it might not be the same as that of a native speaker of BE.

After this, I describe and explain how I arrive at a conclusion about the problem the caller intends to solve. In order to do this, I apply a relevance theoretic account of procedural meaning in my analysis. In doing so, I demonstrate that both sets of callers construct their problems in indirect style, to the extent that there is evidence that I have to carry out a lot of inferential work in order to identify the problems the callers intend to solve. It is the markers of procedural meaning that the callers use that make my interpretation process relatively easier. In my analysis, I focus only on those key utterances that will lead me to identify the problems a caller is constructing.

I propose, by drawing on Relevance Theory, a hearer needs to adopt the following procedure to isolate markers of procedural meaning:

(a) A speaker (S) used X in her speech;

(b) The contribution of X does not convey any distinct proposition in S’s utterance, but indicates how the utterance that contains X is to be processed, or alters the strength of an utterance by increasing the salience of some hypotheses and eliminating others;

(c) When S uses X in the sense of (b), she intends to signal that the propositions expressed in her utterances are relevant to the ongoing discourse topic.

In my study, I interpret X as referring to prosody and discourse connectives. Drawing on Relevance Theory, I propose that X would direct a hearer’s attention to the
proposition expressed in the utterance that contains X. This would then lead the hearer to access the contextual assumptions made manifest by means of X.

I also propose, by drawing on Relevance Theory, that in order for a hearer to identify problems a caller constructs in this particular context, the hearer needs to undertake the following inferential processes: (i) the hearer assigns a propositional form to the utterance by resolving ambiguities in the language used and assigning referents to deictic words; (ii) the hearer selects a context (a set of contextual assumptions) that would allow the caller’s utterance to be perceived as relevant; and (iii) through a synthesis of evidence of (i) and (ii), the hearer makes an assumption as to the caller’s intention.

For ease of reference only, when I analyse my two sets of data, I name the heading of each of the subsections with the problem that I assume a caller is constructing.

My analysis in the next two subsections begins with my English data, followed by its corresponding Chinese data.

**5.2.1 Prosody and discourse connectives used by BE callers**

In Section 3.2.3, on the basis of my literature review, I argued that there is evidence that BE speakers use markers of procedural meaning to guide the interpretation process. In the analysis that follows, I show that this is also the case for BE callers in my data.

In the next three subsections, I analyse three English extracts one by one.
5.2.1.1 Getting money back or getting rid of ex-partner

The following is a brief summary of my understanding of the caller’s problem communicated in English extract 1 (see Appendix 2):

The caller’s partner was always working, and therefore already had money. However, her partner had been both borrowing and stealing money from her. What the caller wants now is not advice on how to get her money back from her partner, but advice on how to get rid of him. My inference is that the caller’s problem is that her partner’s behaviour of borrowing and stealing makes the caller wish her partner would leave, but the caller herself is unable to get rid of him. Therefore, she asks for advice on this.

Now, I analyse the following key utterances that lead me to identify the problem the caller is constructing.

[5.1]

(1) H: Was he working at the time to fund his //
(2) C: //He is al … this is it he’s always working he’s ALWAYS ALWAYS working.
(3) H: Alright so why was he borrowing cash off you then?
   (E01GT)

Previously, the caller had indicated that her partner was always borrowing money from her.

While uttering (2), the caller stresses the second ‘always’ by raising her pitch, followed by the repetition of the same word with a similar pitch. I argue that by uttering the word with extra loudness, the caller makes me (as a hearer) aware that she is using prosody in her utterances, this explicitly sets up my expectation of the
relevance of the stressed word to the problem she is constructing. This then leads me
to select a context that would be guided by using prosody.

To infer the problem the caller intends to solve in this case, I am engaging in the
process of disambiguation. I assume that in the context of a discussion about money,
the word ‘working’ in (2) refers to being in paid employment. I then identify the
resulting proposition made manifest by the utterance in (2) as something like the
following:

(a) The caller’s partner is always working in paid employment.

I identify the fact that the stress assigned to the word ‘always’ leads me to access the
proposition in (a) made manifest in the following context:

(b) In normal circumstances, when an individual works excessively in paid
employment, this individual is more likely to earn more money.

I combine the explicature in (a) with the contextual assumption in (b) and draw the
following contextual implication:

(c) The caller’s partner has earned a lot of money by working excessively in
paid employment, and therefore he does not need to borrow money.

In the light of the inferential work I carried out above, I infer that the caller’s problem
is related to the partner’s borrowing. My interpretation that the caller’s problem is
related to her partner’s borrowing is supported by the host’s question in (3), which
indicates that he confirms my own interpretation.
Thus, my identification of what the caller intends to express in this case depends on inference, and it is the caller’s use of prosody that makes my inference easier, in that it guided me to interpret the proposition expressed in (a) in the context of (b) and finally led me to draw the conclusion that the caller’s problem is related to her partner’s borrowing.

Since the procedure, a hearer needs to follow to isolate markers of procedural meaning, is applicable to all the analysis in this chapter. Therefore, in the analysis that follows, I omit my detailed explanation of how I, as both an analyst and a hearer, follow the procedure to isolate markers of procedural meaning, but focus only on how I am led by prosody and discourse connectives to identify the problem a caller is constructing.

[5.2]

(1) H: But there was always an excuse for him borrowing cash off you then?

(2) C: Yeah money wasn’t BORROWED from me which (. ) he was doing such a lot … there is another (. ) my back was turned. If I was making a couple of tea or something he’s taking money anyway … as well.  

(E01GT)

I assume in the context in which the caller either lost sight of her money because she was making a cup of tea, or she did not give any permission to take her money, that the possible meaning of ‘taking money’ is that it refers to stealing money. I then identify the resulting propositions made manifest by the caller’s utterances as something like the following:

(d) The caller’s partner was doing more than borrowing;
(e) When the caller was not watching him, he was stealing money from the caller.

Having been directed to the word ‘*borrowed*’ by the caller’s raised pitch, I identify that the contribution of prosodic stress assigned to this word makes the propositions in (d) and (e) immediately manifest in the following context:

(f) If one is stealing money from somebody else, then this one has no excuse for his behaviour.

I combine the propositions in (d-e) with the contextual assumption in (f), and generate the following contextual implication:

(g) No excuse, because the partner wasn’t borrowing at all but stealing.

In this exchange, the caller does not directly answer ‘*no*’, but provides a longer and more complex utterance as in (2). I assume, by doing so, the caller must have intended to achieve some additional effects not achievable simply by saying ‘*no*’: the caller might have intended to communicate not just the fact that the partner’s behaviour was not borrowing, but that his behaviour was stealing. Even though the effort required for me to process this response is larger than that needed to interpret the direct answer ‘*no*’, the caller’s use of prosody makes the assumption in (f) easily accessible. Therefore the difference in processing effort is not so significant. Moreover, the contextual effects achieved by the indirect answer are obviously greater. As a result, the indirect answer is optimally relevant, since the extra processing effort is offset by the extra contextual effect.
The assumption in (g) indicates that the propositions in (d-e) are relevant to the ongoing discourse topic, in that they provide evidence that leads me to assume that the caller’s problem is related to the partner’s behaviour of both stealing and borrowing although it is not yet made explicit at this stage.

Thus, in this example, understanding the caller’s utterances involves some degree of inference, and it is the caller’s use of prosody that guides the interpretation process.

I also found the caller sometimes uses discourse connectives to guide the interpretation process, as illustrated below.

[5.3]

(1) H: And if someone’s been nicking money off us, we want it back and what you intend to do… what do you intend to do Lisa about all these.
(2) C: I don’t know I just (.) the only thing I … the only thing I could think of was to put a quite big notice on the front door where I’m living now pinned it on … saying I don’t want to see you anymore.
(3) H: And you think that will work?
(4) C: Well he came back three times, about half past two in the morning ringing and ringing my front door bell.
   (E01GT)

[5.4]

(5) H: Are you trying to finish with him //
(6) C: //Yeah.
(7) H: Or are you just trying to get money off him? What’re you going to do.
(8) C: Well it’s … it’s going to be waste of time get … trying to get money off him. I just hh I want him out of my life.
(9) H: So the question, the question tonight is how do you get rid of the man that you don’t want any longer, yeah?
(10) C: Yeah (E01GT).
The host’s utterance in (1) contains the phrase ‘nicking money’, and this indicates that the host confirms my interpretation in [5.2] that the caller’s problem is related to her partner’s behaviour of both borrowing and stealing.

In both [5.3] and [5.4], the caller respectively uses a discourse initial ‘well’ as in (4) and (8). I assume that the caller’s use of this ‘utterance-initial use of discourse connective’ (Blakemore 2002, 133) is intended to achieve relevance by indicating that the information that ‘well’ prefaces ‘diverges from the expectations set up by the preceding discourse’ (Blakemore 2002, 133). I assume the ‘preceding discourse’ in both cases refers to the host’s respective questions in (3) and (5). This is not merely because the host’s questions and ‘well’ segment are adjacent utterances, but also because the host’s questions ‘would provide easy access to a chunk of contextual information required for the comprehension of latter utterances’ (Wilson 1998, 69).

To see how the utterances in [5.3] are constructed as a problem for the caller, I am engaging in a process of reference assignment. I assume, in the context of talking about the caller’s relationship with her partner, that ‘he’ and its various forms refer to the caller’s partner. I then identify the resulting proposition made manifest by the caller’s utterances in [5.3] as something like the following:

(h) The caller’s partner persistently came back to her after she put a notice on the door telling him not to turn up again.

I identify that the presence of ‘well’ makes the proposition in (h) immediately manifest in the following context:
(i) If the method of putting a notice on the door would work, then the partner would stop attempting to see her.

I combine the explicature in (h) with the contextual assumption in (i) and draw the following contextual implication:

(j) The proposed solution is unlikely to work.

Based on my above inferential work, I assume that the caller’s problem is related to her effort to get rid of her partner.

In [5.4], I identify that the resulting propositions made manifest by the caller’s utterances as something like the following:

(k) Trying to get back her money that her partner has both borrowed and stolen is a waste of time;

(l) The caller wants her partner to leave her alone.

I identify that the presence of the connective ‘well’ makes the proposition in (k) more accessible in the following context:

(m) In normal situation, if people realize that doing something is a waste of time, then they simply won’t do it.

I combine the explicature in (k) with the contextual assumption in (m) and draw the following contextual implication:

(n) The caller won’t waste her time trying to get her money back from her partner.
On the basis of the assumption in (n), I infer that trying to get her money back from her partner does not appear to be the problem the caller is constructing.

I then identify that the recovery of the proposition in (l) makes the following contextual assumption immediately accessible:

(o) If a person desires (by using the word ‘want’) to do something, then the very thing this person wants to do is beyond the reach of this person at the moment.

I combine the assumptions in (l) and (o) and draw the contextual implication that:

(p) The caller is unable to get rid of her partner.

On the basis of the inferential work I have carried out so far, I assume that the caller’s problem is that she is unable to get rid of her partner.

My interpretation that the caller’s problem is that she is unable to get rid of her partner is supported by the host’s summing up of the problem in (9), which indicates that the host acknowledges that the caller’s problem has been made explicit.

In summary, I found that understanding the caller’s utterances in this case depends on inference. I found that the relevance of the information about stealing and borrowing appears to provide the context for why it is important that the caller gets rid of her partner. However, the relevance of this information only becomes evident at the end, and therefore it shows that I have carried out much inferential work, in order to work out the problem the caller was constructing. I also found that it is the caller’s use of prosody, as in the cases of [5.1] and [5.2], and discourse connectives, as in the cases of [5.3] and [5.4], that guided my whole process of interpretation.
In the next two sections, I look at two more English extracts in order to show that the phenomenon I have observed in this extract are also available in the other extracts.

5.2.1.2 Spending Christmas in the absence of children

The following is a brief summary of my understanding of the problem constructed by the caller in English extract 2 (see Appendix 3):

The caller’s niece has invited the caller’s family for a Christmas get-together at the niece’s home. However, the niece has recently moved away, and she is now living somewhere else. Going to the niece’s new home involves travelling. Moreover, the caller’s children have gone to their respective girlfriends’ homes, therefore they would be unable to go to the niece’s home. This very fact results in a problem that the caller’s husband refuses to go to the niece’s home for Christmas. This is a problem for the caller, because she does not have the transport and is not able to get to her niece’s home. Now the husband wants their children to come back home for Christmas, whereas the caller wants to spend Christmas as she usually does. My inference is that the caller’s problem is that she and her husband have different views on how they should spend Christmas, and therefore she wants advice on this.

In what follows, I analyse the key utterances that lead me to identify the problem the caller is constructing.

[5.5]

(1) C: Yeah we’ve ALWAYS spent family (.) family Christmas together ALWAYS.
(2) H: Um-hum
(3) C: Erm but as I say they’ve just recently moved away.

(E01JD)
To infer the problem the caller was intending to solve, I resolve ambiguities in the language used and assign referents to deictic words. I then identify the resulting proposition made manifest by the caller’s utterances as something like the following:

(a) The caller’s family and the caller’s niece’s family have always spent Christmas together in the niece’s home;

(b) The caller’s niece has moved away and she is now living somewhere else.

Having been directed to the word ‘always’ by the caller’s raised pitch, I am led to access the proposition in (a) made manifest in the following context:

(c) If a sort of celebration is repeated for a number of years, then it has become a tradition.

I combine the assumptions in (a) and (c) and draw the contextual implication that:

(d) The caller has the expectation that what happened in the past will happen in the future, that is, the caller’s family and the niece’s family will celebrate Christmas together in the niece’s home as what they did in the past.

However, the caller’s use of ‘but’ in (3) indicates that the ‘but’ segment is intended to achieve relevance by virtue of contradicting and eliminating a (possibly mistaken) assumption deducible from the first segment of the caller’s utterances (Blakemore 1992, 102), which in this case appears to be the assumption in (d). This connective leads me to process the proposition in (b) in the following context:

(e) If the niece had not been moved away, then the caller’s family and the niece’s family would have been able to spend Christmas as they normally do.
I combine the explication in (b) with the contextual assumption in (e) and draw the following contextual implication:

(f) There is some impediment to the caller’s being able to celebrate Christmas as she normally does.

On the basis of evidence in (f), I infer that the caller’s problem is related to the factors that impede her normal Christmas celebration, although it is not yet made explicit at this stage.

Thus, in this example, in order to identify the problem the caller was expressing, I carried out some degree of inferential work. It is the caller’s use of prosody and the connective that made my inference relatively easier.

[5.6]

(1) C: He is refusing to go.
(2) H: Right.
(3) C: Which now causes the problem we just … because I can’t get to my niece otherwise I would have GONE.
   (E01JD)

The context of the above conversation is that the caller’s husband is refusing to go to the caller’s niece’s home for Christmas, because the caller’s children are unable to go. This has brought a problem to the caller, in that she is not able to get to the niece’s home, as the niece no longer lives locally.

After resolving the ambiguities in the language used and assigning referents to deictic words, I identify the resulting proposition, made manifest by the caller’s utterances, as something like the following:
(g) The caller’s husband refuses to go to the niece’s home for Christmas;

(h) This is the problem for the caller, because she is not able to get to the niece’s home;

(i) If it were not for this problem, the caller would have gone to the niece’s home.

The caller’s accented falling tone when she uttered the word ‘gone’ directs me specifically to this word. I assume that by uttering ‘gone’ in such a way, the caller is indicating that the preceding phrase (i.e. I can’t get to my niece) is to be interpreted ‘as part of a larger piece of structure, thereby…indicating a wider context’ (House, 2006, 1554). This leads me to access the propositions in (g – i) at least in the following context:

(j) Going to the caller’s niece’s home may involve travelling;

(k) If an individual travels to somewhere, necessary transport is needed;

(l) The caller’s husband usually drives wherever the caller travels;

(m) If the caller’s husband does not drive, then the caller cannot travel.

I combine the assumptions in (g-i) and (j-m) and draw the contextual implication that:

(n) There are some factors that impede the caller’s being able to spend Christmas in the way she wants.

In the light of the assumption in (n), I infer that the caller’s problem is related to her being unable to spend Christmas in a way she wants.
Thus, in this example, in order to identify the problem the caller was constructing, I have carried out a number of inferences. It is the caller’s use of prosody that has helped me to identify the problem indicated in (n).

[5.7]

(1) H: Before I get to Mo, and Mo takes on your situation Lindsey how are you feeling about this and what would you really like to do.

(2) C: I would like the sort of being together like we normally do erm as I said both … you know my children have left home. HE really wanted the children to co … to come here to make our other arrangement.

(The stage of clarification is omitted)

(3) H: Ok - all right Mo – this is the situation you probably come across in in various different permutations over the year …what do you make it to Lindsey’s story?

(E01JD)

To infer the problem the caller intends to solve in this case, I am engaging in the process of reference assignment and enrichment. In the context of discussing the caller’s argument with her husband surrounding the issue of family get-together, I assume that the pronoun ‘he’, which the caller uttered with a raised pitch, refers to the caller’s husband. Moreover, where the caller states ‘he really wanted children to come here’ in (2), the word ‘here’ refers to the caller’s own home. This is based on my understanding that going to the niece’s home may lead to some problems. I then identify the propositions made manifest by the caller’s utterances in [5.7] as something like the following:

(o) The caller prefers to celebrate Christmas as she normally does;

(p) The caller’s husband wanted their own children to come back home for Christmas.
I combine the explicatures in (o - p) with the contextual assumption in (q) and draw the following contextual implication:

(q) The caller and her husband have different views on how to celebrate Christmas.

In the light of above inferential work, I assume that the assumption in (q) is the problem the caller intends to solve. My interpretation that the caller’s problem is that she and her husband have different views on how to celebrate Christmas is supported by the host’s asking Mo (the expert sitting alongside the host in the studio) to give advice, which indicates that the host believes that the problem has been expressed.

Thus, in this case, my interpretation of the caller’s problem involves a large amount of inference. It is the caller’s use of prosody that gives me a clear indication of how her utterances are to be processed, so that I can see, with the least inferential effort, the assumption in (q) as the problem the caller intended to solve.

In summary, I found that the caller’s utterances include a lot of seemingly irrelevant details such as the information about the niece’s moving away, the children’s having been away from home, the husband’s refusing to go to the niece’s home as well as the caller’s preference for spending Christmas as she normally does. However, all the information appears to provide a context for why the caller and her husband have different views on celebrating Christmas. The relevance of this information only becomes evident at the end of my interpretation, so it shows that I have carried out a great deal of inference in order to make explicit what problem the caller intends to solve. It is under the guidance of prosody and discourse connective together as in
[5.5], or prosody as in [5.6] and [5.7] that I could successfully identify the caller’s problem with the least inferential effort.

5.2.1.3 Physical change affects love relationship

The following is a brief summary of my understanding of the caller’s problem communicated in English extract 3 (see Appendix 4):

The caller and her partner Mark have just had a baby. Although the caller loves her partner very much, her partner is not happy with all the stretch marks the caller has and therefore they have not made love together for a while, despite the fact that Mark is very good to the baby. My inference is that the caller’s problem is that the caller is not happy because her partner Mark is no longer having a sexual relationship with her. Therefore she asks advice on this.

In my analysis, I focus on the following key utterances from this extract that lead me to identify the problem the caller is constructing.

[5.8]

(1) C: My partner Mark (.) he is ok. I love him to pieces and all that but he is just … he’s not very happy with like all the stretch marks and all that.

(2) H: Right so he < > he thinks that you’ve kind of changed physically.

(3) C: Yeah he is not happy with the figure and everything, he thinks I’ve put on a lot of weight during pregnancy.

(4) H: Have you spoken to him about it… have you actually talked to him about it?

(E07AD)

The context of the above exchange is that the caller has just had a baby.

On the basis of my existing knowledge about British culture, I assume that the term ‘partner’ refers to someone with whom the caller is in a long-term stable sexual
relationship although I also assume (based on my knowledge about Chinese culture) that this relationship is not applicable to people from China. I then identify the resulting proposition, made manifest by the caller’s utterances in (1), as something like the following:

(a) The caller loves her partner Mark very much;

(b) Mark is not happy with the stretch marks the caller now has.

I identify that the proposition in (a) made manifest in the following context:

(c) In UK, if two people are love partners, then they will have a sexual relationship.

I combine the assumptions in (a) and (c) and draw out the contextual implication that:

(d) The caller and Mark must have had a sexual relationship.

However, the caller’s use of ‘but’ makes the proposition in (b) immediately manifest in the following context:

(e) The sexual relationship between the caller and Mark has suffered because she has stretch marks, Mark does not find her sexually attractive.

By combining the explicature in (b) with the contextual assumption in (e), I draw the contextual implication that:

(f) It is the caller’s physical change that has impeded Mark from having a sexual relationship with her.
On the basis of evidence in (f), I assume that the caller’s problem is that her physical change makes her sexual relationship with her partner suffer, and therefore she asks advice on this. My interpretation that the caller’s problem is about her sexual relationship with her partner is supported by the host’s question in (4), which indicates that he believes that the caller’s problem has been expressed, and now comes to the stage of offering advice to the caller on how to solve her problem by talking to her partner.

Thus, in inferring the caller’s problem, it is the caller’s use of the connective ‘but’ that has guided my interpretation process.

In summary, I found the caller’s utterances include a lot of seemingly irrelevant details such as information about Mark’s unhappiness with the caller’s stretch marks. I found that the relevance of such information appears to provide a context for why Mark no longer has a sexual relationship with the caller. However, it is only at the end of the conversation that the relevance of this information becomes evident, and therefore, it shows that I have undertaken a lot of inferential work to identify what problem the caller intends to solve. I found that it is the caller’s use of the connective ‘but’ in her utterance that led me to draw the conclusion in (f). I also found that while interpreting the term ‘partner’ used by the caller, I was activating an assumption about relationships that is cultural specific, in that it would not be available to Chinese hearers. I will address the issue of the awareness of hearers (who are bi-cultural) who have a choice of contexts to call on in Chapter Six and discuss further in Section 7.2.2.4.
5.2.1.4 Summary

In this section, drawing on Relevance theory, I have analysed in detail the key utterances in three extracts that led me to identify the problems the callers were constructing.

I found that the problems of BE callers are all indirectly communicated, in that the callers’ utterances include a lot of apparently irrelevant details. A consequence of this indirect communication is that the host and the hearers have to carry out a great deal of inferential work in order to find out what makes the details relevant.

I found that it is the callers’ use of prosody and discourse connectives that guides the interpretation process, so that hearers can identify problems expressed by these callers in a less costly way.

I found that all of the callers under study use either prosody, as in the cases of [5.1], [5.2], [5.7] and [5.9], or discourse connectives, as in the cases of [5.3], [5.4], [5.6], [5.8] or both, as in the case of [5.5], to guide the interpretation process.

I found that there are cases where I activated contextual assumptions, as in [5.8], that were available to hearers from Britain but I assume were not available to hearers from China.

5.2.2 Prosody and discourse connectives used by MC callers

In this section, I analyse Chinese data in order to show that, as with what I have found in the English data, callers in Chinese radio programmes also use discourse connectives, or prosody, or both, to guide the interpretation process.
As with my analysis of English data, in the next three subsections, I analyse three Chinese extracts, one by one.

5.2.2.1 Getting rid of a married man

The following is a brief summary of my understanding of the caller’s problem in Chinese extract 1 (see Appendix 8):

The caller is a divorced lady and she is now in a romantic relationship with a man. However, the caller now cannot allow her romantic relationship with the man to continue, because she discovered that the man she considers as her potential husband is married. Although the caller is trying to end the relationship with the man, the fact that she is living together with him in the same room makes her feel that it is difficult to get rid of him. My inference is that the caller’s problem is that she does not know how to get rid of the man living in the same room with her, and therefore she asks advice on this.

In what follows, I analyse the following key utterances from this extract.

[5.10]

(1) C: 我发现他有家我就退出来了.
    I find he has family I so withdrew come (sentence final particle)
    I found he’s married, so I withdrew.

(2) H: 嗯.
    Em
    Em
    (C03SX)
The context of the above example is that the caller found that her boyfriend is married.

To infer the problem the caller intends to solve in this case, I am engaging in the process of disambiguation. I assume, in the context of discussing the caller’s romantic relationship with her boyfriend (i.e. he), that the possible meaning of the term ‘withdraw’ is that it refers to not allowing her relationship with her boyfriend to continue. I then identify the resulting propositions, made manifest by the caller’s utterances, as something like the following:

(a) The caller’s boyfriend who would potentially be her husband is married;

(b) The caller would not allow her romantic relationship with the man to continue.

I am aware that the caller uses a connective ‘so’ to introduce her second segment of her utterances. The presence of ‘so’ implies that a causal relationship holds between (a) and (b). It leads me to assume that the caller is indicating that the ‘so’ segment is relevant by virtue of being a contextual implication derived from the segment that precedes ‘so’ (Blakemore 2002, 95; 1992, 139), which in this case appears to be the assumption in (a). Based on my own understanding of Chinese culture in relation to the issue raised by the caller, I assume that the presence of ‘so’ makes the following contextual assumption immediately accessible:

(c) In Chinese society, if one knows that the person one is going to marry is already married, then the individual would not allow the romantic relationship between them to continue.
I also assume, on the basis of my knowledge of Chinese culture, that the assumption in (c) may be available to hearers from China, but may not be available to hearers from Western countries like Britain. Again, I will address the issue of the awareness of hearers having possessed two cultural meaning systems who have a choice of contexts to draw on in Chapter Six and discuss further in Section 7.2.2.4.

I then combine the explicature in (a) with the contextual assumption in (c) and draw the contextual implication that:

(d) The caller would not allow her romantic relationship with the man to continue.

In the light of evidence in (d), I infer that the caller’s problem is related to the caller’s action of not allowing her romantic relationship with the man to continue, although it is still not clear what problem the caller intends to solve.

Thus, in this example, understanding what problem the caller intends to solve involves a lot of inference. It is the caller’s use of the connective ‘so’ that has led me to reach the conclusion that the caller’s problem is that her discovery about his marriage has caused her decision of not allowing her relationship with her man to continue. As my analysis indicates, in response to the caller’s utterance, I activated the assumptions that I assume were available to hearers from China, but not available to hearers from Britain. I will address the issue of the awareness of hearers (who are bicultural) who have a choice of context to draw on in Chapter Six and discuss further in Section 7.2.2.4.
[5.11]

(1) C: 我不理他 可他现在总赖着我.
I ignore him but he now always cling to me

(2) H: 那不行你必须得告诉他你有家你本身就是欺骗我.
That no you must tell he you have home you itself be cheat me
Oh, no, you must tell him. Since he’s married, he’s cheated on you.

(C03XS)

Where the caller states in (1) 我不理他 (i.e. I ignore him), the phrase 不理 (i.e. ignore) may have a number of possibilities. It could refer to taking no notice to whatever happens to somebody; and it could also imply that one person does not talk to another. In the situation where the caller has decided not to allow her relationship with the man to continue, I assume that the latter function is more appropriate for this context. Moreover, where the caller states in (1) 他现在总赖着我 (i.e. he now always clings to me), the phrase 赖着 (i.e. cling to) in this context refers to harassing the caller. I then identify the resulting propositions, made manifest by the caller’s utterances, as something like the following:

(e) The caller does not talk with her boyfriend;
(f) The caller’s boyfriend keeps harassing her.

I recognise that the recovery of the explicature in (e) makes the following contextual assumption immediately accessible:

(g) If one does not talk with the other, then one treats the other as a stranger.
I combine the assumptions in (e) and (g) and draw the contextual implication that:

(h) The caller treats her boyfriend as a stranger.

However, the caller’s use of ‘but’, when she introduces her second segment of utterances in (1), makes the proposition in (f) immediately manifest in the following context:

(i) The caller cannot treat her boyfriend as a stranger because he persistently harasses her.

I combine the explicature in (f) with the contextual assumption in (i) and draw the following contextual implication:

(j) The caller feels that it is difficult to end the relationship with the man.

In the light of above analysis, I infer that the caller’s problem is related to her feeling that it is difficult to end her relationship with the man.

My interpretation that the caller’s problem is related to her feeling that it is difficult to end the relationship with the man is supported by the host’s utterances in (2), which indicates that the host believes that the caller’s problem has been expressed, and is trying to offer advice on how to stop the man’s harassing.

Thus, in this example, the caller’s utterances require a lot of inferential work on the part of the hearer, and it is the caller’s use of the connective ‘but’ that has led me as a hearer to draw the conclusion that her problem is related to her feeling that it is difficult to end her relationship with the man.
The caller here uses a ‘but’ in (2). I assume the ‘but’ segment is intended to achieve relevance by contradicting and eliminating an assumption which has been made manifest in her preceding utterance. However,

In many cases the assumption which the speaker intends the hearer to eliminate is not derived from the interpretation of the first segment of the but utterance at all, but is simply an assumption which the speaker has reason to believe is manifest to the hearer (Blakemore 2002, 109, emphasis original).

The point Blakemore makes here appears to be true in this case. I identify that when the caller utters ‘but’, it is in overlap with the utterance 报警 (i.e. call the police) made by the host in (1). In my view, such an overlap seems to indicate that this may well be what the caller was intending at this point. I then assume that the eliminated assumption manifest to the hearer (i.e. host) is ‘provided by an utterance made by the
hearer herself” (Blakemore 2002, 109). Given the overlap function, I accept that the given assumption made manifest by the host refers to the second segment of her utterance in (1), where the host was giving advice to the caller on how to persuade her boyfriend to leave the caller alone in a way that the caller can 报警 (i.e. *call the police*).

Where the host states in (1) 你可以报警了 (i.e. *you can call the police*), the phrase 报警 (i.e *call the police*), based on my own understanding of Chinese culture, has a number of functions: it could refer to the assumption that in an emergency, people can call the police to report a crime; it could also refer to the assumption that people can call the police to help them deal with something urgent that they are unable to cope with. In this particular context, my understanding of this extract assumes the latter: to call the police to stop the caller’s boyfriend’s harassing. I also assume that this assumption may not be available to hearers from Britain, because what is described is Chinese cultural specific phenomenon.

I then identify the resulting proposition, made manifest by the host’s utterance in (1), as something like the following:

(k) The caller can call the police to help her get rid of her boyfriend if he keeps harassing her.

I also identify the proposition, made manifest by the caller’s utterance in (2), as something like the following:

(l) The caller is living together with the man in the same room.
I am then directed to the phrase (i.e. live in the same room) by the caller’s lengthened duration. I identify that the fact that the stress assigned to this phrase makes the following contextual assumptions immediately accessible:

(m) When two people in a romantic relationship live in one room, they normally live together consensually;

(n) If they live together consensually, it would be difficult for one of them to get rid of the other;

(o) As long as they do not break the law, even the police have no right to set them apart.

I combine the explicatures in (k-l) with the contextual assumptions in (m-o), and draw the following contextual implication:

(p) The caller feels unable to get rid of her boyfriend.

In the light of the inferential work I have carried out so far, I assume the caller’s problem is that she feels unable to get rid of her man. If we compare the implicature in (j) with the implicature in (p), we can find that the implicature in (p) remains unaltered. However, with the evidence provided in (l), the contextual implication in (j) is obviously strengthened. This indicates that the man’s living in the same room with the caller makes her feel that it is even more difficult to get rid of him and it further confirms that how to get rid of her boyfriend is the problem the caller is intending to solve. My interpretation that the caller’s utterances are designed to communicate a problem about how to get rid of her boyfriend is supported by the host’s utterances in (3), which indicates that the host confirms that the caller’s
problem has been made explicit, and which also indicates that she is coming to the stage of offering advice by telling the caller to let her man out of her room.

Thus, understanding the caller’s problem involves inference. It is the caller’s use of discourse connective and prosody that led me to identify the problem the caller was constructing with the least inferential effort.

In summary, I found that the caller’s utterances consist of information about the man’s harassing the caller and living in the same room with the caller. These pieces of seemingly irrelevant information appear to provide a context for why it is difficult for the caller to get rid of the man. However, the relevance of this information only becomes evident at the end of the conversation. This shows that the hearer has carried out a great deal of inferential work in order to understand what the caller intends to solve. I found that the caller’s use of discourse connective as in [5.1], or both discourse connectives and prosody as in [5.11] makes the inferential process relatively easier. I also found that there are cases where I activated contextual assumptions available to hearers from China that I assume may not be available to hearers from Britain.

5.2.2.2 A romantic relationship with an older and married lady
The following is a brief summary of my understanding of the caller’s problem communicated in Chinese extract 2 (see Appendix 9):

The caller is in a romantic relationship with a lady 12 years older than the caller himself. Moreover, the lady is married and has children. Despite her age and marital status, the caller has been in a relationship with this lady for two years. My inference is that the caller’s problem is that his relationship with the woman is morally
impermissible, and therefore he asks advice on whether or not he should maintain his relationship with the woman.

In what follows, I analyse the following key utterances from this extract.

[5.13]

(1) C: 我 喜欢 上 了 一个 比 我 大 一 轮 的 一 个 女的.
   I like (particle) a than I big a round of a lady
   I’m in a relationship with a lady who is A ROUND OLDER than me.

(2) H: 啊 (hahaha).
   Ah (hahaha)
   Ah (hahaha)
   (C02LY)

To infer the problem the caller intends to solve, I am engaging in a process of disambiguation. The caller uses a term 一轮 (i.e. one round) in (1). On the basis of my knowledge about Chinese culture in relation to the issue raised by the caller, I assume that 一轮 refers to Chinese traditional twelve year lunar circle which in this case means 12 years. I then identify the resulting proposition, made manifest by the caller’s utterances, as something like the following:

(a) The caller is in a romantic relationship with a lady twelve years older than the caller himself.

I am then directed to the phrase 大一轮 (i.e. twelve years older) because the caller assigned stress to it by uttering it in a lengthened duration. I identify the fact that the stress assigned to this phrase makes the proposition in (a) immediately manifest in the following context:
(b) If there is a large age difference between two lovers, then their romantic relationship is not seen as appropriate in Chinese society because it appears to be unnatural;

(c) If a woman is a lot older (say, 5 years or more) than a man in a romantic relationship, then this relationship is even more inappropriate.

I combine the explicature in (a) with the contextual assumptions in (b-c), and draw the following contextual implication:

(d) The romantic relationship between the caller and his lady is seen as inappropriate in Chinese society.

My interpretation that the relationship between the caller and his lady is seen as inappropriate in Chinese society is supported by the host’s surprising tone when she uttered 啊 (i.e. ah) in (2), followed by her laughter, and I take this to indicate that she confirms my interpretation.

Thus, in inferring the problem the caller was constructing, it is the caller’s use of prosody that guides the interpretation process.

[5.14]

1. C: 我们时间长了我们就喜欢上了对方了.
   We time long we so like opposite (sentence final particle)
   We meet each other frequently due to our geographical proximity, so we’ve gradually fallen in love with each other.

2. C: 你说这件事儿我应该怎么处理呢？
   You say this issue I should how deal with ？
   Do you think I should maintain the relationship and become closer to her?
Previously, the caller had indicated that the lady that the caller is in a romantic relationship with has a shop next door to the caller’s workplace, which gives them opportunities to frequently meet each other.

To make sense of the utterance, I am engaging in a process of disambiguation. On the basis of my existing knowledge about Chinese culture, I assume that it is morally impermissible if one has a romantic relationship with someone who is married, and also it is not seen as appropriate for an older woman to have a romantic relationship with a younger man. Therefore, the expression 这件事儿 (i.e. this issue) in (2) refers to the fact that the man has a morally impermissible romantic relationship with an older woman.

I then identify the resulting propositions, made manifest by the caller’s utterances, as something like the following:

(e) The caller and his lady have met each other frequently due to close geographical proximity;

(f) The caller and his lady have developed a romantic relationship;

(g) The caller is asking whether he should maintain his morally impermissible relationship with the older lady.
I am aware that the caller uses a connective ‘so’ to introduce the second segment of utterances. I assume the presence of ‘so’ implies that there is a causal relationship that holds between (e) and (f). It indicates that the proposition introduced by ‘so’ is relevant, by virtue of being a contextual implication of the assumption which has been made accessible by the interpretation of the preceding utterance (Blakemore 2002, 95; 1992, 139), which in this case appears to be the assumption in (e). I recognise the presence of ‘so’ makes the following contextual assumption immediately accessible:

   (h) If one is geographically closer to the other, then it is relatively easier for this one to develop a romantic relationship with the other.

I combine the assumptions in (e-f) and (h) and draw the contextual implication:

   (i) The caller and his lady are geographically closer to each other. As a consequence, they have developed a romantic relationship.

On the basis of the assumption in (i), I infer that the caller’s problem is related to the geographical proximity between the caller and his lady.

I then identify the proposition in (c) made manifest in the following context:

   (j) The caller is trying to find out whether he should maintain his morally impermissible relationship with the older lady.

I combine the explicature in (c) with the contextual assumption in (j) and draw the contextual implication:

   (k) The caller wants advice on whether he should maintain his morally impermissible relationship with the older lady.
In the light of above inference, I assume the caller’s problem is that he does not know whether he should maintain his morally impermissible relationship with the older lady. My interpretation that the caller’s problem is that he does not know whether he should maintain his morally impermissible relationship with the older lady is supported by the host’s response in (3), which indicates that she believes that the caller’s problem has been made explicit and comes to the stage of giving advice to the caller, in that she is telling the caller to end the relationship straightaway.

Thus, in this example, it is the caller’s use of discourse connective that guides my inferential process.

In summary, I found that while constructing his problem, the caller provided some seemingly irrelevant information such as the information about the caller’s morally impermissible relationship with a married older woman. However, I found that the relevance of this information appears to provide a context for why it is important for the caller to know whether he should maintain his relationship with this lady. Specifically, it is only at the end of the conversation that the relevance of this information becomes evident. Therefore, it shows that understanding the caller’s utterances involves a lot of inferential work on the part of a hearer. I also found that the caller’s use of prosody as in the case of [5.13] and discourse connectives as in [5.14] in his utterances guided the interpretation process. Moreover, I found that in order to understand what the caller means by what he said, I activated many assumptions, which in this case appear to be based on my existing knowledge about Chinese culture. This implies that these assumptions may not be available to hearers whose native language is BE. As indicated earlier in this chapter, I will address the
issue of the awareness of a choice of context that hearers having processed knowledge of two cultures may have in Chapter Six, and discuss further in Section 7.2.2.4.

5.2.2.3 The relationship with a bad tempered husband

The following is a brief summary of my understanding of the caller’s problem, communicated in Chinese extract 3 (see Appendix 10):

The caller herself has a good temper, but her husband’s temper is terrible. Despite his bad temper, this husband does care about the family he and the caller have together. Therefore, the caller is generally satisfied with her husband. What makes the caller upset is that her husband often argues with her. My inference is that the caller’s problem is that she and her husband often argue, therefore she wants advice on this.

In what follows, I analyse the key utterances that lead me to identify the problem the caller is constructing.

[5.15]

(1) C: 我爱人吧性格挺暴噪的.
    My husband temper very bad of
    My husband’s temper is very bad.

(2) C: 但是他是 一个 顾 家的 男人.
    but he be a care home of man
    but he does care about the family.

(3) C: 所以 不能说 他 不好.
    So cannot say he not good
    So I am satisfied with him in general.

(C03HM)
As always, to infer the problem the caller is constructing, I resolve ambiguities in the language used and assign referents to deictic words, and identify the resulting propositions, made manifest by the caller’s utterances, as something like the following:

(a) The caller’s husband has a bad temper;
(b) The husband cares about the family he and the caller have together;
(c) The caller is generally satisfied with her husband.

I then identify the recovery of the explicature in (a) make the following contextual assumption immediately accessible:

(d) If a husband has a bad temper, then he may often argue with his family members, of course, including his wife.

I combine the explicature in (a) with the contextual assumption in (d) and draw the contextual implication that:

(e) The caller’s husband often argues with the caller.

On the basis of the assumption in (e), I assume that the caller’s problem may be related to her argument with her husband.

However, the caller’s use of ‘but’ in (2) makes me assume that the ‘but’ segment is intended to achieve relevance by virtue of contradicting and eliminating a (possibly mistaken) assumption which is deducible from the first segment of the caller’s utterances (Blakemore 1992, 102), which in this case appears to be the assumption in (e). The presence of ‘but’ makes the proposition in (b) immediately manifest in the following context:
(f) The caller’s husband does care about the family if he does not lose temper.

I combine the explicature in (b) with the contextual assumption in (f) and draw the contextual implication that:

(g) If it were not for his bad temper, the husband would care about the family more.

On the basis of evidence in (g), I infer that the caller’s problem may be related to her husband’s bad temper.

The caller’s use of ‘so’ in (3) leads me to assume that it implies that there is a causal relationship that holds between (b) and (c). It indicates that the ‘so’ segment is relevant by virtue of being a contextual implication derived from the segment that precedes ‘so’ (Blakemore 2002, 95; 1992, 139), which in this case refers to (b). The presence of ‘so’ makes the proposition in (c) immediately manifest in the following context:

(h) If a married man takes care of the family, then the man’s wife is satisfied with him.

I combine the assumptions in (c) and (h) and draw the following contextual implication:

(i) Despite the bad temper, the caller’s husband does care about the family. As a consequence, the caller is satisfied with him.

The assumption in (i) leads me to infer that the caller’s problem is related to her husband’s bad temper although it is still not made explicit at this stage.
Thus, in this example, it is the caller’s use of connectives ‘but’ and ‘so’ that guided the interpretation process.

[5.16]

(1) C: 昨天 又 打 起来了 吵 起来了.

Yesterday again fight up argue up (sentence final particle)
We argued again yesterday.

(2) H: 你应该 和他谈谈.

You should and him talk talk
You should have a talk with him.
(C03HM).

The caller used an expression ‘yesterday’ in (1). My understanding of this extract assumes that this refers to the day before the caller phoned up to the show. I then identify the resulting proposition, made manifest by the caller’s utterance, as something like the following:

(j) The caller and her husband argued again the day before she phoned up to the show.

Having identified the propositional form, I am directed to the word 又 (i.e. *again*) by the caller’s lengthened duration. I find the stress assigned to this word makes the proposition (j) immediately manifest in the following context:

(k) It is not the first time that the husband had an argument with the caller.

(l) In Chinese society, family harmony is highly valued. As a result, it is seen as a big problem (e.g. bigger than other countries like UK) if husbands and wives argue.
I combine the explicature in (j) with the contextual assumptions in (k) and (l) and draw the contextual implication:

(m) The caller and her husband often argue, and this is a serious problem for the couple.

In the light of the above inferential work, I assume that the caller’s problem is that she and her husband often argue. My interpretation that the caller’s problem is the assumption in (m) is supported by the host’s turn in (2), which indicates that the host acknowledges that the caller’s problem has been expressed and comes to the stage of offering advice to the caller in a way that the caller should have a talk with her husband.

Thus, again, I have undertaken a great deal of inferential work in order to understand the problem the caller was expressing. It is the caller’s use of prosody that guided the interpretation process.

In summary, I found that I have to rely on inference to identify what problem the caller intended to solve. However, I also found that in the process of inferring the problem the caller was constructing, it is with the help of the caller’s use of prosody and discourse connectives that I arrived at the interpretation that the caller intended to solve the problem that she and her husband often argue.

5.2.2.4 Summary

In this section, drawing on Relevance Theory, I have analysed in detail the key utterances in three Chinese extracts that have led me to identify the problems the callers were constructing.
I found that the problems of these MC callers are all indirectly communicated, in that
the callers’ utterances include a lot of seemingly irrelevant details. A consequence of
this indirect communication is that the host and the hearers are required to carry out a
great deal of inferential work to work out what makes the details relevant.

I found that all the callers in question use either discourse connectives, as in the cases
of [5.10], [5.11], [5.14] and [5.15], or prosody, as in the cases of [5.13] and [5.16], or
both, as in the case of [5.12], to guide the interpretation process.

I also found that in order to interpret the relevance of what a caller is attempting to
convey in her utterances, I sometimes activated contextual assumptions based on my
knowledge about Chinese culture, as in the cases of [5.12], [5.13] and [5.16] that were
not available to hearers from Britain.

5.3. Conclusion

In this chapter, by drawing on Relevance Theory, I have analysed six extracts from
my two set of data, in order to examine whether or not markers of procedural meaning
are used respectively by callers from China and Britain.

My analysis has revealed that:

(1) There are similarities within the two sets of data, in that the problems of all the
callers in the two sets of data are all indirectly communicated.

(2) Understanding utterances produced by the two sets of callers involves a great deal
of inferential work.
(3) Callers from both China and Britain use prosody and discourse connectives to guide the interpretation process so that a hearer is able to identify what makes details relevant to the problems the callers were constructing.

(4) In the process of inferring the problem a caller was constructing, I (as a hearer) sometimes activated contextual assumptions that were only available to hearers from one culture, but not available to hearers from the other culture under study, as in the cases of [5.8], [5.12], [5.13] and [5.16].

My analysis in this chapter was premised on the assumption that a caller’s utterance can generate different interpretations for different hearers. Therefore, my interpretations can only represent my own understanding rather than others. In the next chapter, I show that when interpreting problems constructed by the callers, hearers from China and Britain do actually come up with different interpretations, because they are drawing on a different cognitive environment.

My above analysis forms the basis of my discussion in Chapter Seven.
Chapter Six: Differences in Interpretation

6.1 Introduction
In Chapter Five, I showed that in my own interpretation of problems that callers were constructing, there are cases where I was activating contextual assumptions that I assume were not shared by hearers from Britain and China. I argued that a caller’s utterance can generate different interpretations for different hearers and my own interpretation can only represent my own understanding rather than others. My goal in this chapter is to show that when interpreting the problems expressed by the callers, hearers from China and Britain do actually come up with different interpretations, because they are drawing on a different cognitive environment. I also show that hearers who are bicultural have a choice of context to draw on when they interpret an utterance produced by a caller. However, before I proceed to my analysis, I explain the procedure my analysis is designed to follow.

As my second research question states (see Section 3.3), I was looking for evidence that when interpreting naturally occurring conversations, hearers from different cultures do, indeed, come up with different interpretations, because they are drawing on a different cognitive environment. From a relevance theoretical point of view, this was to identify the contextual assumptions that hearers from different cultures were accessing. In order to determine whether or not hearers with distinct cultural backgrounds draw different inferences from utterances that apparently express the same propositional content, as proposed by earlier studies of culture and communication (e.g. (e.g. Cohen 2004; Gao and Ting-Toomey 1998; Ting-Toomey 1999; Scollon and Scollon 1995), I examined the contextual assumptions activated in the process of interpretation in my two sets of data, as follows. In cases where hearers
from China activated a contextual assumption (or a set of contextual assumptions) in response to an utterance produced by a caller, I looked to see if the same contextual assumption (or a set of contextual assumptions) was also available to hearers from Britain. If the answer was positive, I indicated that hearers from China and Britain generated similar interpretations. If the answer was negative, I indicated that the two set of hearers generated different interpretations. In the latter situation, I indicated that Chinese culture has an impact on interpretations generated by Chinese hearers. Likewise, in cases where hearers from Britain activated a contextual assumption (or a set of contextual assumptions) in response to an utterance produced by a caller, I looked to see if the same contextual assumption (or a set of contextual assumptions) was available to hearers from China. If the answer was positive, I then indicated that hearers from Britain and China generated similar interpretations. If the answer was negative, I would then indicate that the two sets of hearers generated different interpretations. In the latter situation, I also indicated that British culture has an impact on interpretations generated by hearers from Britain.

I adopted two steps in collecting data relating to contextual assumptions, in order to show how interpretations were generated. The first step was my own interpretation of the radio talk, and the second step was the focus group interview, which referred to the opinions of actual hearers of the two cultures in consideration. The reason that I adopted two steps was that I believed that an analysis drawing on my own understanding of what a caller intended to communicate in her utterance could only represent my own interpretation. Therefore, whether it was actually an interpretation that anyone other than myself would come up with was not self-evident. Only an interview asking actual hearers themselves would generate evidence to support this
claim. As Patton (2002, 466) points out, ‘[w]ho is in a better position to judge whether the categories appropriately reflect their issues and concerns than the people themselves?’ These two approaches were supplementary to each other, in that they both provided evidence to support or challenge my claim.

In my study, I adopted an integrated approach, by using the dynamic constructivist approach to analysing contextual assumptions within the framework of Relevance Theory. According to the dynamic constructivist approach proposed by Hong and her colleagues, individuals have culturally specific meaning systems that are shared by individuals within the culture. These cultural meaning systems, as I discussed in Section 2.1.1, are interpretative frames that influence individuals’ affect, cognition and behaviour (Hong et al. 1997). Individuals can internalize two separate cultural frames (e.g. Hong 2009; Hong et al. 2000). The biculturals - those ‘individuals who have been exposed extensively to two cultural meaning systems’ (Hong and Mallorie 2004, 64) can shift between these frames in response to cultural clues such as an utterance through the frame-switching mechanism. Since I am a native speaker of Mandarin Chinese from mainland China and I have also been exposed to British culture for a number of years, I assume that I have had access to at least some knowledge constructs from both cultural meaning systems. I therefore consider myself as a Chinese-English bicultural individual for the purposes of my study.

In the data consisting of my own interpretation of the radio talk, I first articulate the contextual implications that I came up with when I heard a caller’s talk, then the contextual assumptions I activated in response to the caller’s utterances, and finally the synthesis of the contextual assumptions and the explicature that led me to draw that contextual implication. Specifically, when I hear the utterances produced by a
British caller, I am not going to access Chinese contextual assumptions, but assume that the contextual assumptions informed by British culture are relevant ones. Because I am not a native speaker of BE, I predict that the contextual assumptions I activated might not overlap with those supplied by a native speaker of BE. In order to infer what a caller means by what she says, I make as explicit as possible the processes that I went through in interpreting that call. I then demonstrate how the responses of the British group and Chinese group in my interview study overlap with or are different from my own interpretations. While analysing the inferences drawn by my respondents in discussing a call, I provide only those details of their responses that allow me to indicate or account for differences in interpretation.

In order to provide evidence that people who have access to different cognitive environments are likely to generate different contextual assumptions when interpreting the problems expressed by the callers, I provide six extracts taken from my two sets of data (see Appendix 5-7 and 11-13). In order to contextualise the contextual assumptions I set out to elicit, I begin my analysis with a brief summary of the problem a caller is constructing. The summary I give is based on my own understanding of the problem the caller was expressing and it is therefore not necessarily the interpretation shared by other hearers.

Since my aim here is to investigate whether or not people who have access to different cognitive environments interpret a caller’s problem in different ways, I focus primarily on those key utterances that I assume, based on my own understanding of the overall extract, to have the possibility that activates the assumptions that are available to hearers of either culture or both cultures under study. Consequently, those utterances that are not relevant to my concern are excluded.
I propose, by drawing on Relevance Theory, in inferring the problem a caller intends to solve, I as a hearer have to resolve ambiguities in the utterances produced by a caller and assign referents to deictic words. I believe it is the presence of these ambiguities that give the utterances the potential for different interpretations. I claim the way in which I resolve the ambiguities in a caller’s utterances is significantly related to the way I interpret the overall extract. The particular assumptions which lead to the process of disambiguation I describe above are the problem a caller intends to solve.

In the section that follows, I present evidence found in my study, and then in Section 6.3, I conclude my analysis by summarising what I have found in this chapter.

6.2 Evidence on differences in interpretation

My goal in this section is to show that there are different interpretations available if different contextual assumptions are activated. I begin my analysis with English data, followed by its corresponding Chinese data. For ease of reference, in my analysis, I name the heading of each of the subsections with the problem I assume a caller is constructing.

6.2.1 Contextual assumptions activated in English talk shows

In the next three subsections, I present evidence found in three English extracts, one by one.

6.2.1.1 A pierced tongue and sex life

The following is my brief summary of the caller’s problem constructed in English extract 4 (see Appendix 5):
The caller’s girlfriend is getting her tongue pierced, which makes the caller worried that the pierced tongue would adversely affect his physical expressions of love. However, the caller is not sure whether he needs to worry about this. My inference is that the caller does not know whether or not his girlfriend’s pierced tongue will adversely affect his physical expression of love, and therefore he asks advice on this.

I focus on the following key utterances from this extract in my analysis.

[6.1]

(1) H: What is it.
(2) C: Basically the < > she’s getting her tongue pierced, and I’m just thinking it’s going to ruin my SEX LIFE, you know well the.
(3) H: Well sorry ba ba ba ba.
(4) C: (heh) yeah (heh) I know.
(5) H: ba ba ba ba, let’s just rewind < > rewind, excuse me, both of listeners, let’s just rewind for a moment if we can.
(6) C: I know it’s silly //isn’t it?
(7) H: //No no zip it. she’s getting her tongue pierced,
(8) C: Yeah.
(9) H: This is all this is about she’s goanna to have her tongue pierced and you’re worried this is goanna to ruin your sex life,
(10) C: Yeah but wouldn’t it? Am I worried too much?

The context of the above conversation is that the caller was hoping to go to Paris with his girlfriend on St. Valentine’s Day, but now he is feeling depressed and will have to stay at home alone.
Upon hearing the above conversation, the initial interpretation that I came across is that the caller did not know if his girlfriend’s pierced tongue would adversely affect his physical expression of love.

The reason that I generated this interpretation is that I assumed, in the context of discussing something that happened to the caller and his girlfriend, that ‘she’ refers to the caller’s girlfriend. Moreover, where the caller states in (2) ‘and I’m just thinking it’s going to ruin my sex life’ the conjunction ‘and’ implies a causal relationship between these two states which could be alternatively stated as ‘and therefore’. I then identified the resulting proposition made manifest by (2) as something like the following:

(a) The caller’s girlfriend has a metal thing put into the tongue of her mouth;
(b) He is worried that this will have an adverse effect on his sex life.

I was then led by the caller’s stress assigned to the phrase ‘sex life’ to access (a-b) made manifest in the following context:

(c) Sex life is a physical expression of love between couples;
(d) If one’s tongue in the mouth has a metal thing fixed, then one may make one’s partner feel uncomfortable when they physically express their love;
(e) The caller is not sure whether his girlfriend will make him uncomfortable after having that metal thing fixed.

I combined the assumptions in (a-b) and (c-e) and finally drew the contextual implication I described earlier, namely that:
(f) The caller does not know if his girlfriend’s pierced tongue will adversely affect his physical expression of love.

Because the assumption in (f) is the first line of interpretation that occurred to me, I accepted it as the intended interpretation of the caller without looking any further for alternative interpretations that might also be relevant. Therefore, I regard the caller’s problem to be that he does not know if his girlfriend’s pierced tongue would adversely affect his physical expression of love.

When discussing this call, I first asked each group in my interview study what they thought was meant by a pierced tongue ruining my sex life.

**The English group responded:**

T: I was thinking he was thinking she can’t perform oral sex on him any more (laugh).
J: I’m glad you said that this is also what I was thinking.
A: My idea is exactly the same.
S: Yeah I thought the same as well.
E: Yeah. anyway he says ruin MY sex life. he’s only thinking about himself…he’s not talking about HER…it seems he cares about himself.

**The Chinese group answered:**

C: Actually you know sex life has different kinds…there is a popular French style called what? anyway he may be thinking he won’t be feeling comfortable when they have sex life together.
L: You know in our country we don’t do that sort of thing with the tongue. but I’m just guessing he was thinking they couldn’t have sex life together.
G: Probably he was just thinking the pierced tongue would have a bad effect on their sexual relationship or maybe their romantic relationship.
For the English group, the referent of the term ‘sex life’ is distinct from that of the Chinese group. For the English group, ‘sex life’ in this context is ‘oral sex’. For the Chinese group, ‘sex life’ implies all kinds of physical expression of love. Specifically, I am aware that in my interpretation of their responses, I sometimes enriched and disambiguated the utterances my respondents came up with. In this case, for example, it is because I take C’s emphasis given to ‘a popular French style’ to be just one kind of ‘sex life’ that I then go on to infer that what C meant by saying this may probably refer to what the English group said ‘oral sex’ although C herself did not acknowledge this.

Later in the interview, I asked the groups what problem they thought the caller wanted to solve.

The English group responded:

A: I don’t think he does WANT to solve. he’s just kind of wanted to tell someone about it.
J: He’s obviously nervous.
T: He’s probably just wanted his opinion confirmed.
S: He’s like calling up looking for help from a friend? looking for a second opinion…trying to get someone to agree with him.
E: Like he wants to know if he’s been too worried about it.

The Chinese group answered:

G: He does not know if a pierced tongue would indeed have a bad effect on his sex life. so this is his problem.
C: Yeah…but he sounds like he is lack of common sense.
L: Agree.
Their responses indicated that members of both groups understood the caller’s utterances as implying that he was thinking about the relationship between a pierced tongue and sex life. The groups varied, however, in terms of their assessment of the problem the caller intended to solve. I argue that the variations in their interpretations are the consequence of differences in the evidence each group used in their inference. For example, in inferring what problem the caller intended to solve, the two groups used distinct sets of assumptions as evidence. The evidence potentially available to the respondents was made explicit in their responses to my questions, which focused on the groups’ understanding of the term ‘sex life’. Their responses to my first question show that not all members of the Chinese group had, as part of their knowledge, the assumption articulated in varying ways by members of the English group, that ‘sex life’ in this context is a form of ‘oral sex’. Because of this, the two groups activated different sets of assumptions when later asked to explain the problem the caller was expressing. For example, T, in the English group, drew on his previous articulated assumption about ‘oral sex’ to infer that the caller did not want to solve any problem but just ‘wanted his opinion confirmed’. In contrast, G in the Chinese group drew on her previously articulated assumption about a pierced tongue having a bad effect on their sexual relationship to infer that the caller’s problem was that he wanted to know ‘if a pierced tongue would indeed have a bad effect on the sexual relationship’. In general both groups understood the relevance of what the caller was saying in different ways: the English group saw the caller’s utterances as designed not to solve any problem but to look for a second opinion to agree with him; the Chinese group saw the caller’s utterances as designed to communicate a problem whereby he wanted to know if a pierced tongue would affect his physical expression of love. However, their responses also indicated that although members within a group bear a
close resemblance in their cognitive environment, because they are brought up in the same country, they sometimes generated quite different interpretations. For example, members in the English group appear to activate similar contextual assumptions about ‘oral sex’, however, their understanding of the problem the caller intended to solve vary: A saw the caller’s utterances as designed not to solve any problems but to tell someone about what would happen to his sex life. In contrast, T and S saw the caller’s utterances as designed to communicate that he wanted to have his opinion confirmed, but E saw the caller’s speech as communicating a problem whereby he wanted to know whether he was too worried about the effect the pierced tongue would have on his ‘oral sex’. The English group produced interpretations that were not the same as my own, but which did indicate that there was a similarity in our interpretations, in that we all inferred that the caller was thinking about the relationship between a pierced tongue and his sex life. The Chinese group appeared to indicate that they were interpreting the caller’s problem in the same way as I had, but the difference between us is that they also talked of a ‘French style’ and a ‘lack of common sense’, something as if they are instantiated in their everyday life.

Specifically, in response to my first question, L, in the Chinese group, appeared to shift her English cultural knowledge to her Chinese one, and inferred that ‘in our country we don’t do that sort of thing with the tongue’, but she quickly switched back and inferred that the caller was more concerned with whether he could still have sex life with his girlfriend. This indicated that L had a choice of context to draw on, in that L used her bicultural knowledge to make a comparison about the issue of the ‘pierced tongue’, but depended on her English cultural knowledge to interpret the English caller’s remarks.
To summarise, there are differences both between and within the groups in understanding the caller’s problem. In general, for the English group, the caller’s speech was designed not to communicate a problem but to look for a second opinion. For the Chinese group, the caller’s speech was to solve the problem of a pierced tongue indeed affecting his physical expression of love. Although the cognitive environments of members within the English group overlap with each other, and consequently, they did have access to the similar contextual assumptions about ‘oral sex’, their understanding of the problem the caller wanted to solve was distinct. More specifically, there is evidence that the Chinese group shifted their Chinese cultural frame to their English one, so as to infer the issue raised by the English caller.

**6.2.1.2 Sex outside a relationship**

Below is my summary of English extract 5 (see Appendix 6):

The caller’s girlfriend told the caller that she had a sexual relationship with somebody else. Although the girlfriend has had a sexual relationship with somebody else rather than the caller himself, the caller still loves her. Because of this, the caller does not know how to accept the fact that his girlfriend has a sexual relationship with somebody else. My inference is that the caller’s problem is that he does not know how to accept the fact that his girlfriend has a sexual relationship with somebody else, and therefore, he asks advice on this.

I focus on the following key utterances from this extract in my analysis.
(1) C: She told me yesterday morning that she’s been seeing and < > having um sexual relationship…with ANOTHER MAN.

(2) H: Ok not er the sort of information you want to hear from your girlfriend is it?

(3) C: No. I was very hurt and I feel very troubled by it, I’m you know just wondering, I mean she is behaving like she’s a complete cow.

(4) H: Em.

(5) C: And I’m just you know I I love her, and I’m not sure how to take this.

Upon hearing the above conversation, the initial interpretation that I came up with is that the caller did not know how to accept the fact that his girlfriend had had a sexual relationship with somebody else.

The reason that I generated this interpretation is that I assumed, in the context of discussing the relationship between the caller and his girlfriend, that ‘she’ (as well as its object form her) referred to the caller’s girlfriend. Moreover, where the caller states in (5) ‘I love her and I’m not sure how to take this’ the connective ‘and’ implies a causal relationship between the two states in (5) which could be alternatively stated as ‘and therefore’. I then identified the propositions, made manifest by the caller’s utterances, as something like the following:

(a) The caller’s girlfriend has a sexual relationship with somebody else.

I was then led by the caller’s stress assigned to the phrase ‘another man’ to access the proposition in (a) made manifest in the following context:

(b) In English society, sex life is a physical expression of love between couples;
(c) If a woman is in a romantic relationship with someone, then the woman should be loyal to the relationship.

(d) If a woman in a romantic relationship with someone has sex with somebody else, then she is not faithful in her current romantic relationship.

I combined the assumptions in (a) and (b-d) and drew the following contextual implication:

(e) The caller’s girlfriend is not faithful in her relationship with the caller.

The assumption in (e) shows that the pronoun ‘this’ in (5) refers to the assumption that the caller’s girlfriend is not faithful to her relationship with the caller. Because of this, I identified the fact that the proposition made manifest by (5) turns out to be:

(f) The caller is not sure how to accept the fact that his girlfriend is not faithful in her relationship with the caller.

I was then led by the caller’s use of the connective ‘and’ and process (f) in the following context:

(g) If a man still loves his girlfriend, the man may not know how to accept the fact that his girlfriend has had a sexual relationship with somebody else.

I combined the assumptions in (f) and (g) and drew the contextual implication I described earlier, namely that:

(h) The caller does not know how to accept the fact that his girlfriend has had a sexual relationship with somebody else.
The assumption in (h) is the first line of interpretation that I came up with when I heard the caller’s above speeches, I accepted it as the intended interpretation of the caller, and stopped looking any further for any alternative interpretations that might also be relevant. Therefore, I consider the problem the caller intended to solve in this case to be that he does not know how to accept the fact that his girlfriend has had a sexual relationship with somebody else.

When discussing this call with my two groups, I first asked each group a question about what they thought it might mean if one told one’s partner that one had a sexual relationship with somebody else.

**The English group responded:**

G: Just tell the fact.
S: Just mean what they say.
A: That’s the fact. If they decide that’s a problem then that’s a problem, if they decide that it’s not then it’s not.
T: Yeah.
J: I guess what he’s trying to say depends on the situation. It can mean anything that means that she’s bored, it could mean she’s not having enough sex as it is, or maybe she’s found somebody better than the one she has had before, so it’s really hard to say just from saying that she’s had sex with someone else.

**The Chinese group answered:**

L: She had sexual relationships with someone else and even told her partner. Obviously she doesn’t take the issue of sexual relationship seriously… a good name for this kind of women is open but probably I am deeply influenced by my parents. I call her a morally bad woman.
C: A slut. I think a case like this is rare in China. She even TOLD him she had a sexual relationship with somebody else when she is IN a relationship. I assume if someone in a relationship has a sexual relationship with somebody else. They try to
hide it and not to tell anyone and it would be silly if this person tells her partner what has been done.

G: Yeah. maybe it’s common in Western countries like England that they don’t really care whether you are a virgin or not. but in China a large majority of us still think those people who have sexual relationship before getting married are not good at least morally.

For the English group, the referents of the expression ‘having a sexual relationship with somebody else’ are quite distinct from that of the Chinese group. The English group as a whole came to an agreement that this expression is just ‘the fact’ although J inferred that this fact ‘can mean anything’. Their remark that ‘if they decide that’s a problem then that’s a problem, if they decide it’s not then it’s not’ indicates that the English group did not think having a sexual relationship with somebody else was a particularly important issue in a romantic relationship. For the Chinese group, in contrast, this expression has a much wider field of reference, potentially covering their referent for ‘the fact’ in the sense of Chinese morals. They thought that having a sexual relationship with somebody before getting married was an important issue, and assumed that a woman with such a behaviour was ‘a morally bad woman’. Although G in the Chinese group compared how England and China treated the issue of virginity differently, she quickly switched from her knowledge of English culture to her knowledge of Chinese culture, and inferred that sleeping around before getting married in China was a morally wrong behaviour. This indicated that G had a choice of context to call on, and finally depended on her Chinese cultural specific knowledge to interpret the issue raised by the English caller.

Later in the interview, I asked the groups what problem they thought the caller wanted to solve in this case.
The English group responded:

T: He is trying to say whether he would be with her or not.
A: I think it’s also a problem with his own self-image. he’s a kind of confused about how he should react to that situation.
G: Like he said…I don’t know how I’ve got her in the first place. like he’s lucky to have a girlfriend like this. so he doesn’t want to break up.
J: I think he’s really confused as well. so he’s calling to get some clarification as to what he should do.
S: I think he wants to know if it’s wrong for her to cheat on him because he wants to get radio host’s opinions.

The Chinese group answered:

G: I think if in China a man in this situation knows exactly how to react to this. they will end the relationship straightaway. I think he’s just feeling hurt that someone he wants to marry turns out to be like this and he’s trying to find someone to express his anger. probably he thinks radio programme is the best place to tell because he is in the dark and nobody knows him.
L: I don’t think he needs advice on this issue. he just wants to tell someone otherwise he may feel mad.
C: I agree it’s hard for him to accept the fact that his girl is a bad woman.

On the basis of evidence such as the above, it became clear that although both groups understood what the caller was saying in similar ways, in that they both inferred that the caller’s speeches were about his relationship with his girlfriend who had a sexual relationship with somebody else, they varied in terms of their assessment of the problem the caller was constructing. Again, I argue that the differences in their interpretations arise from the differences in contextual assumptions each group activated. For example, in inferring what problem the caller intended to solve, the two groups used distinct sets of assumptions as evidence. Their responses to my first
question show that the English group did not have, as part of their knowledge, the assumption articulated in varying ways by members of the Chinese group that ‘having sex with somebody before getting married is a morally bad woman’. Because of this, the two groups activated a distinct set of assumptions when later asked to explain what problem they thought the caller intended to solve. A, in the English group, drew on his previous articulated assumption about ‘the fact’ to infer that the caller was just ‘kind of confused about how he should react to that situation’. In contrast, G, in the Chinese group, drew on her previous articulated assumption about ‘a morally bad woman’ to infer that the caller’s (if he were a Chinese) phone in to the show was not to solve any problem because ‘he knows exactly what to do’, but to express how angry he was at his girlfriend’s morally impermissible behaviour. In general, there are some broad differences in each group’s understanding of the problem the caller intended to solve: the English group saw the caller’s utterances as designed to communicate the fact that he wanted to know what he should do in this situation. The Chinese group saw the caller’s speech as designed not to solve any problem, but to express how angry he was with his girlfriend’s morally impermissible behaviour.

I am also aware of the differences within the groups of my respondents. For example, although members of the English group activated similar contextual assumptions about ‘the fact’, their understanding of the problem the caller intended to solve varies: T inferred that the caller wanted to know whether he should be with his girlfriend or not. In contrast, both A and J inferred that the caller was confused about how he should react to that situation; F, however, inferred that the caller wanted to know if it is wrong for his girlfriend to cheat on him. The English group as a whole did not indicate that they were interpreting the caller’s issue in exactly the same way as I had,
but which did indicate that they inferred that the caller was confused as to what he should do in this situation. The Chinese group produced interpretations that were different to my own, but which did indicate that we all understood the caller’s speech as implying that he was concerned with his relationship with his girlfriend after she had a sexual relationship with somebody else.

More specifically, I am aware that the bicultural participants have a choice of context to call on when they interpret the problem constructed by the caller. Their responses to my second question show that G, in the Chinese group, made an immediate connection between the caller’s issue and how a Chinese man in the same situation would actually act, and inferred that the caller (if he were a Chinese) ‘was trying to find someone to express his anger’. What this indicated is that G depended on her Chinese cultural specific knowledge to infer the issue raised by the English caller.

To summarise, there are differences both between and within the groups in understanding the problem the caller was expressing. For the English group, the caller’s speech was designed to solve the problem of how he should react to that situation. For the Chinese group, the caller’s speech was designed not to solve any problem, but to express how angry he was at his girlfriend’s morally impermissible behaviour. Moreover, although members within the English group resemble each other in their cognitive environment, and consequently they activated similar contextual assumptions about ‘the fact’, there are variations in their understanding of the problem the caller wanted to solve. Specifically, there is evidence that the Chinese group depended on their Chinese cultural specific knowledge to infer the issue raised by the English caller.
6.2.1.3 Maintaining a friendship rather than a romantic relationship

Below is my brief summary of the caller’s problem expressed in English extract 6 (see Appendix 7):

The man the caller was dating indicated his interest in maintaining a friendship with the caller when he ended his dating relationship with her. Because the caller did not give the man an answer as to whether she wanted to be his friend, the caller now tries to give the man a call and tell him that she wants to be his friend. My inference is that the caller’s problem is that she does not know whether or not telling him to accept his friendship would help to re-establish their dating relationship, and therefore she wants advice on this.

In my analysis, I focus on the following key utterances from this extract.

[6.3]

(1) H: Hi there what’s happening in your life at the moment then?
(2) C: Well basically (. ) I’ve been on a … I’ve seen this guy eight times over two months.
(3) H: Um-hum.
(4) C: And he’s kind of like DUMPED me.
(5) H: Right.
(6) C: And basically he (. ) he’s currently like kind of saying < > the connection doesn’t feel right. But he … while we were dating … he did make a big thing about how would be great to be friends of somebody first and … and even when he dumped me (. ) said we can still be friends but I didn’t say anything cos I was upset.
(7) H: Ok.
(8) C: Basically… I’m just wondering I’m thinking about … maybe calling him when he < > comes back and saying < > well (. ) be nice and clearly I want to be friends. but I’m thinking is that too needy or is that a good way to try to win somebody back.
(E03JD)
Upon hearing the above conversation, the initial interpretation that came to my mind was that the caller wanted to know whether or not building a friendship with the man was a good way to win him back to the dating relationship with the caller.

The reason that I generated this interpretation was that I assumed, in the context of discussing a dating relationship, that the caller’s use of ‘dumped’ means that the man she was dating has left her, and also where the caller states ‘is that a good way to try to win somebody back’ in (8), the pronoun ‘that’ refers to building a friendship with the man. I then identify the resulting propositions, made manifest by the caller’s utterances, as something like the following:

(a) The man the caller was dating has left her;
(b) He wanted to build a friendship with the caller first;
(c) Building a friendship with the man is a good way to win him back to the dating relationship with the caller.

I was led by the caller’s use of ‘but’ in (6) to access the propositions in (a-b), made manifest in the following context:

(d) The man’s wishes to start out by being friends with the caller are the obstacles hindering the progress of their relationship.

I combined the assumptions in (a-b) and (d) and drew the contextual implication:

(e) The caller has difficulty in developing a romantic relationship with the man because he wishes to be friend with the caller first.

I then identified that the proposition in (c) was not intended to communicate the fact that building a friendship with the man was a good way to win him back to the
romantic relationship with the caller, but to find out whether it is. Therefore I assumed it activated the following contextual assumption:

(f) The caller is asking if it is true that building a friendship is a good way to win the man back.

I combined the assumptions in (c) and (f) and drew the contextual implication I described earlier, namely that

(g) The caller wants to know whether or not building a friendship with the man is a good way to win him back to the romantic relationship with the caller.

The assumption in (g) is the first line of interpretation to satisfy my expectation of relevance raised by the caller’s utterances, and therefore I accepted it as the intended interpretation of the caller, without looking any further for alternative interpretations that might also be relevant, because extra processing effort would be required to retrieve them. Hence, I consider the caller’s problem to be that she wanted to know whether or not building a friendship with the man was a good way to win him back to the relationship.

When discussing this call with my two groups, I first asked each group what they thought it might mean if someone has dumped her.

The English group responded:

S: He’s finished the relationship.
G: Yeah.
A: He’s ended the relationship.
T: He doesn’t want to continue seeing her.
J: It’s a kind of like dumped. I think it’s only about eight times they’ve seen, probably it’s not a proper relationship yet.
A: I agree. it doesn’t sound like they’ve been in a real serious relationship.

**The Chinese group responded:**

L: He’s ended the relationship.
G: He doesn’t want to date her any more.
C: Yeah.

On the basis of evidence such as this, it became evident that the referent of the term ‘dumped’ was similar to both groups, referring to the man’s ending the relationship with the caller.

Later in the interview, I asked them to sum up in their own words what problem they thought the caller wanted to solve.

**The English group responded:**

T: She wants to find out if she is ok to call that guy back and to see if she may fix the relationship with him or if it’s too desperate.
A: Yeah I think basically right.
J: Yeah she wants to know if it’s worth pursuing the relationship or not.
S: I think she’s trying to decide if she has a chance to have a relationship with him again.
G: She’s just trying to have a relationship with him again.

**The Chinese group answered:**

C: She still wants to have a relationship with him.
L: She’s trying to find out if she can keep the relationship going.
G: I agree she’s just asking whether he will be back to her again if she tries.
Responses such as these indicate that the two groups did appear to share the assumptions I took to be manifest to the caller when she was constructing her problems. Because of the shared contextual assumptions about ‘dumped’ activated by the two groups, as well as myself, our understanding of the problem the caller was expressing was similar.

To summarise, the two groups’ understanding of the caller’s problem overlapped with my own interpretations, in that we all inferred that the caller’s problem in this case to be that the caller wanted to know whether or not building a friendship with the man could win him back to the relationship. I believe the similarity in our interpretations is the consequence of the similar contextual assumptions activated by the caller’s account in the process of interpretation.

6.2.1.4 Summary

In this section, I found that when hearers of one culture activated assumptions that were not available to hearers of the other culture, their understanding of the relevance of what a caller was saying was in radically different ways, as in the cases of [6.1] and [6.2].

I found that when hearers in one culture activated contextual assumptions that hearers of the other culture also had access to, their understanding of the relevance of what a caller was saying was similar, as in the case of [6.3].

I found that my respondents were flexible in using their bicultural knowledge, in that they sometimes depended on their knowledge about a culture foreign to their own, as in the case of [6.1], but sometimes they depended on their cultural specific knowledge, as in the case of [6.2], to draw the inference.
6.2.2 Contextual assumptions activated in Chinese talk shows

In the next three subsections, I present evidence found in three Chinese extracts.

6.2.2.1 Parents’ decision in a romantic relationship

Below is my summary of the caller’s problem expressed in Chinese extract 4 (see Appendix 11):

The caller is trying to have a romantic relationship with a man five years younger than the caller herself. Because it is not seen as appropriate in China that an older woman has a romantic relationship with a younger man, their relationship is objected to by the man’s parents. My inference is that the caller’s problem is that she does not know how to persuade the man’s parents to accept her romantic relationship with their son, and therefore she asks advice on this.

In my analysis, I focus on the following key utterances.

[6.4]

(1) C: 我认识一个比我小五岁的男人我想和他在一起

I know a than I small five year of man I want and he together

I know a man five years younger than me, and I want to be with him

(2) C: 可他的家里不愿意

but he of family not agree

but his family do not agree

(3) C: 我该怎么做?

I should how do

What should I do?

(C01LY)
Upon hearing the above conversation, the initial interpretation that I came up with is that the caller did not know how to persuade the man’s parents to accept her inappropriate romantic relationship with their son.

The reason that I generated this interpretation is that I assumed, on the basis of my own understanding of parents’ influence on one’s romantic relationship in Chinese society, that the phrase ‘his family’ in (2) referred to ‘the caller’s man’s parents’. I then identified that the resulting propositions, made manifest by the caller’s utterances, as something like the following:

(a) The caller wants to have a romantic relationship with a man five years younger than the caller herself;

(b) This is objected by the man’s parents;

(c) The caller is asking what she should do in order to persuade the man’s parents’ to accept her relationship with their son.

I identified that the recovery of the proposition in (a) made the following contextual assumption immediately accessible:

(d) In Chinese society, it is not seen as appropriate for an older woman (say, 5 years older) to have a romantic relationship with a younger man because it is not seen as natural.

I combined the assumptions in (a) and (d) and drew the following contextual implication:

(e) The caller’s romantic relationship with the younger man is not seen as appropriate in China.
I was then led by the caller’s use of 返 (i.e. but) in (2) to access the propositions in (b-c), made manifest in the following context:

(f) Normally, one’s romantic relationship is affected by one’s parents’ opinions;

(g) If parents disagree with their child’s romantic relationship, then the child may try to persuade the parents to accept the relationship.

(h) The man’s parents disagree with their son’s relationship with the caller because it is not appropriate;

(i) The caller does not know how to persuade the man’s parents to accept her relationship with the man.

I combined the assumptions in (b-c) and (f-i) and drew the contextual implication I described earlier, namely that:

(j) The caller wants advice on what she should do to persuade the man’s parents to accept her inappropriate relationship with their son.

The assumption in (j) is the first line of interpretation to satisfy my expectation of relevance raised by the caller’s utterances, and therefore I accepted it as the intended interpretation of the caller, without looking any further alternative interpretations that might also be relevant. Hence, I consider the caller’s problem in this case to be that she does not know how to persuade her man’s parents to accept her inappropriate relationship with her younger man.
When discussing this call with the two groups, I first asked each group why the caller was telling us that she wanted to be in a relationship with a man five years younger than the caller herself.

**The English group responded:**

G: She wants to get someone else’s opinion to see if they think that him being five years younger is ok. like someone else’ perspective on the situation.

T: I guess it maybe like… not as common in China… like if in this country… five years age difference wouldn't usually matter. unless one of the people was like…a teenager… say that one person is fifteen the other one is twenty. that will be a problem. but one is twenty the other is twenty five. that’s not.

S: That’s indicating that that’s a problem. she's not actually said that that’s the problem.

G: She probably thinks she’s too old. she wants to know if the age gap is a problem.

A: Yeah that’s a good point actually. maybe she wants to attribute to that. maybe she’s also a bit weird.

J: I think in China it’s a bit strange for her to have an older woman than a man in a relationship like five-year difference is quite significant. I think specifically like older family wouldn’t agree with it, so I think she seeks justification whether five year is too much even though it wouldn’t be that strange in this country.

**The Chinese group responded:**

C: There is a big gap between them and also she is a lot older than the man…5 year gap not 1 year. so not appropriate.

G: Yeah not like this country…they don’t really care about this and a bachelor in this country can marry a lady with two or even three children which is unbelievable in China.

L: She is worried about that age gap and she is older than the man…and that’s not common in China and hard to accept.
The responses indicated that for the English group, the referent of the expression ‘the man is five years younger than the caller’ is somewhat distinct from that of the Chinese group. For the English group, this expression has been assigned different interpretations: G sees the issue of being 5-year older than her man as providing background information to the assumption the caller made about herself that ‘she is too old’; T and J made an immediate connection which links the caller’s case to their knowledge about Chinese culture. For example, J inferred that the issue of 5-year age gap ‘may not be common in China’ and made a point that in China it’s a bit strange ‘to have an older woman than a man in a relationship’. For the Chinese group, the expression ‘the man is five year younger than the caller’ refers to the assumption articulated in varying ways by members of this group that it is not an appropriate relationship if ‘a woman is a lot older than the man’. Although this assumption sounds similar to the point made by J in the English group, the Chinese group did not talk of it being about an issue with ‘older families’. Moreover, G, in the Chinese group, linked the issue of age gap to her knowledge of British culture, and inferred that British ‘don’t really care about this’. These responses indicate that both groups depended on their bicultural knowledge to make a comparison about the issue of age gap, to infer what the caller was trying to communicate.

I then asked each group the question of why they thought that it mattered if the man’s family did not agree with the relationship.

**The English group responded:**

T: It depends on like how serious the relationship is. like if this one has been going for a few years and you’re thinking of getting married. that will be because she’s going to join your family.
G: Clearly it implies that family is important and the family’s opinions about their relationship are obviously important.

A: It sounds like if the family doesn’t agree, it will be difficult for them to be together. whereas I think if in this country if the guy left home…he wouldn’t really care what the family think so much.

S: Presumably if his family is involved then this is a very serious relationship.

J: I think it’s the bonus. at the end of the day you’re an adult, you make the decision and you know yourself better than anyone else…so if you can get your family to like her then that’s good. but if they don’t then it doesn’t matter.

The Chinese group responded:

G: Parents’ idea is important and if the man’s parents don’t agree and she has to think it over and see whether that man is indeed ok for her.

C: It DOES matter. if it’s me…I’d like to listen to my parents’ idea before having a relationship with a man …but a lot of people don’t.

L: It is important. it determines whether she can be together with the man.

The responses indicated that members of both groups understood the caller’s statements as implying that she does care about the man’s family’s opinions about her relationship with the man. The two groups, however, differed in their assessment of the caller’s point about the man’s family’s opinions as to whether the parents’ acceptance is important. All the members of the Chinese group inferred that parents’ opinions were very important to one’s relationship. In contrast, the English group generated varying interpretations: G inferred that ‘approval is important’; A in the English group admitted that the approval sounded important for the caller, however, A made a direct connection between the caller’s issue and what he could experience in his own country, and inferred that if it were in UK, a guy ‘would not really care about the family’s opinions so much’. This indicated that A depended on his bicultural knowledge to infer the issue raised by the caller. The responses by J that ‘if you can
get your family to like her then that’s good, if they don’t it doesn’t matter’ implied that he did not take family’s opinions as significant in a relationship. More specifically, T and S extended the issue of parents’ opinion which they expressed as having to do with ‘how serious the relationship is’, and inferred that ‘if his family is involved then this is a serious relationship’.

Later in the interview, I asked them to sum up in their own words what problem they thought the caller wanted to solve.

The English group’s response was:

J: It looks like she actually wants practical advice rather than the other ones. she just seems to want some kind of affirmation or someone to tell them it’s ok.
S: Well ‘what should I do’ is quite an open ending, like…should she try and get approval from his family or should she just give the whole thing up.
G: I think you’re absolutely right.
T: Yeah she doesn’t know whether she still needs to try to get approval or to give up.
A: Yeah.

The Chinese group’s response was:

L: It sounds like she still wants to be together with that man although his family do not agree. so probably she is asking how she can be together with that young man.
G: I think her question implies many different issues. being older than a man is difficult to accept and this is a face issue. and it’s difficult to convince the man’s parents. also she herself may not be certain about her relationship with the man and after all the man is 5 years younger. so she may need someone to say OK you two can be together.
C: Not sure really … but it doesn’t sound like she wants to give up.

The responses to my first and second questions show that the English group did not make the assumptions articulated in varying ways by members of the Chinese group
that (a) it is not an appropriate relationship if a woman is 5 year older than a man, and
that (b) parents’ opinions ‘determine whether she can be together with that man’.
Because of these, the two groups vary in terms of their assessment of the problem the
caller wanted to solve: the Chinese group saw the caller’s utterances as designed to
communicate a problem of how the two can be together. For the English group, the
differences in the contextual assumptions they drew on to infer the issues about age
gap and family’s opinions on the man’s relationship, led to variations in their
understanding of the caller’s problems: one of them inferred that the caller wanted
someone to tell her that the two were ok, implying that the age gap was not too much;
all the other four inferred that the caller wanted to know whether she needed to try to
get approval or to give up the relationship. Neither of the groups produced
interpretations that overlapped with my own, but they did indicate that we all inferred
that the caller did care about the man’s parents’ opinions about her relationship with
the man and she did think about the issue of age gap.

To summarise, there are differences both between and within each group’s
understanding of the caller’s problem: the Chinese group as a whole saw the caller’s
utterances as designed to communicate the problem of how she can be together with
her younger man, rather than of how she can get approval from her young man’s
parents, which was the interpretation I formulated. The English group generated two
different interpretations: all but one of them saw the caller’s speech as designed to
solve the problem of whether she needed to get approval or to give up her relationship
with her younger man. One of them inferred that the caller merely wanted to have
someone’s opinion to confirm that her relationship with her younger man was
acceptable. As my analysis shows, it was the differences in the contextual
assumptions each group drew on that led to the differences in their interpretations. Moreover, there is evidence that both groups depended on their bi-cultural knowledge and drew a comparison between the two cultures about the issue of age gap raised by the caller.

6.2.2.2 Pregnancy before marriage

Below is my brief summary of the caller’s problem communicated in Chinese extract 5 (see Appendix 12):

The caller and his girlfriend have a sex life together, and now the girl is pregnant. Although they have agreed that the girlfriend should have an abortion, the caller cannot find her on the day when the abortion is to take place. The caller fears that his girlfriend intends to give birth to the baby, and then take it to the man’s parents’ home in order to force him to marry her. My inference is that the caller does not know whether or not he should marry the girlfriend for the sake of the baby, therefore he asks advice on this.

In my analysis, I focus on the following key utterances from this extract.

[6.5]

(1) C: 定好了 今天 去 打胎 可 她 现在 躲避 我
Agreed (particle) today to abortion but she now hide me

We have agreed that she should have an abortion today, but she is hiding from me.

她 现在 准备 把 孩子 生 下来 然后 把 孩子 给 我 家 送去
She now prepare hold child bear out then hold child give I home send

She is now planning to give birth to the baby and then take it to my home.
(2) C: 如果她把孩子生下来那我该怎么办呢
If she gives birth to the baby, what should I do?

(3) H: 那就是个法律的问题了你可以不娶她
That then be a law issue you may not marry her

但你是孩子的父亲你必须承担法律的责任了.
But you are the father, and you must take legal responsibility for the child.

Upon hearing the above conversation, the initial interpretation that occurred to me is that the caller did not know whether or not he should marry his girlfriend for the sake of the baby.

The reason that I generated this interpretation is that I assumed, based on my own existing knowledge about Chinese culture, that in the context of discussing a home for an unmarried person, the caller’s use of 我家 (i.e. my home) in (1) referred to the caller’s parents’ home, because in China, an unmarried person usually lives with his or her parents. I then identified the resulting propositions, made manifest by the caller’s utterances, as something like the following:

(a) The caller and his girlfriend have made a joint decision that she should have an abortion;
(b) She is hiding from the caller on the day when the abortion is to take place;
(c) She is planning to give birth to the baby;
(d) After the baby is born, she will take the baby to the caller’s parents’ home;
(e) The caller is asking what he should do.

I identified that the recovery of the proposition in (a) made the following contextual assumption immediately manifest:

(f) If a pregnant woman wants to have the abortion, then the woman does not want the baby.

I combined the assumptions in (a) and (f) and drew the following contextual implication:

(g) Neither the caller nor his girlfriend wants the baby.

However, the presence of 可 (i.e. but) in (1) led me to access the proposition in (b) in the following context:

(h) If a woman is hiding on the agreed abortion day, then she wants to keep the baby.

I combined the assumptions in (b) and (h) and drew the contextual implication:

(i) It is the caller himself that does not want the baby.

The caller’s stress assigned to 生 (i.e. give birth to) by his lengthened duration drew my attention and I was led to access the proposition in (c), made manifest in the following context:

(j) In Chinese society, if an unmarried couple have a baby, it will cause many problems to the baby and also to the couple themselves.

I combined the assumptions in (c) and (j) and drew the contextual implication:
(k) There will be many problems if the girlfriend gives birth to the baby.

I then identified that the recovery of the proposition in (d) made the following contextual assumptions immediately manifest:

(l) In the situation where one does not want the baby, the mother’s taking the baby to the father’s parents’ home is to show it to the father’s parents in order to let the parents pressurise the father to marry the baby’s mother for the sake of the baby.

I combined the assumptions in (d) and (l) and drew the contextual implication:

(m) The caller’s girlfriend intends to force the caller to marry her.

The evidence in (m) indicates that the verb 办 (i.e. do) in (2) refers to the caller’s choice of whether he should marry his girlfriend or not. On this basis, I identified that the proposition in (e) made manifest in the following context:

(n) The caller is not sure whether he should marry his girlfriend or not for the sake of the baby.

I combined the assumptions in (e) and (n) and drew the contextual implication I described earlier, namely that:

(o) The caller does not know whether or not he should marry his girlfriend.

The assumption in (o) is the first line of my interpretation to satisfy my expectation of relevance raised by the caller’s utterances, and therefore, I accepted it as the intended interpretation of the caller. Hence, I consider the caller’s problem to be that he does not know whether he should marry his girlfriend or not.
While discussing this call with my two groups, I first asked each group what they thought ‘my home’ referred to and why the caller was telling us that his girlfriend would take the baby to his home.

**The English group responded:**

S: Presumably his parents’ home or something like that.

T: Doesn’t really know where he lives…his house.

A: I assume his own house.

G: If she’s taken the baby to his parents’ home LOOK WHAT HAS HE DONE (laughter). maybe trying to shame him into doing something. like she wants to try in that particular way in front of his parents. that’s why I assume it could be his parent’s home.

A: I thought just taken to his house like. he should get support from this house for 18 years.

J: Maybe my home refers to his family as a whole. as you said, presented it to his family rather than an actual physical house.

**The Chinese group answered:**

G: Obviously his parents’ home because they are not married. if she takes the baby to his parents’ home. the parents will obviously pressurise him to marry her for the sake of the baby.

C: Parents’ home. I assume the girl herself does not want to bring it up but she wants to keep it. anyway that’s her own baby. and I think this is probably our culture ... a man’s parents usually love grandchild dearly and they are the best candidates who can bring it up ...and also I assume she doesn’t necessarily want to marry him. but she wants him to take the responsibility.

L: I agree parents’ home but I think her aim is to force him to marry her.

The responses indicated that the two groups varied in terms of the referents assigned to the term ‘my home’. The Chinese group as a whole appeared to take it to be the caller’s parents’ home, and inferred that taking the baby to the parent’s home was to
force the caller to marry the girlfriend. For the English group, the term ‘my home’ in
this context referred to the caller’s home. Their statement that ‘presumably his
parents’ home’ indicated that ‘parents’ home’ is also the referent which this group
provided for what this term referred to. Although G, in the English group, appeared to
overlap with the point made by the Chinese group, in that G did infer that this
expression referred to the caller’s parents’ home, he talked of it as assuming that
taking the baby to the parents’ home was a way to shame the caller into doing
something, without being specific about what that ‘something’ might be. More
specifically, in response to my second question, C, in the Chinese group, related the
issue raised by the caller to her own ‘culture’, and inferred that taking the baby to the
caller’s parents’ home was a way of wanting ‘him to take the responsibility’. This
indicates that she depended on her Chinese cultural specific knowledge to infer the
issue raised by the caller.

Later in the interview, I asked each group to summarise in their own words what
problem they thought the caller wanted to solve.

**The English group responded:**

T: The baby.
S: He doesn’t want the baby.
A: Illegitimate child on the way, he doesn’t want it, he doesn’t know how to deal with
it.
G: The child’s mother is a bit crazy. It’s quite a big problem actually. I did know a girl
in high school who said her life plan was basically to find a rich man … sleep with
him and she had his kid and he would be forced to look after both of them for 18
years and then find another man to do the same thing.
J: I still stick to what I just said he doesn’t understand what he is required to do
according to law. That’s his problem.
The Chinese group responded:

L: To marry or not to marry her.
C: A big problem (laughter). yeah I agree that’s his problem and also I think he wants to know whether he should take responsibility for the baby.
G: He wants to listen to the host’s opinion about whether he should marry or not.

Their responses to my first question show that the members of the English group did not have, as part of their knowledge, the assumption articulated in varying ways by members of the Chinese group that taking the baby to the caller’s parents’ home was ‘to force the caller to marry his girlfriend’. Because of this, the two groups drew on different assumptions when later asked to explain what problem the caller intended to solve. For example, L, in the Chinese group, drew on her previously articulated assumptions that taking the baby to the parents’ home was a way to force the caller to marry his girlfriend, and inferred that the caller’s problem was that he did not know whether he should ‘marry her’. In contrast, A, in the English group, drew on his previously articulated assumption that taking the baby to the caller’s own home was a way to show that the baby should get support from this house for 18 years, and to infer that the caller’s problem was that he did not know how to deal with a child he did not want. The Chinese group did indicate that their interpretations were similar to my own, but they also talked of the responsibility the caller needed to take for the baby. Members of the English group differed in their views as to what the caller’s problem was about: one of them inferred the caller’s problem to be that ‘he does not understand what is required according to law’. The other four inferred that the caller’s problem was about the baby. Neither line of their interpretations was the same as my own, but it did imply that the caller’s remarks were about the baby.
To summarise, there are differences both between and within the groups in understanding the caller’s problem. As regards the Chinese group, the caller’s problem was that he did not know whether or not he should marry his girlfriend. The English group itself generated two different interpretations: (a) the caller was uncertain as to what was required of him, according to law, and (b) the caller did not know how to deal with a baby he did not want. There was also evidence that both groups depended on their own culture specific knowledge to infer what the caller was saying.

6.2.2.3 Children’s New Year greeting

The following is my brief summary of the caller’s problem communicated in Chinese extract 6 (see Appendix 13):

The caller is very upset that the daughter that she had with her ex-husband didn’t give her a New Year greeting call. The caller wants to know whether she should ring her daughter. My inference is that the caller’s problem is that she does not know whether she should break the Chinese tradition to phone her daughter first during the New Year, and therefore she asks advice on this.

My analysis focuses on the following key utterances.

[6.6]

(1) C: 这 孩子 到 现在 过了 春节 这么 长时间了
   The child till now gone spring holiday such long time
   Even such a long time after the New Year
一 直 不 给 我 来 个 电 话 就 是 等 我 给 她 挂 电 话。
Always no give I come a call just wait I give her hang phone
She hasn’t phoned me yet, she just waits for me to call her.

(2) C: 我 心 里 不 平 衡 红 梅 我 现 在 给 不 给 她 挂 这 个 电 话。
I heart no balance HongMei I now give no give her hang this call
I’m very upset. HongMei, do you think I need to call her?

(3) H: 你 现 在 给 她 发 短 信 吗?
You now give her send short letter ?
Have you sent her a message?
(C02HM)

The initial interpretation that occurred to me when I heard the above exchange was that the caller did not know whether she should phone her daughter during the Chinese New Year.

The reason that I generated this interpretation is that I assumed, in the context of discussing the caller’s daughter’s not having phoned the caller during the New Year, that both the phrase 这孩子 (i.e. the child) and the pronoun 她 (i.e. she or her) referred to the caller’s daughter. I then identified the resulting propositions, made manifest by the caller’s utterances, as something like the following:

(a) The caller’s daughter has not phoned the caller a long time after the New Year;
(b) The child just expects a call from the caller;
(c) The caller is asking whether she should phone her daughter.
I was led by the caller’s stress in the form of the lengthened duration assigned to the phrase 过了春节这么长时间了 (i.e. such a long time after the New Year) to access the proposition in (a), made manifest in the following context:

(d) Chinese New Year is a significant festival for Chinese people and at that time they expect to be together with or hear from their children.

I combined the assumptions in (a) and (d) and drew the following contextual implication:

(e) The caller had a strong expectation that her child would call her, but the expectation has not been fulfilled.

I was then led by the caller’s stress assigned to the pronouns 我 (i.e. me) and 她 (i.e. her) and access the proposition (b), made manifest in the following context:

(f) Children are expected to call parents and not the other way round.

I combined the assumptions in (b) and (f) and drew the contextual implication:

(g) The daughter is not acting according to the expectations.

I then identified the proposition in (c) made manifest in the following context:

(h) The caller is trying to find out whether she needs to phone the child.

I combined the assumptions in (c) and (h) and drew the contextual implication I described earlier, namely that:

(i) The caller does not know whether she needs to phone her child.
The assumption in (i) is the first line of my interpretation to satisfy my expectation of relevance raised by the caller’s utterances, and I accepted it as the intended interpretation of the caller. Therefore, I consider the caller’s problem in this case to be that she does not know whether or not she needs to phone her child.

When discussing this call with my respondents, I first asked each group the question of whether they thought that it mattered to the caller that she did not receive her daughter’s call during the New Year.

**The English group responded:**

J: A call from her child would indicate her child cares about her.
A: she’s kind of expected the child would call her, the child kind of fails to do what she meant to do.
S: I think it matters to the caller because she wants to have a kind of like communication from her daughter.
G: She is just thinking her child doesn’t care about her.
T: Yeah.

**The Chinese group responded:**

L: Of course it’s important. to call parents to say Happy New Year no matter where you are and that’s our tradition but if I didn’t call them for some reasons they would call me and ask me if I am ok.
G: No doubt to say Happy New Year. actually I call them almost on all the holidays not just for New Year. if I don’t…my parents would be worried and they might also think I’m too busy and they would call me.
C: So do my parents. so before they call me I call them.

The responses indicated that members of both groups took the call from the child as significant to the caller. The groups varied, however, in terms of their perception of the relevance of the child’s call: why it was important to the caller. The English saw
the call as indicating that the child cared about the parents. For the Chinese group, however, the issue of calling parents was specifically related to the Chinese tradition of exchanging a New Year greeting, assuming that without this greeting call, parents would be worried about their child.

Later in the interview, I asked them to sum up what problem they thought the caller wanted to solve.

**The English group responded:**

T: I think because she expects the child to call her she thinks it's the right thing to do. Clearly she wants to talk to her daughter but she doesn’t think she should call her first. so that’s why she’s called up to the radio station to ask whether it’s ok for the mum to call her daughter first. that's what she's asking.

J: It's strange it's such a private matter. I mean who calls who first it’s only between the person who is on the phone. no one else would even know. it seems so strange to be something to swallow your pride about.

S: That’s not respectable. she’s like even in Chinese New Year she doesn’t call the mum to say like ‘Good Luck’ and Congratulations.

G: Clearly the mums don’t call the daughter in Chinese New Year, so why would she expect her daughter to.

A: Does she really think she can solve the problem …on the phone.

**The Chinese group responded:**

L: She wants to know whether she should call her daughter first ...actually I feel like the caller and her daughter must have some other problems …otherwise she would call her child directly like all the other mums do.

C: Yeah I’ve got the same feeling too.

G: Agree.
On the basis of evidence such as this, it became apparent that although both groups understood what the caller was saying in similar ways, in that they both inferred that the caller wanted to know whether she should phone her daughter, they differed in their concern to ask for advice. That is: why the caller should ask about it at all. The Chinese group appeared to indicate that they were interpreting the caller’s account in the same way as I had, but they extended the issue raised by the caller to ‘some other problems’ between the caller and her child, and inferred that ‘the caller would call her child directly’ otherwise. The English group produced interpretations that were not the same as my own, in that the group specifically related the issue raised by the caller about her child’s calling first to the caller’s ‘pride’, and inferred that the caller’s concern was with how her calling her child first would ‘swallow her pride’.

I am also aware of the differences between members within the English group in their understanding of the caller’s concern about her child’s call. For example, J’s repeated use of the word ‘strange’ indicated that he felt that the mum’s strong expectation about her child’s initiating a call was unacceptable. Similarly, G’s point that if ‘mums don’t call the daughter in Chinese New Year, so why would she expect her daughter to call her’ indicated that he regarded the mum’s expecting her child’s call as unfair, but S, on the contrary, inferred that a child should call their parents in the New Year to show respect for the parents. Nevertheless, these responses indicated that even members with the same cultural backgrounds sometimes interpreted what was heard in different ways.

6.2.2.4 Summary

In this section, I found that (1) when hearers of one culture activated assumptions that were not available to hearers of the other culture under study, their understanding of
the relevance of what a caller was saying differed as in the case of [6.4], [6.5] and [6.6]; (2) when hearers within the same culture activated assumptions that were not available to the other hearers in the same group, their understanding of the relevance of what a caller said differed; (3) when these bicultural individuals interpreted a caller’s remarks, they were flexible in using their bicultural knowledge, by making a comparison, to interpret the meaning of a caller.

6.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to analyse the contextual assumptions hearers from China and Britain drew on when they interpreted the problems expressed by callers. My analysis brought out variations in interpretation, both between and within the groups, but there was also a consistent pattern that indicated that members of each group were drawing on a set of assumptions about what a caller was saying that were not available to the other group. More specifically, what this indicated was that the two groups interpreted what a caller said in radically different ways. Moreover, there were patterns that indicated that members within the same group were drawing on a set of assumptions about what a caller said that were not available to the other members. This indicated that members within the same speech community sometimes interpreted the meaning of a caller in different ways. There were also patterns that indicated that the bicultural individuals were very flexible in their use of bicultural knowledge: sometimes, they depended on their own cultural specific knowledge, and sometimes they used their knowledge of a culture foreign to their own, but sometimes they relied on their bicultural knowledge by making a comparison, to infer what a caller meant by what she said.

All the above findings form the basis for my discussion in Chapter Seven.
Chapter Seven: Discussion

7.1 Introduction
In this chapter, my goals are: (a) to summarise and evaluate the findings reported in this thesis, and (b) to demonstrate the significance of my findings in the context of existing scholarship by showing that the approaches adopted in existing studies of culture and communication are not appropriate as a means of characterising cultural differences.

I begin my discussion, in Section 7.2, with a summary of my findings on differences in communication between MC and BE in the context of radio advice talk shows. Then in Sections 7.2.1, 7.2.2 and 7.2.3, I show how the relevance-theoretic approach I adopted in my thesis enables me to reveal and explain cultural differences in communication in a more effective way than previous studies of culture and communication. Subsequent to this, I discuss, in Section 7.3, how my findings contribute to our understanding of cultural differences in communication between individualistic and collectivistic cultures, by focusing on Britain and China. I conclude this chapter with Section 7.4, in which I argue that on the basis of my previous discussions, it is the differences in contextual assumptions that are the cause of variations in interpretation, and it is the cause of cultural differences in communication; here, I also argue that there is no simple direct connection between culture and communication style, and that the use of direct and indirect style is not appropriate for characterising cultures.
7.2 Findings on differences in communication between MC and BE

In this section, I summarise and evaluate what my empirical research has found about cultural differences in communication between MC and BE. I show how Relevance Theory provides a descriptive vocabulary and an explanatory framework that enable me to describe in greater detail the socio-cultural phenomenon that previous studies of culture and communication are unable to do.

My data analysis shows that in the context of radio advice talk shows, (a) utterances produced by callers from China and Britain both require some degree of inferential work on the part of a hearer; (b) both sets of callers rely on markers of procedural meaning to guide the interpretation process being carried out by the hearer; (c) there is no correlation between culture and communication style, and (d) different interpretations are available if different contextual assumptions are activated in response to the utterances that make up my data. In the following three subsections, I show how the relevance-theoretic approach that I adopted in my thesis enables me to explain the observed phenomenon in a way that approaches adopted in previous studies of culture and communication preclude.

7.2.1 All communication is indirect

In this section, I show why the relevance theoretic approach I adopted in my thesis enables me to explain the issue of context better than the approaches adopted in existing studies of culture and communication. I further show how the relevance-theoretic approach in this thesis enables me to explain the process of inference in a more effective way than previous studies of culture and communication. I also show what the relevance-theoretic approach in my thesis adds to studies of culture and communication in the analysis of communication style.
7.2.1.1 All utterances need a context

I begin my discussion of cultural differences in communication with the direct and indirect distinction made by previous studies of culture and communication. I then show how and why this distinction is seen as problematic from the perspective of Relevance Theory.

As I reviewed in Section 2.2.1.2, when arguing that one style counts as direct and another style counts as indirect, culture and communication researchers tend to attribute the differences between the two types of styles to the way in which the meaning of an utterance is expressed. For example, Adair and Brett (2004, 161) argue that when a speaker is using a direct style in a given utterance, the meaning of that utterance ‘is embedded in words or acts’, whereas when a speaker is using an indirect style in a given utterance, the meaning of that utterance ‘is conveyed not just by a person’s words or acts, but also by the contexts in which those words or acts are communicated’. This implies that for Adair and Brett, some utterances may be understood without needing to draw on context.

However, from the perspective of Relevance Theory, what this distinction indicates is that these scholars do not engage with the pragmatics of utterance interpretation. As I indicated in Section 3.2.1, what a speaker communicates is merely a piece of evidence of her ‘thought’ or assumption, and ‘no assumption is simply decoded, and that the recovery of any assumption requires an element of inference’ (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 182). The required inferential process is governed by the principle of relevance, in that the meaning of an utterance may only be inferred with reference to the context in which it occurs by following the principle of relevance. This understanding leads us to assume that, as I have already shown in my literature review and my data analysis,
context is essential in interpreting any utterance. This means that all forms of utterance produced by speakers from any culture can only be meaningful if they are interpreted within a context.

To illustrate how context is involved in interpreting any utterance, I now take one of Adair and Brett’s (2004) cases, as I cited in Section 2.2.1.2 as an example.

[7.1]

[A] negotiator from a LC culture might suggest that his company is financially weak that without a good price, his company will not be able to buy the product at all (Adair and Brett 2004, 162).

Adair and Brett categorise this case as being direct on the premise that ‘the negotiator’s message is explicit’ (2004, 162). As indicated in Section 2.2.1.2, the above example is a report from an utterance produced by a negotiator, it is unclear what actual utterance could be. For the purpose of my analysis, I therefore paraphrase the report on the basis of my understanding of the meaning of the message, as follows:

My company is financially weak, and without a good price, my company will not be able to buy the product at all.

Since the meaning of the expressions like ‘financially weak’ and ‘a good price’ is not made explicit, according to Recanati (2003, 7), these expressions are in need of ‘saturation’ (i.e. a pragmatic process of contextual value-assignment that is triggered (and made obligatory) by something in the sentence itself). I assume, in the context of ‘buying products’, that the expression ‘financially weak’ may well refer to ‘not
having much money to buy products at a higher price’, and that the term ‘a good price’ may well refer to ‘a cheaper price’. Consequently, the assumption derived from the paraphrase would be something like the following:

My company does not have much money to buy products at a higher price, and without a cheaper price my company will not be able to buy the product at all.

Although Adair and Brett (2004, 162) argue that the meaning of the negotiator from a LC culture is explicit, and they also attribute their own interpretation, namely that ‘if you do not give us a good price, we will not be able to buy from you’ to the message, since they claim that context is not required for communication in LC cultures, they are therefore unable to explain how that meaning is arrived at.

Drawing on Relevance Theory, it is relatively easy to see the contextual assumptions that hearers call on and yet are ignored by Adair and Brett as follows:

To infer the relevance of what the negotiator was saying, the interlocutors would first assume that the negotiator’s utterance is relevant to them, and they then resolve the ambiguities in the utterance by assuming that ‘my company’ refers to the business company the negotiator belongs to, and ‘the product’ refers to the product being offered, and also the one the negotiator wants to buy. All of this requires the interlocutors to draw on context, so the foreground is: even working out what is literally said (i.e. explicatures) is context dependent. Only after contextually disambiguating the vague expressions can negotiators identify the resulting propositions, made manifest by the negotiator’s utterance, as something like the following:
(a) The negotiator’s company does not have much money to buy products at a higher price;
(b) The negotiator’s company will not be able to buy the product offered.

The recovery of the propositions in (a) and (b) makes the following contextual assumption immediately accessible:

(c) If a company does not have much money to buy products at a higher price, then the company is only able to buy a product at a lower price;
(d) If the product price is higher, then the company is not able to buy it.

A synthesis of the assumptions in (a-b) and (c-d) would lead the interlocutors to draw the contextual implication that:

(e) The negotiator wants a lower price.

It is evident, contrary to Adair and Brett’s (2004) claim that context is not necessary for communication in LC cultures, my analysis shows that utterances produced by the negotiator from a LC culture do, indeed, need a context. As I have shown, assumption (e) could be derived only in the context of the assumptions (c) and (d) together. The implication is that without drawing on context, the assumption (e) is not self-evident to a hearer or an analyst. Although Adair and Brett (2004, 161) acknowledge that people in HC (collectivistic) cultures need to draw on context in order to understand what a speaker is saying, what they do not acknowledge is that this is actually the case for all forms of utterance produced by people from both HC and LC cultures. This indicates that Adair and Brett’s (2004) claim ignores a fundamental aspect of the communication process.
My data is full of instances that indicate that context is integral to the interpretation of all forms of utterance. I now take only two as an illustration, one from each set:

[7.2]

C: my partner Mark erm he is ok. I love him to pieces and all that but he is just … he’s not very happy with like all the stretch marks and all that.

(E07AD, see Section 5.2.1.2 of this thesis)

[7.3]

C: 他 现在 跟 我 在 一个 屋 里 住 呀！
he now and I in a room in live (exclamation)

He is living in the same room with me.

(C03XS, see Section 5.2.2.1 of this thesis)

In [7.2], I inferred that the caller’s utterances were designed to communicate the problem that the caller’s stretch marks are having a negative effect on her sexual relationship with her partner Mark. To derive this interpretation, I initially had access to the contextual assumptions about British culture, made manifest by the caller’s utterance, that (i) if two people are love partners, then they have a long-term stable sexual relationship. By combining what the caller explicitly said with the assumption in (i), I drew the contextual implication (ii) that the caller must have a stable sexual relationship with Mark. Because the caller used ‘but’ to introduce her subsequent utterance, I was led to activate another set of contextual assumptions (iii) that if a man is not happy with the stretch marks his partner has, then the man would find his partner sexually unattractive, and (iv) If a man finds his partner sexually unattractive, then the man would no longer have a sexual relationship with the partner. Only when I combined the assumptions in (ii) and (iii) and (iv) would I finally draw the
contextual implication (v), namely that it is the caller’s stretch marks that are having a negative effect on her sexual relationship with Mark. If we compare the assumption in (v) with the new information in the form of the caller’s utterance, we can see that there is nothing in the linguistically encoded content of the caller’s utterances that expresses the assumption in (v), and this meaning is actually derived through my assumptions about love partnership in Britain, together with the information conveyed in the caller’s utterances. This means that assumption (v) is a context-dependent interpretation.

In [7.3], I inferred that the caller’s utterances are designed to communicate a problem that it is difficult for her to end her romantic relationship with her boyfriend who is already married. To arrive at this interpretation, I initially had access to contextual assumptions, made manifest by the caller’s utterances, that (i) when two people in a romantic relationship live in one room, they normally live together consensually, and that (ii) if they live together consensually, it would be difficult for one of them to get rid of the other. Only when I combined the newly presented information (i.e. the caller’s utterance) with the contextual assumptions in (i) and (ii) could I draw the contextual implication (iii) that it is difficult for the caller to end her relationship with her man. The assumption in (iii) is not self-evident to me, but a result of the interaction between the information conveyed in the caller’s utterance and the contextual assumptions (i) and (ii) that I drew on in response to the utterance. Therefore, it is only with reference to context that I can generate the assumption in (iii).

In the light of the above analysis, it is clear that unlike the study by Adair and Brett, who argue that context is required for communication in HC cultures only, evidence
from my data indicates that context is involved in interpreting utterances made by speakers from British culture, which as Hall (1976) argued, is a LC culture, as well as an individualistic culture argued by Hofstede (1980). Therefore, I argue that the distinction that Adair and Brett make between the use of direct and indirect style in different cultures, which emphasises that context is the key for understanding communication in HC cultures only, is problematic.

To sum up, I have shown that my study, which draws on Relevance Theory, provides evidence to indicate that context is an essential part of the utterance interpretation process. In the next section, I show that the interpretation of an utterance in a context determines that inference is required for understanding utterances made by speakers from cultures that have been categorised as HC and those from cultures that have been categorised as LC.

7.2.1.2 Inference required for communication in cultures that have been categorised as HC and LC

This section aims to demonstrate that utterances produced by speakers of cultures that have been categorised as HC and LC both require the hearer to make inferences. I show that although existing studies of culture and communication claim that understanding communication in HC cultures involves a process of inference, because they neither acknowledge that this process is also required for communication in LC cultures, nor do they make explicit how hearers in HC cultures carry out the process of inference, they are therefore unable to explain how one style is direct and another style is indirect. I show that the relevance theoretic approach that I adopted in this thesis not only acknowledges that a process of inference is required for communication in cultures that have been categorised as HC and LC, but also makes
explicit how the process of inference works, I am therefore able to explain that the distinction between the use of direct and indirect style in different cultures is misleading.

As I reviewed in Sections 2.2.2.3, while addressing cultural differences according to style, studies of culture and communication suggest that the difference between direct and indirect communication is that the former requires a hearer to decode the meaning of a speaker, whereas the latter requires a hearer to make some inference, as in the following quotation:

[LC] refers to communication patterns of direct verbal mode…, the speaker is expected to be responsible for constructing a clear, persuasive message that the listener can decode easily. [HC] refers to communication patterns of indirect verbal mode …the receiver or interpreter of the message assumes the responsibility to infer the hidden or contextual meaning of the message (Ting-Toomey 1999, 100-101).

However, as I discussed in the previous section, an utterance produced by a speaker of any culture ‘is only a piece of evidence about the communicator’s intentions, and has to be used inferentially and in a context’ (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 170). This intention can only emerge if a hearer or an analyst processes the evidence in a specific context, by carrying out a process of inference. When a hearer or an analyst has recognised the intention, it is the result of inference made by a hearer or an analyst. In the case of direct and indirect communication, this means that utterances produced by speakers from high and low context cultures all require inference. This is in direct opposition to the view held by Ting-Toomey (1999).
From the perspective of Relevance Theory, the reason that different forms of utterances all require inference is that, when the utterances are processed within the context in which they are produced (via interaction between old and new information), they all lead a hearer to undertake the following three basic stages of inferential processes:

(i) The hearer assigns a propositional form to the utterance by resolving ambiguities in the language used and assigning referents to deictic words;

(ii) The hearer selects a context (a set of contextual assumptions) that would allow the speaker's utterance to be perceived as relevant;

(iii) By a synthesis of evidence of (i) and (ii), the hearer makes an assumption of the speaker’s intention.

(Sperber and Wilson 1995, 108, also see Section 3.1.2 of this thesis).

By way of illustration that inference is essential to understanding all utterances, I now use Ting-Toomey’s own data (see Section 2.2.1.2 for the details) as an example.

[7.4]

(A dispute between two European American neighbours)

Jane (knocks on her neighbour’s open window): Excuse me, it is 11 o’clock already, and your high-pitched opera singing is really disturbing my sleep. Please stop your gargling noises immediately! I have an important job interview tomorrow morning, and I want to get a good night sleep. I really need this job to pay my rent.
Diane (*resentfully*): Well, this is the only time I can rehearse my opera! I’ve an important audition coming up tomorrow. You’re not the only one that is starving, you know. I also need to pay my rent. Stop being so self-centred!

Ting-Toomey categorises the talk involving two Japanese women as indirect (see Section 2.2.1.2), but categorises the talk between the two Americans in the above dispute as direct, on the premise that ‘their interaction exchange is direct, to the point’, and Jane and Diane ‘use the strengths of low-context, explicit talk in dealing with the conflict issue openly and nonevaluatively’. This implies that, for Ting-Toomey, when hearing the above utterances made by the two Americans, hearers do not need to undertake a process of inference to identify the intention of the communicator. Drawing upon Relevance Theory, it is relatively easy to see the inferential work that hearers need to undertake, and yet which is ignored by Ting-Toomey, as follows:

From the relevance theoretic point of view, upon hearing Jane’s utterance ‘*please stop your gargling noises immediately*’, Diane would first assume that the information carried in the utterance is relevant to her, and she then resolves the ambiguities by assuming that ‘*your*’ refers to Diane’s, ‘*gargling noises*’ refers to the noise made by her own singing, and ‘*immediately*’ refers to the moment after the utterance is made. Diane would then identify the following resulting proposition:

(a) Jane is telling Diane to stop singing right now.

On the basis of previous information that ‘*your high-pitched opera singing is really disturbing my sleep*’, Diane may identify that the recovery of the proposition in (a) makes the following contextual assumption immediately accessible:
(b) In normal circumstances, if one tells the other to stop singing because of disturbing one’s sleep, then this one is making a compliant.

The two assumptions in (a) and (b) together would lead Diane to draw the contextual implication that:

(c) Jane is making a complaint about her (i.e. Diane’s) singing.

In the light of above analysis, it is clear that in the culture that Ting-Toomey characterises as using a direct style, it is necessary to employ an inferential process to interpret an utterance. Although Ting-Toomey (1998, 104) acknowledges that an utterance produced by a communicator in a HC culture like Japan and China requires a process of inference, what she ignores is that ‘every act of interpretation involves inference’ (Clark 2009b, 6), and that the process of inference contributes to understanding all forms of utterance produced by speakers from cultures that have been categorised as HC and LC. Moreover, although Ting-Toomey does, indeed, acknowledge that a process of inference is required for communication in HC cultures, she does not explain how that inference is made (see Section 2.2.2.3). Because of this, Ting-Toomey is unable to explain how one style can be categorised as direct and another style can be categorised as indirect. As I showed above, even the initial stage, where Diane works out what proposition the utterance produced by Jane is likely to be expressing (by assigning referents, resolving lexical ambiguities and enrichment) is an inferential process. As I showed, without Diane’s (as a hearer) inferential work, by going through the above three stages, the assumption in (c) cannot emerge. This indicates that within the framework of Relevance Theory, direct and indirect forms of style categorised by Ting-Toomey (1998) both fall into the
category of indirect style, in that they both require some inferential work on the part of a hearer.

There is a great deal of evidence in my data that indicates that in most cases, neither set of callers indicates their meaning unequivocally, but they both produce utterances that require a substantial amount of inference (see Chapter Five). I now take two examples from my data as an illustration, one from each set.

[7.5]

(1) H: Was he working at the time to fund his //

(2) C: //He is al … this is it he’s always working he’s ALWAYS ALWAYS working.

(3) H: Alright so why was he borrowing cash off you then?

(E01GT)

[7.6]

(1) C: 我 喜欢上了一个比我大一轮的一个女的．

    I like (post-verb particle) a than I big a round of a lady

    I’m in a relationship with a lady who is A ROUND OLDER than me.

(2) H: 啊 (hahaha).

    Ah (hahaha)

    Ah (hahaha).

(C02LY)

In [7.5], although the caller ostensively communicated the assumption (i) that ‘her partner had enough money, and therefore did not have to borrow money from the caller’ by her utterance of ‘he’s always always working’, she did this, in Sperber and Wilson’s (1995, 178) terms, ‘not by saying so, but by providing direct evidence’ in the form of her utterance that he had. By contrast, there is nothing in the encoded content of the caller’s utterance in (2) that expresses the assumption in (i). I derive
that assumption purely inferentially, on the basis that working excessively (along with my existing knowledge of working in paid employment) means that the partner had enough money. Therefore, the utterances produced by the English caller require inference.

Likewise, in [7.6], the caller’s statement communicates the information (ii) that ‘his romantic relationship with his lady is seen as inappropriate in Chinese society’ by his utterance in [7.6 (1)]. Again, the caller did this by providing direct evidence that it is. Notice that the assumption in (ii) does not follow just from the information carried in the utterance in [7.6 (1)]. It is actually the result of inference that I make by combining the new information with other immediately accessible contextual assumptions, which in this case appear to be my knowledge of Chinese culture that it is not an appropriate romantic relationship in Chinese society if a woman is a lot older than a man. Therefore, the utterances produced by the Chinese caller also involve some inferential work being carried out on the part of a hearer.

As the above analysis has shown, inference is an integral part of interpreting all forms of utterance produced by speakers from both HC and LC cultures. This, again, indicates that the direct and indirect communication that Ting-Toomey (1999) identifies both fall into the category of indirect communication, in that they both require inference. On this basis, I take the stance that the distinction between the use of direct and indirect style that Ting-Toomey employs to categorise cultures is misleading.

To sum up, the evidence that my study has brought to light in my own data analysis adds a layer of description and explanation to the study by Ting-Toomey, namely that
utterances produced by speakers from cultures that have been categorised as HC and LC all require a process of inference. As I show later in Section 7.2.3, the acknowledgement that inference is involved in interpreting any utterance produced by speakers from the two types of cultures has further implications for our understanding of differences in interpretation, which is important for our understanding the relationship between culture and communication.

In the next section, I discuss how Relevance Theory provides an account that enables me to add a new level of explanation of the issue of communication style to studies of culture and communication, which such studies currently do not have.

7.2.1.3 Markers of procedural meaning occur in cultures that have been categorised as HC and LC

In this section, I show how my data analysis provides evidence to indicate that the issue of communication style can be addressed by focusing on markers of procedural meaning. I also show how evidence from my empirical analysis indicates that communication style of cultures that have been categorised as HC and LC is indirect, and that speakers from cultures that have been categorised as HC and LC use markers of procedural meaning to guide a hearer’s interpretation process.

In Section 2.2.1.2, I showed that the previous studies of culture and communication have characterized individualistic (LC) and collectivistic (HC) cultures as using direct and indirect styles respectively. However, as my discussion in the previous two sections shows, utterances produced by speakers belonging to both types of culture, i.e. speakers of MC and BE, use communication that is indirect. In the light of the application of Relevance Theory in my data analysis, I argue that the notion of direct and indirect communication as a way of addressing cultural differences should be
abandoned. In what follows, by drawing on Relevance Theory, my study offers an alternative perspective from which the issue of communication style can be studied.

In Section 3.2.2, I showed that within the framework of Relevance Theory, ‘there is no guarantee that the interpretation that satisfies the hearer’s expectation of relevance will be the correct, i.e. the intended, one’ (Wilson 1994, 47). As a result, a speaker who wants to be understood engages in the communication by using markers of procedural meaning which enable a hearer to recognize her intentions. On that basis, I argued that the styles of speakers of any culture are indirect, including those that relevant literature has defined as using ‘direct style’. Drawing on Relevance Theory, I show that this is exactly what happens in my data as well as the data provided by previous studies of culture and communication. I now take one case from Adair and Brett’s data (2004), as I cited in Section 2.2.2.2, as an example. According to Adair and Brett, in response to a question of whether a product can be sold at the price offered, a seller from a HC culture tends to say something like (a) to imply that the price offered for the product is too low to be accepted. A buyer from a LC culture tends to say something like (b) to make a direct refusal to offer a higher price.

[7.7]

**Indirect style**
(a) We are an award-winning film studio and therefore get higher prices for our production.

**Direct style**
(b) Even though your studio has won awards for its film series, you’ve moved this series into syndication a year early, so you cannot expect a high price under those market conditions (adapted from Adair and Brett 2004, 165).
As I reviewed in Section 2.2.2.2, Adair and Brett categorise (a) as indirect, but categorise (b) as direct. However, drawing on Relevance Theory, we can see that both set of utterances themselves do not explicitly indicate the intended meaning. For example, although the negotiator in (a) has ostensively communicated the assumption (i) that the negotiator wants higher price for the production the negotiator’s film studio has produced by her utterance, this assumption, in Sperber and Wilson’s (1995, 178) terms, bears no relation to the semantic content of the utterance. Interlocutors need to undertake a process of inference to derive that assumption. To help hearers identify this assumption, the negotiator uses a marker ‘therefore’ in her utterance. The contribution of the connective does not impact on the propositional meaning of the utterance that contains it, but it is there to indicate that the segment before the connective is a premise, and segment introduced by ‘therefore’ is a conclusion.

The process of inference is also required for understanding (b). What the negotiator in (b) is communicating but not explicitly saying is that (ii) we cannot offer you a higher price because your studio has not moved the series into syndication for long. Since the negotiator does not explicitly state the relationship between the price of the series and the length of the series’ being moved into syndication, I do not really understand what the negotiator meant by saying ‘you’ve moved this series into syndication a year early’ and its relationship with ‘price’. However, I simplistically assume, based on my understanding of the connective ‘so’ that it may imply that the price of the series is devalued, because of the short period of being moved into syndication. This indicates that the proposition that precedes ‘so’ is not self-evidently meaningful. It is the negotiator’s use of ‘so’ that gives the interlocutors a clue that there is a casual relationship between the propositions expressed in the two states divided by ‘so’. As a
result, the interlocutors derive the assumption in (ii) with the least inferential effort. It is plausible to claim that in both cases, without the help of these connectives, it may not be easy for the interlocutors to interpret the utterances in accordance with the way they are intended.

As seen in the above two cases, both cultures rely on inferential work being carried out on the part of the hearer, and to that extent, both are ‘indirect’. As my analysis of Adair and Brett’s data shows, it is the presence of markers of procedural meaning that makes the inference easier. What this indicates is that, within the framework of Relevance Theory, markers of procedural meaning are used in cultures that Adair and Brett have categorised as using ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ style.

The use of markers of procedural meaning is not limited to the data provided by Adair and Brett. As my data analysis in Chapter Five shows, the inferential processes are involved in interpreting utterances produced by callers from both China and Britain. In order to help hearers to work out with the least processing effort the problems they were attempting to articulate, both sets of callers help the hearers by using markers of procedural meaning in their utterances. To illustrate, I now take two examples from my data, one from each set.

[7.8]

(1) C: Yeah we’ve ALWAYS spent family er family Christmas together
    ALWAYS.
(2) H: Um-hum.
(3) C: Erm but as I say they’ve just recently moved away.
    (E01JD)
[7.9]

(4) C: 我 发现 他 有 家.
   I found he has family
   I found he is married.

(5) C: 后来吧 我 就 退出来 了.
   later I so withdrew (postverbal particle)
   So I withdrew.
   (C03SX)

In each case, the caller’s utterance may generate different interpretations according to different contexts. However, in both cases, the callers use markers of procedural meaning to limit my possible interpretations. When I interpret these utterances, I am aware that the contribution of markers of procedural meaning does not add anything new to the proposition expressed in the utterances that contain them, but they provide a clue as to how to select the contextual assumptions. As a result of this process, I am able to draw the contextual implications. For example, in [7.8], I was led by prosody assigned to the word ‘always’ to activate the contextual assumption (i) that it has become a tradition that the caller’s family and her niece’s family spend Christmas together at her niece’s home. It is only when I perceived the word ‘always’ that I would be encouraged to derive the contextual implication (ii) that the caller would spend Christmas as she normally does. Thus, as I showed, my interpretation of the caller’s utterances involved a great deal of inferential work, and it is under the guidance of prosody that I succeeded in selecting the contextual assumption in (i) and finally drew the contextual implication in (ii).

Moreover, the propositions expressed in (1) and (3) are not self-evident. If ‘but’ were not there, it would have been hard for me to identify the logical connections between
them, and thus it would be difficult for me to infer the caller’s intention. I may possibly see (1) as a premise leading to the conclusion in (3), or I may see (3) as a premise and (1) as a conclusion. However,

[F]or an utterance to be understood, it must have one and only one interpretation consistent with the principle of relevance – one and only one interpretation, that is, on which a rational speaker might have thought it would have enough effects to be worth the hearer’s attention, and put the hearer to no gratuitous effort in obtaining the intended effect (Wilson and Sperber 1992, 69).

It is the presence of ‘but’ that gives me a clue that the ‘but’ segment is intended to achieve relevance by contradicting or eliminating the assumption (ii), which finally leads me to successfully draw the contextual implication (iii) that there is some impediment to the caller’s being able to celebrate Christmas as she normally does. It can be argued that, without the guidance of ‘but’, the assumption in (iii) would not be made so strongly manifest.

Similar to [7.8], the caller in [7.9] formulates her utterances by means of markers of procedural meaning in the way that certain contextual assumptions are triggered before others. For example, the caller adds ‘so’ in (5). The presence of ‘so’ gives me a clue that the relationship between (4) and (5) the caller is envisaging is that the former is a premise for the deduction of the proposition expressed by the latter. Under the guidance of ‘so’, I successfully reached the contextual implication (iv) that the caller discovers that the man (i.e. 他) the caller in the relationship with is married, and as a consequence, the caller decides to end the relationship with the man. Again, there is nothing in the linguistically encoded information that expresses the assumption
indicated in (iv). It could be derived only by drawing the inference, guided by the connective ‘so’.

Hence, Relevance Theory provides me with a theoretical framework that has a descriptive vocabulary which allows me to account for the processes involved in meaning generation. As such, it allows me to explain what makes an utterance more or less direct in a way that other approaches do not.

What I want to suggest here is that, as I showed in examples [7.7 – 7.9], if a speaker intends to explicitly direct a hearer’s attention to a specific set of contextual assumptions, and thus points the hearer to the intended interpretation, the actual form of markers of procedural meaning a caller uses can vary, but this will not affect the fact that the contribution of these markers does not convey any distinct propositions in the caller’s utterance, but simply alters the strength of that utterance by making the contextual assumption and cognitive effects immediately available.

7.2.1.4 Summary

My argument in this section has been that my present research, which draws on Relevance Theory, provides a way that allows me to demonstrate that the styles of HC and LC cultures are both indirect, in that the inferential processes are involved in interpreting utterances produced by callers from both China and Britain. Both sets of caller use markers of procedural meaning to help hearers identify the problems they were trying to articulate.

7.2.2 The relationship between culture and communication style

My goal in this section is to show how the relevance-theoretic approach that I adopted in this thesis enables me to demonstrate that culture is not related to communication
style in the way that studies of culture and communication have argued. On this basis, I argue that the relationship between culture and communication can be more effectively addressed if we focus on what hearers actually do.

7.2.2.1 Communication style in cultures that have been categorised as HC and LC is indirect

Strictly speaking, this section reiterates many of the issues that I have discussed in the previous section. However, since it is widely accepted in studies of culture and communication that cultures can be distinguished in terms of the use of direct and indirect style, I regard it important to make explicit how communication style is used in cultures that have been categorised as HC and LC by earlier studies of culture and communication. My goal in this section is to argue that communication style of the two types of culture is indirect.

In Sections 2.2.1.2 and 2.2.2.2, I showed that, while addressing cultural differences in communication, earlier studies of culture and communication argue that the relationship between culture and communication can be addressed according to the use of direct and indirect style. For example, Fujishin (2007) argues that in the context of business negotiation, there are differences in the use of communication style between different cultures, as follows:

In a low-context style, verbal communication is very direct, precise, explicit and literal…. [In HC cultures] verbal communication is indirect, subtle, implicit and figurative…. you are expected to read between the lines and understand what the speaker is intending to communicate without being told or instructed with explicit details (Fujishin 2007, 69).
This claim assumes that communication style in LC cultures is direct, whereas communication style in HC cultures is indirect.

However, as I discussed in the previous section (see Section 7.2.1.3), since from the perspective of Relevance Theory, ‘there is no guarantee that the interpretation that satisfies the hearer’s expectation of relevance will be the correct, i.e. the intended, one’ (Wilson 1994, 47). Consequently, a speaker tends to use markers of procedural meaning to enable a hearer to recognise what the speaker is intending to communicate. In Section 7.2.1.3, I argued that evidence from Adair and Brett’s (2004) data as well as my own data has shown that markers of procedural meaning are used by speakers from cultures that have been categorised as LC and those that have been categorised as HC. I would argue that the presence of markers of procedural meaning in both types of cultures indicates that communication style of the two types of cultures is indirect. This view stands in strong contrast to that of Fujishin (2007). On the basis of evidence as well as what I have discussed above, I argue that Fujishin’s claim that the relationship between culture and communication can be addressed in terms of direct and indirect style is problematic.

To sum up, unlike the argument made by Fujishin (2007) that cultures can be characterised by the use of direct and indirect style, the evidence that has emerged from my current empirical study is that communication styles of cultures that have been categorised as LC and those that have been categorised as HC are all indirect, in that speakers belonging to both types of cultures employ markers of procedural meaning to guide the interpretation process.
In the next section, I show that the fact that communication style of the two types of cultures is indirect determines that there is no correlation between culture and communication.

7.2.2.2 No correlation between culture and communication style

In Section 2.2.2.2, I showed that previous studies of culture and communication argue that there is a strong correlation between culture and communication style (e.g. Adair and Brett 2004; Fujishin 2007; Neuliep, 2006; Pekerti and Thomas 2003). For example, Pekerti and Thomas argue that

Overall, the results of our analysis provide support … [that] cultural differences in communication styles…were evident across cultures. An idiocentric communication style was dominant for Pakeha….In contrast, a sociocentric style was dominant for Asians (2003, 145).

There, I also argued that Pekerti and Thomas’ work has fallen into what Cameron (1995) calls a ‘correlational fallacy’ because although Pekerti and Thomas make the claim that culture is closely connected to communication style, they do not actually provide any evidence to indicate how the correlation is made. Without explaining how culture is related to communication style, it is therefore not clear how, or if, culture and communication style are related to each other.

By drawing on Relevance Theory, as I discussed in the previous sections, communication style of cultures that have been categorised as HC and those that have been categorised as LC is indirect, in that understanding utterances produced by speakers from both types of cultures involves inference. In order to help hearers to identify the intended meaning of their utterances, both sets of callers use markers of
procedural meaning to guide the interpretation process. The evidence that communication style of both types of cultures is indirect indicates that there is no direct connection between culture and communication style. This, in turn, indicates that cultural difference does not result from the use of direct and indirect communication style. This is in strong opposition to the view held by Pekerti and Thomas. In the light of Relevance Theory and evidence from my study, I argue that Pekerti and Thomas’ argument that culture is connected to communication style is problematic.

Hence, Relevance Theory provides me with a theoretical framework which has an explicit vocabulary that enables me to reveal that there is no direct connection between culture and communication style.

**7.2.2.3 Conclusion**

My argument in this section has been that my present research, which draws on Relevance Theory, provides a way that allows me to demonstrate that the styles of HC and LC cultures are both indirect, in that the inferential processes are involved in interpreting utterances produced by callers from both China and Britain. Both set of callers use markers of procedural meaning to help hearers identify the problems they were constructing. On the basis of this evidence, I have also argued that there is no direct and positive correlation between the style used in communication and the underlying culture.

In the light of Relevance Theory and my above discussion, I argue that the direct and indirect dichotomy needs to be questioned if the relationship between culture and communication is to be understood. Given that the claims made by the existing
studies of culture and communication ignore a fundamental aspect of communication process, I argue that moving from a focus on how an utterance is produced in terms of style to the study of how meaning of an utterance is generated may yield new insights into the relationship between culture and communication. My study seeks to open up a debate about cultural differences by focusing on what hearers actually do. The goal of the next section is to discuss what the relevance theoretic approach that I adopted in this thesis can add to existing studies of culture and communication, and the analysis of interpretation in particular.

7.2.3 On differences in interpretation

In this section, I show that my data provide evidence to indicate that different interpretations are available if hearers choose different contextual assumptions as evidence to interpret a given utterance. I also show that evidence from my study indicates that bicultural individuals are flexible in the use of the knowledge they access in response to an utterance.

In the section that follows, I begin my discussion of differences in interpretation with the notion of context, since context or contextual assumptions play a crucial role in understanding how a hearer generates an interpretation and how different interpretations are generated in a specific context.

7.2.3.1 Context selection is a dynamic process

In this section, I show that Relevance Theory provides a framework that enables me to explain that context selection is a dynamic part of the process of working out what a speaker is saying. I show that since the approaches adopted in previous studies of culture and communication view context as an element determined before the process
of comprehension, they are unable to explain how meaning is generated in a context. I show that the relevance-theoretic approach that I adopted in this thesis studies context as resulting from the dynamic process of selection, more specifically, I show that the dynamic constructivist approach that I adopted in this study views culture as a meaning system that can be accessed by a cultural group, I am therefore not only able to explain how a hearer generates an interpretation in a specific context, but also how culture is dynamic.

In Section 2.2.2.3, I showed that while addressing cultural differences in communication, relevant studies of culture and communication argue that there are differences in interpretation between people with distinct cultural backgrounds. For example, Ting-Toomey (1998, 125) argues that in the ‘airport ride request’ scenes below, Americans and Chinese generate different interpretations for an utterance that expresses the same propositional content.

[7.10]

**Scene 1:**

American 1: We’re going to New Orleans this weekend.
American 2: What fun! I wish we were going with you. How long are you going to be there? [If she wants a ride, she will ask]
American 1: Three days. By the way, we may need a ride to the airport. Do you think you can take us?
American 2: Sure. What time?
American 1: 10:30 pm, this coming Saturday.
Scene 2:
Chinese 1: We’re going to New Orleans this weekend.
Chinese 2: What fun! I wish we were going with you. How long are you going to be there?
Chinese 1: Three days [I hope she’ll offer me a ride to the airport].
Chinese 2: [She may want me to give her a ride] Do you need a ride to the airport? I’ll take you.
Chinese 1: Are you sure it’s not too much trouble?
Chinese 2: It’s no trouble at all.
(Ting-Toomey 1999, 104 adapted, and also see Section 2.2.2.3 of this thesis).

According to Ting-Toomey (1999, 104), if an American wants a ride, she will ask directly, and consequently, inference is not necessary. In contrast, ‘in the Chinese culture such requests for help are likely to be implied rather than stated explicitly and directly’, and as a result, hearers have to make some inference to identify whether the communicator needs a ride to the airport. This claim assumes a strong correlation between cultural background and difference in interpretation.

However, Ting-Toomey does not explain how culture impacts on interpretation. Since a speaker does not explicitly state that her utterance is intended to generate different interpretations, if a hearer from any culture is to understand the proposition expressed in the speaker’s utterance, he must carry out some degree of inference. Without an explanation that draws upon a hearer’s inferential work, the approach adopted by Ting-Toomey would only suggest that the speaker’s utterance itself would automatically give rise to predictable and distinct interpretations. The implication of this is that culture is static, context is determined before the interpretation process starts, and therefore interpretation can be predicted, according to the cultural background of the speaker.
However, from the perspective of Relevance Theory, context is ‘seen as a matter of choice and as part of the interpretation process itself’ (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 141). An utterance can only achieve contextual effects if the newly presented information interacts with a context of existing assumptions in the way of either strengthening, or contradicting and eliminating, or combining with an existing assumption. This means that within the framework of Relevance Theory, interpretation of any utterance involves, on the part of a hearer, the selection of particular contextual assumptions in order to achieve contextual effects. More importantly, context within Relevance Theory ‘is not limited to information about the immediate physical environment or the immediately preceding utterances’ and it may also include ‘general cultural assumptions’ (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 16). By drawing on the argument made by Hong (2009) in her dynamic constructivist approach that culture guides our information processing only when cultural assumptions are triggered or activated in response to a stimulus, I argue that culture is dynamic because people draw on cultural knowledge to interpret an utterance. This dynamic view of culture stands in strong contrast with the static view of culture Ting-Toomey holds.

Applying Relevance Theory to the analysis of the above ‘airport ride request’ scenes, it is relatively easy to see that context defines the way how the same utterance is perceived as I show below:

From the perspective of Relevance Theory, while interpreting an utterance like ‘three days’ in Ting-Toomey’s above data, both American 2 and Chinese 2 would first assume that the information carried in this utterance is relevant to them, and they would then enrich ‘three days’ by assuming that ‘three days’ refers to ‘we’re going to New Orleans for three days this weekend’. The American 2 (or Chinese 2) would
assume that the pronoun ‘we’ refers to the group including American 1 (or Chinese 1) and that ‘New Orleans’ is the city different from where American 1’s (or Chinese 1’s) group is living, and that ‘this weekend’ refers to the coming weekend after the utterance is being made. The American 2 would then identify the following resulting proposition:

(a) The American 1’s group is going to New Orleans for three days at the weekend after the utterance is being made.

The recovery of the proposition in (a) makes the following contextual assumption immediately accessible:

(b) In normal circumstances, if people go to somewhere at the weekend, they will have a great time.

The two assumptions in (a) and (b) together would lead American 2 to draw the contextual implication that:

(c) The American 1’s group will have a great time in New Orleans.

In contrast, having resolved the ambiguities in the utterance produced by Chinese 1, Chinese 2 would identify the following resulting proposition:

(d) The Chinese 1’s group is going to New Orleans for three days at the weekend after the utterance is being made.

The recovery of the proposition in (d) makes the following contextual assumption immediately accessible:
(e) In Chinese society, if an individual is going to a city foreign to one’s own, then the individual needs a ride to the airport to take the flight;

(f) Even if the individual requests help, it is not polite to ask directly.

(g) The interlocutors need to ask whether the individual requests help in order to show respect.

By combining the assumptions in (d) and (e-g), Chinese 2 draws the following contextual implication:

(h) I need to ask if Chinese 1 needs a ride to the airport.

The interpretation in (h) is supported by the question raised by Chinese 2 in Ting-Toomey’s data: do you need a ride to the airport? I’ll take you.

From the above analysis, it is evident that although Ting-Toomey might be right, in that there is no evidence that American 2 is making inferences about the need to offer a lift, my analysis has shown that American 2 would still be required to make some inferences. As my analysis shows, the identification of the intended interpretations as in (c) and (h) respectively by American 2 and Chinese 2 clearly depends on their choice of context respectively in the assumptions in (b) and (e-g), which in this case appear to be their respective cultural specific knowledge, and that the choice of context is part of the comprehension process. As I have shown, both American 2 and Chinese 2 draw on their respective cultural knowledge to interpret the same utterance, this indicates that culture is indeed dynamic. Since Ting-Toomey assumes that culture is a fixed set of values and norms, and that context is a feature determined in advance of the comprehension process, she is therefore unable to explain how differences in interpretation are caused by cultures.
There is a great deal of evidence in my data to indicate that context is a result of a
dynamic process of selection. I now take only one among the many as an illustration.

[7.11]

C: 昨天 又 吵 起来 了.
   Yesterday again argue up (sentence final particle)
   We argued again yesterday.

H: 嗯.
   Em
   Ok
   (C03HM)

As I have shown in Section 5.2.2.3, when interpreting the caller’s utterance in this
case, it is easy to assume that the immediate contextual assumptions I as a hearer
would choose (under the guidance of prosody assigned to ‘again’) are that (i) it is not
the first time the caller and her husband argued; (ii) in Chinese society where family
harmony is strongly valued, it is seen as a big problem if husbands and wives argue.
Processed in the context containing the assumptions (i) and (ii), the caller’s utterance
would yield contextual effect (iii) that the caller and her husband often argue, which is
a serious problem for the couple. In this scenario, it is hard for me to pin down what
other interpretation would be relevant enough to justify the caller’s speech and the
interpretation in (iii) is basically the only possible one.

Hence, the relevance-theoretic approach that I adopted in my thesis not only allows
me to reveal and explain that
It is not that first the context is determined, and then relevance is assessed. On the contrary, people hope that the assumption being processed is relevant (or else they would not bother to process it at all), and they try to select a context which will justify the hope: a context which will maximise relevance. In verbal comprehension in particular, it is relevance which is treated as given, and context which is treated as a variable (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 142).

It also enables me to reveal and explain that an interpretation is ‘a synthesis of old and new information, a result of interaction between the two’ (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 108). More specifically, by drawing on both Relevance Theory and a dynamic constructivist approach, I am able to explain that people draw on cultural knowledge in response to an utterance. Because of this, culture is dynamic. Since Ting-Toomey is constrained by her assumptions that culture is static, and that context is a feature determined in advance of the process of comprehension, she is unable to provide empirical data to indicate how an interpretation is generated. On the basis of my empirical evidence, I argue that although Ting-Toomey makes the claim about differences in interpretation between hearers from different cultures, without access to data which would indicate how a hearer makes sense of what a speaker says, her discovery of differences in interpretations is of limited value.

In the next section, I show that studying context as a result of a dynamic process of selection has a significant effect on our understanding of differences in interpretation between hearers from different cultures, which is important for our understanding the relationship between culture and communication.
7.2.3.2 Differences in contextual assumptions lead to differences in interpretation

In this section, I draw on my data analysis to indicate that the claim made by previous studies of culture and communication that there are differences in interpretation can be addressed by contextual assumptions hearers draw on in response to an utterance. I show how evidence from my study indicates that different interpretations are available if hearers use distinct contextual assumptions to infer the relevance of what a speaker has said.

As I noted in the previous section, Ting-Toomey is limited by her methodology, working as it does on the assumption that culture is static and that context is determined before the process of comprehension gets under way, and therefore she is unable to explain how meaning is generated dynamically. Based on the premise that there is no evidence to indicate how an interpretation actually occurs, it would be impossible to sustain her claim about the differences in interpretations between cultures once the process of interpretation is foregrounded.

Applying Relevance Theory to my study, I argue that, as indicated in Section 3.1.2, in order for hearers to generate the same interpretations, there must be some degree of overlap in their cognitive environment, since they draw on this when generating contextual assumptions. If people have been brought up in different cultures, they may not overlap in their cognitive environment. Consequently, ‘they can construct different representations and make different inferences’ (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 38). When interpreting ‘a given utterance’, they may interpret it in different ways, in that they use distinct contextual assumptions in response to an utterance. What this adds to Ting-Toomey’s ‘airport ride request’ scenes is that the variations in
interpretations between two U.S. Americans and two Chinese can be addressed by focusing on contextual assumptions. From the perspective of Relevance Theory, we can see that Chinese 2 and American 2 use distinct contextual assumptions in response to the utterance ‘three days’. The differences in contextual assumptions available to them can be seen in my analysis in Section 7.2.2.1. As my analysis indicates, because the cognitive environment of American 2 does not overlap with that of Chinese 2, American 2 does not have the assumptions activated by Chinese 2 that (i) if an individual is going to a city foreign to one’s own, then the individual needs a ride to the airport to take the flight, that (ii) even if the individual requests help, it is not polite to ask directly, and that (iii) the interlocutors need to ask whether the individual needs help in order to show respect. As a result, according to Ting-Toomey, Chinese 2 and American 2 understand the utterance of ‘three days’ in different ways: Chinese 2 sees the utterance of ‘three days’ as designed to communicate an assumption that Chinese 2 needs to ask if Chinese 1 needs a lift to the airport. In contrast, American 2 sees the same utterance as designed to communicate an assumption that American 1’s group will have a great time in New Orleans. Thus, only if context is seen as a result of a dynamic process is it possible to show how differences in interpretation between hearers from different cultures are caused by the contextual assumptions the hearers activate. Since differences in contextual assumptions lead to differences in interpretations between hearers from different cultures, this shows that it is not the utterance that is direct or indirect (it is the same utterance in each case), it is the contextual assumptions that are generated by the Chinese speaker that cause different interpretations in the English version. This indicates that cultural differences do not lie in communication styles, but are realised by activating different contextual assumptions in response to an utterance that
expresses the same propositional content. I argue that such findings are significant because they indicate that in an intercultural encounter, there may be a great risk of misunderstanding if people from different cultures draw on different contextual assumptions in response to an utterance. They further suggest that intercultural misunderstanding can be minimized if hearers from different cultures share more contextual assumptions.

There are many instances in my data that indicate that differences in contextual assumptions lead to differences in interpretation. As my analysis in Chapter Six shows, my interview with the two groups of students with distinct cultural backgrounds brought out differences both between and within the groups, but there were consistent patterns that indicate that members of the English group were drawing on a set of assumptions about the issues raised by the callers that were not available to the Chinese group. In particular, what this indicates is that the two groups interpreted those issues raised by the callers in radically different ways. This also indicates that culture has an impact on interpretation. For example, in Section 6.2.1.1, I showed that because the cognitive environments of the Chinese group did not overlap with that of the caller in the same way that those of the English group appeared to, they did not access the contextual assumptions about ‘oral sex’ that the caller’s utterances appeared to require if they were to be understood in the same way that (based on my own understanding) the caller intended. Although both groups understood the caller’s utterances as implying that he was thinking about the relationship between a pierced tongue and the couple’s sex life, their understanding of the problem the caller was expressing was distinct: the English group as a whole saw the caller’s utterances as not so much as designed to communicate a problem, but rather, to elicit a second
opinion. The Chinese group, however, saw the caller’s utterances as designed to solve the problem of whether a pierced tongue would, indeed, adversely affect his physical expression of love.

Thus, Relevance Theory has a descriptive vocabulary that allows me to explain the impact that culture has on interpretation, whereas the approach adopted by Ting-Toomey does not.

To sum up, in this section, I have shown that although the study by Ting-Toomey (1999) argues that there are differences in interpretation between hearers from different cultures, it does not actually explain how culture has an impact on interpretation. I have shown that the relevance theoretic approach I adopted in this thesis enables me to explain that culture has an impact on interpretation if hearers with diverse cultural backgrounds draw on different contextual assumptions in response to an utterance.

### 7.2.3.3 Interpretation varies from individual to individual

In this section, my aim is to show that, in opposition to the assumption made by studies of culture and communication that people in the same culture produce the same interpretation for a given utterance, my data provides evidence that indicates that interpretation, in fact, varies from individual to individual.

In Section 2.2.2.3, I reviewed the fact that when claiming that there are variations in interpretation between hearers from distinct cultural backgrounds, studies of culture and communication seem to suggest that a speaker’s utterance would generate the same line of interpretation for every individual in the same culture. For example,
Cohen (2004, 41) argues that for Malaysians, Keating’s (the prime minister of Australian) utterance that *I don’t know and I don’t care* in the context of the Malaysian prime minister’s presence was meant to ‘insult’ the prime minister of Malaysia. In contrast, for Australians, ‘this outspoken language is acceptable in Australian society’, or in Keating’s own words, his remarks ‘were not meant to be offensive…they cannot be interpreted as being offensive’ (Cohen 2004, 41). By arguing this, Cohen (2004) implies that although not made explicit, all individuals in the same culture produce the same interpretation for a given utterance.

However, as I discussed in the previous section, the same interpretation can be generated only if hearers overlap with each other in their cognitive environment. Within the framework of Relevance theory, ‘people never share their total cognitive environments’ (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 41), and even members of the same linguistic communities converging on the same language do not share the same assumptions, since no two people share identical ‘life history’ (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 16). Because of this, in Blakemore’s (1992, 18) words, ‘there are always differences which lead not only to differences in the events memorized, but also to different interpretation of the same event’.

My data contains numerous instances that indicate that interpretation varies from individual to individual. Even in a simple case, where parents expect their children’s call in Chinese New Year, as I have shown in Section 6.2.2.3, members within the English group who share the cognitive environment generate different interpretations. For example, one of them felt it to be unacceptable that the caller had a strong expectation about her child’s initiating a call. Another member stressed that if mothers do not call their children, they should not expect their children to call them.
In opposition to their views, one member insisted that children should call their parents during the New Year to show respect for the parents. Moreover, there is evidence that none of the groups produced interpretations that were the same as my own, although our interpretations did bear some resemblance at some point to interpret the caller’s intentions. For example, the Chinese group in this case appeared to indicate that they were interpreting the caller’s problem in the same way as I had, in that we all inferred that the caller wanted to know whether she should call her child, but we differed in that this group extended the issue raised by the caller to her problematic relationship with her daughter, which I did not. Therefore, as my analysis has shown, the caller’s single utterance was taken to convey different meanings by different hearers.

Similarly, in Section 6.2.1.2, I have shown that in inferring the problem constructed by the caller, members within the English group understood what the caller intended to solve in radically different ways. For example, the caller’s utterance was perceived to convey a problem that (a) the caller wanted to know whether or not he should be with his girlfriend, or (b) that the caller was confused about how he should react to the situation he was in, or (c) that the caller wanted to know if it was wrong for his girlfriend to cheat on him. Therefore, the relevance theoretic approach that I adopted in this thesis enables me to explain that the fact ‘that two people share a cognitive environment does not imply that they make the same assumption: merely that they are capable of doing so’ (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 41).

In the light of Relevance Theory and evidence from my own data, it is now clear that interpretation varies from individual to individual, from culture to culture, and that people from the same culture do not necessarily produce the same interpretation for a
given utterance. Since Cohen (2004) assumes that an utterance will generate the same line of interpretation for people from the same culture, I therefore argue that his view can only provide us with limited insights into how hearers interpret what a speaker says.

7.2.3.4 Flexibility in the use of bicultural meaning systems

In this section, I show that the relevance-theoretic approach and also the dynamic constructivist approach that I adopted in this thesis are important additions to existing studies of culture and communication, in that they enable me to explain how culture informs behaviours of bicultural individuals in a way that previous culture and communication scholarship does not.

In Section 2.2.2.2, I have shown that when bicultural individuals are involved in intercultural communication, previous literature on culture and communication is unable to examine how culture informs their behaviours. For example, based on their analysis of communication style reflected in the communicative behaviours of the bicultural participants, Pekerti and Thomas (2003, 145) argue that

> Overall, the results of our analysis provide support for the hypothesis … [that] cultural differences in communication styles… were evident across cultures. An idiocentric communication style was dominant for Pakeha…In contrast, a sociocentric style was dominant for Asians (2003, 145).

As I argued in Section 2.2.2.2, although Pekerti and Thomas claim that there is a correlation between culture and communication style, in that idiocentric communication style was dominant for Pakeha and a sociocentric style was dominant for Asians, they do not actually explain how the correlation is made. As a result, this
study has fallen into the ‘correlational fallacy’ (Cameron 1995, 85). I also argued there that the reason that Pekerti and Thomas felt unable to explain the correlation is that the approach they adopted in this study assumes that people who belong to a specific culture are a homogeneous group, and therefore those who have been exposed to two different cultures are not included.

However, in the light of the premise that context is a result of a dynamic process of selection, it includes general cultural knowledge hearers draw on in response to an utterance. Specifically, my study also adopts the dynamic constructivist approach and proposes that culture is a given meaning system shared among members of a cultural group, and therefore I am able to explain how culture informs the behaviors of bicultural individuals.

As my analysis in Chapter Six shows, when the two groups of bicultural participants in my interview study responded to my questions, there is evidence that the bicultural individuals display a tendency to flexibly switch their bicultural meaning systems according to contextual clues (an utterance). For example, in Section 6.2.1.1, I showed that in inferring the problem the English caller intended to solve when he was describing that he was concerned with the effect his girlfriend’s pierced tongue would have on his sex life, one of the members in the Chinese group appeared to shift her knowledge of English culture to the Chinese knowledge she holds, and contrasted the experience the caller recounted with her own life and inferred that ‘in our country we don’t do that sort of thing with tongue’, but because she was in a group with other MC speakers, she quickly switched back and inferred that the caller was more concerned with whether or not he could still have sex with his girlfriend. This indicates that she
appeared to have access to her knowledge of both cultural meaning systems, and flexibly use them to interpret the given utterance. Because she was in a group with other MC speakers, she selected to access their meaning system rather than the BE meaning system.

A similar case is seen in Section 6.2.1.2, where the English caller was telling the audience that his girlfriend told him that she had slept with somebody else. The responses to my question as to what problem the caller intended to solve indicate that one of the members in the Chinese group appeared to switch her knowledge of English culture immediately to her knowledge of Chinese and inferred that, if a Chinese man were in the caller’s position, he was not meant to solve any problem, but was just trying to find some way to express his anger. This indicates that this member had access to the bicultural meaning systems she holds, but depended on her knowledge of Chinese culture to infer the issue raised by the English caller. As I discussed above, in both cases, the bicultural individuals appeared to draw on their bicultural knowledge to contrast the issues raised by the callers with what they experienced in their own countries. What evidence such as this indicates is that culture is indeed dynamic rather than static. It also indicates that the bicultural individuals are very sensitive to their deeply-rooted cultural norms, beliefs and values that inform them how to behave in a particular situation.

Therefore, both the relevance theoretic approach and the dynamic constructivist approach that I adopted in this thesis enable me to add a new insight to the study by Pekerti and Thomas, in that I am able to reveal that bicultural individuals depend on their bicultural knowledge, and switch between them, to interpret an utterance. More specifically, my findings add a level of explanation to the approach proposed by Hong
and her colleagues, in that my findings indicate that the bicultural individuals not only depend on their bicultural meaning systems as proposed by Hong and her colleagues, but also ‘flexibly’ switch them in the process of interpretation. Since the characteristic of ‘flexibility’ is not discussed in Hong’s approach, my findings therefore provide richer data on the use of cultural meaning system than that of Hong’s approach.

7.2.3.5 Conclusion

My argument in this section has been that my study adds several layers of important explanations to existing studies of culture and communication, and the analysis in interpretation in particular. I have shown that studies of culture and communication assume that culture is static and that context is determined before the process of comprehension takes place. As a result, they are unable to explain how meaning is generated and how culture impacts on interpretation. I have shown that my study, which is based on Sperber and Wilson’s Relevance Theory and also the dynamic constructivist approach to culture, stresses that (a) context is a result of a dynamic process of selection, and (b) culture is a meaning system that can be accessed by a cultural group. Consequently, I am able to explain that (i) meaning can be generated only if the newly presented information interacts with the old information (in the form of contextual assumptions), (ii) culture is dynamic, and (iii) culture has an impact on interpretation if hearers from different cultures draw on different contextual assumptions in response to an utterance that expresses the same propositional content, and (iv) that interpretation varies from individual to individual, and even people who share the cognitive environment do not necessarily interpret what a speaker says in the same way. I have shown that the studies of culture and communication assume that people who belong to a specific culture are a homogeneous group and therefore
those who hold bicultural meaning systems are not included, and as a result, they are unable to explain how culture informs the behaviour of those bicultural individuals. I have shown that my study draws on both Relevance Theory and the dynamic constructivist approach, and consequently, I am able to explain that the bicultural individuals are very flexible in their use of bicultural meaning systems in response to an utterance.

In the next section, I show how my findings contribute to our understanding of cultural differences by focusing on China and Britain.

7.3 Differences in communication between speakers of MC and BE

As I explained in Section 3.3, the overall aim of this thesis is to investigate:

(a) Is there evidence from actual language use to indicate that both MC and BE use markers of procedural meaning?

(b) Is there evidence that when interpreting naturally occurring conversations, hearers from different cultures do actually come up with different interpretations because they are drawing on a different cognitive environment?

From a relevance-theoretic point of view, what this indicates is that my study focuses on the complete act of communication, but sees this ‘from two different points of view: that of the communicator who is involved in ostension and that of the audience who is involved in inference’ (Sperber and Wilson 1995, 54). In what follows, I examine, in terms of the two perspectives, the differences in communication between MC and BE in the context of a radio talk show.
7.3.1 Evidence from both communicator and audience

In my study, the question of whether markers of procedural meaning are used by MC and BE is directly related to the question of whether there are similarities or differences between China and Britain in the use of communication styles, which I explained in Section 7.2.1. The question of whether there is evidence that when interpreting naturally occurring conversations, hearers from different cultures come up with different interpretations because they are drawing on a different cognitive environment is related to the issue of how culture impacts on interpretation, which I explained in Section 7.2.3.

As I have shown in Chapter Five and discussed in Section 7.2.1, the styles of MC and BE are both indirect, in that (a) utterances produced by speakers of MC and BE must be interpreted in a context; (b) inferential processes are involved in interpreting utterances produced by callers from both China and Britain; and (c) both sets of callers use markers of procedural meaning to help hearers identify with the least processing effort the problems they were attempting to express. These findings indicate that there is no direct correlation between culture and the communication style underlying the culture, which I discussed in Section 7.2.2.

As I have shown in Chapter Six and discussed in Section 7.2.3, there is evidence in my data that indicates that hearers from China and Britain do come up with different interpretations for the utterance produced by a caller, because they were drawing on distinct contextual assumptions. In particular, what this indicates is that hearers from both cultures interpret the problem the caller was articulating in radically different ways. The implication of such findings is that culture has an impact on interpretation,
which in turn indicates that cultural differences are realised through activating different contextual assumptions.

My analysis has shown that although there is some degree of overlap between people within the same cultural group, my empirical findings indicate that their understanding of relevance of what a caller was saying is sometimes distinct. What this indicates is that an utterance generates different interpretations for different hearers, and even people who share the same cognitive environment do not construct meanings of the same utterance in the same ways.

My analysis has further demonstrated that, culture is dynamic rather than static. More specifically, I have shown that in interpreting a given utterance, the bicultural individuals indeed draw on their bicultural knowledge to make inference. However, as I have also shown, they are very flexible in switching their bicultural meaning systems, in that they sometimes depend on their knowledge of Chinese culture to interpret an issue raised by an English caller, and vice versa.

In the next section, I will show, on the basis of the above evidence, how the differences in communication between MC and BE are realised in the context of radio advice talk shows.

7.3.2 Cultural differences result from differences in contextual assumptions

My aim in this section is to show that research to date has not yet formulated a clear answer as to how cultural differences are realised by focusing on how an utterance is produced and interpreted, my study is designed to provide evidence to indicate how
cultural differences in communication are realised by focusing on what hearers actually do.

As I showed in Section 2.2.1.2, previous studies of culture and communication (e.g. Adair and Brett 2004; Brew and Cairns 2004; Cohen 2004; Ting-Toomey 1999) argue that cultures can be distinguished according to the use of direct and indirect style. However, they do not actually explain how one style can be categorized as direct and another style can be categorized as indirect. I argue that only if we make explicit how such categorizations are made can we be in a position to determine how, or if cultural differences are realised through the use of style.

As I showed in Section 2.2.2.2, previous studies of culture and communication (e.g. Adair and Brett 2004; Fujishin 2007; Pekerti and Thomas 2003; Neuliep 2006) argue that there is a correlation between culture and the communication style underlying the culture. However, they do not actually explain how the connection is made. I argue that only when we have a clear idea of how culture is linked to the use of style can we examine whether cultural differences are related to the use of style.

As I showed in Section 2.2.2.3, previous studies of culture and communication (e.g. Cohen 2004; Gao and Ting-Toomey 1998; Cohen 2004; Scollon and Scollon 1995; Ting-Toomey 1999) argue that there are differences in interpretation between hearers from different cultures. However, they do not explain how culture has an impact on interpretation. I argue that we are able to determine whether or how cultural differences are realised through differences in interpretation only if we make explicit how culture has an impact on interpretation.
On this premise, I am faced with the question of how we can investigate the relationship between culture and communication.

I believe that my research has opened up a debate for the question of how the relationship between culture and communication can be studied.

First, my study raises the question of whether the claim that cultures can be distinguished according to the use of style can be substantiated. Drawing on Sperber and Wilson’s argument that there is no such thing as direct communication at all in any communication, my present thesis is able to address the issue of communication style by focusing on makers of procedural meaning. As my analysis in Chapter Five indicates, utterances produced by callers from both China and Britain involve inferential work being carried out on the part of a hearer, and to that extent, both are indirect. In order to help hearers to identify the problems the callers were constructing with least processing effort, both sets of callers rely on markers of procedural meaning to guide the interpretation process. On the basis of my empirical findings, I argue that if communication styles of China and Britain are both indirect, this indicates that there is no direct correlation between culture and communication style. This also precludes the possibility that cultural differences can be addressed according to this criterion. Consequently, the focus on communication styles would not, or would no longer, be appropriate as a means of characterising cultures. Meanwhile, it is obvious that an understanding of cultural differences requires further evidence that is not particularly tied to styles.

Second, my research raises the question of whether the claim that culture impacts on interpretation can be substantiated. Drawing on Sperber and Wilson’s argument that
communication is a matter of degree, and therefore communicators need to take account of cognitive environment of their addressees when they formulate their utterances, my current thesis is able to address how culture might impact on interpretation by focusing on the contextual assumptions that hearers draw on in response to an utterance. As my analysis in Chapter Six shows, hearers from China and Britain sometimes draw on different contextual assumptions in response to an utterance that apparently expresses the same propositional content. In particular, what this indicates is that they understand the problem a caller was constructing in radically different ways. It also indicates that culture has an impact on interpretation. I argue that it is the difference in contextual assumptions that is the cause of variations in interpretation, and it is the cause of perceived variations in ‘style’ as Ting-Toomey’s example about the ride to the airport illustrates. Therefore, it is the difference in contextual assumptions that hearers from different cultures draw on that is the cause of cultural differences in communication.

I suggest that these findings have important implications for further research, in that my findings indicate that if a hearer in one culture does not already access the contextual assumptions that are available to hearers from the other culture, then intercultural communication between them will run the risk of misinterpretation. My findings also indicate the significance of developing pragmatic awareness, in that they suggest that if people with distinct cultural backgrounds share more contextual assumptions, they will generate more similar interpretations, and consequently a risk of misinterpretation can be significantly reduced.
In Chapter Two, my literature review showed that studies of culture and communication claim that cultures can be distinguished according to the use of direct and indirect style (e.g. Adair and Brett 2004; Brew and Cairns 2004; Cohen 2004; Ting-Toomey 1999), and that there is a correlation between culture and communication style (e.g. Adair and Brett 2004; Fujishin 2007; Pekerti and Thomas 2003; Neuliep 2006). On the basis of the findings from my study and my discussion here, I argue that (a) it is the difference in contextual assumptions that hearers from different cultures draw on in response to an utterance that is the major contributor to cultural differences in communication, (b) there is no connection between culture and communication style, and (c) the distinction between direct and indirect communication is not appropriate for characterizing cultures.

### 7.3.3 Summary

In this section, I have discussed that (a) the findings from my empirical research indicate that there are similarities in communication styles between speakers from China and Britain, in that they are both indirect, and (b) if people from different cultures draw on different contextual assumptions in response to an utterance, they interpret the utterance in different ways. On this basis, I have discussed the relationship between culture and communication. I have argued, in the light of Relevance Theory and evidence from my data analysis, that cultural differences in communication are caused by differences in contextual assumptions, and therefore the direct and indirect distinction is not appropriate for characterising cultures.

### 7.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that studies of culture and communication argue that cultures can be distinguished according to the use of direct and indirect style. By
drawing on Relevance Theory, I have shown that communication style of cultures that have been categorised as HC and LC is indirect. I have shown that studies of culture and communication argue that there is a strong correlation between culture and the communication style underlying the culture. By drawing on Relevance Theory, I have shown that communication style of cultures that have been categorised as HC and LC is indirect, and therefore there is no direct connection between culture and communication style. I have also shown that studies of culture and communication argue that there are differences in interpretation between people from different cultures. By drawing on Relevance Theory, I have shown that differences in interpretation can be better addressed by focusing on contextual assumptions hearers draw on in response to an utterance. On this basis, I have discussed the relationship between culture and communication focusing on China and Britain. I argue that cultural difference in communication is caused by differences in contextual assumptions that hearers from different cultures activate in response to an utterance. I also argue that culture is not related to communication style and that the distinction between direct and indirect style is not appropriate as a means of characterising cultures.

I conclude my present research in the next chapter.
Chapter Eight: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have reported on my research into cultural differences in communication by focusing on interpretations of broadcast talk by native speakers of Mandarin Chinese and British English.

In Chapter Two, I reviewed the literature relating to culture and communication. I have focused on two strands of thought that have had an impact on research in the field. I argued that one line of research has tended to focus on addressing cultural differences according to the distinction between direct and indirect styles. A second line of research addresses cultural differences by assuming that there are differences between people from different cultures in the way they are likely to interpret a given utterance in a specific context. I argued that both lines of research have limitations. More specifically, I demonstrated that those studies that claim that cultures can be distinguished according to the use of direct and indirect styles (e.g. Adair and Brett 2004; Brew and Cairns 2004; Cohen 2004; Ting-Toomey 1999) do not actually explain how one style can be categorised as direct and another style can be categorised as indirect. Because of this, I argued that it is not clear how, or if, cultural differences in communication are realised through the use of style. I showed that those studies make the claim that culture has a strong connection with communication style (e.g. Adair and Brett 2004; Fujishin 2007; Neuliep 2006; Pekerti and Thomas 2003) do not provide a convincing case for whether culture is correlated with communication style. I also demonstrated that those studies which claim that there are differences in interpretation between people from different cultures do not actually address how culture impacts on interpretation (e.g. Cohen 2004; Gao and Ting-Toomey 1998; Scollon and Scollon 1995; Ting-Toomey, 1999). My claim was that
we are not able to examine whether or how cultural differences are realised through different interpretation until we have a clear idea of how culture impacts on interpretation. I argued that explanations offered by these studies are limited by the theories they apply and the methods of analysis they use. My conclusion at the end of Chapter Two was that, if we aim to address the limitations indicated in the previous literature on culture and communication, we need a different theoretical framework and method of analysis. In Chapter Three, by drawing on Relevance Theory, I argued that the claim that there are differences in interpretation between people from different cultures made by previous studies of culture and communication can be addressed by focusing on contextual assumptions. I also argued that the claim that cultures vary according to the use of direct and indirect style made by previous literature can be more effectively addressed by focusing on the markers of procedural meaning.

Given that the studies of culture and communication that I addressed in Chapter Two draw on invented examples and arguments, rather than empirical studies, I set up an empirical study to re-investigate the relationship between culture and communication, by focusing on native speakers of Mandarin Chinese and British English.

In Chapter Four, I described how I audio-recorded host-caller spontaneous interactions of speakers of MC and speakers of BE online, and transcribed and translated the recorded materials. I then adopted a relevance theoretic approach and employed a dynamic constructivist view of culture as a supplementary approach to analyse my two sets of data. I looked at whether or not there is evidence that callers from China and Britain use markers of procedural meaning to guide their hearers’ interpretation process. I also looked at whether or not hearers from China and Britain
did actually come up with different interpretations when they heard the callers’ utterances. My findings (see Chapter Five) indicated that understanding utterances produced by callers from the two cultures involves a lot of inferential work. Both sets of callers use markers of procedural meaning to guide the interpretation process. To that extent, I showed that communication styles of both cultures are indirect. My findings indicated that there is no connection between culture and the use of communication style. By analysing hearers’ interpretations of the utterances produced by the callers (see Chapter Six), I found that different interpretations are available if different contextual assumptions are activated in response to an utterance. I also found that interpretation varies from individual to individual as well as from culture to culture. My findings showed that even members whose cognitive environments overlap with each other sometimes interpret the same utterance in different ways. Moreover, through a combination of a relevance theoretic approach proposed by Sperber and Wilson and the dynamic constructivist approach proposed by Hong and her colleagues, I found that bicultural individuals can be very flexible in the use of cultural meaning systems they access in the process of communication.

I summarised my major findings from my empirical study as follows: cultural differences in communication are realised through activating different contextual assumptions in response to an utterance. Specifically, my findings are:

(a) Communication styles of MC and BE are both indirect, in that the two sets of callers use prosody and discourse connectives to indicate how their utterances are to be processed;
(b) There is no simple correlation between culture and the use of direct or indirect styles, because communication style in cultures that have been categorised as HC and LC is indirect;

(c) Hearers from China and Britain come up with different interpretations because they are drawing on different contextual assumptions.

On the basis of above findings, I discussed the relationship between culture and communication from the perspectives of speakers and hearers. I concluded that cultural differences in communication do not lie in communication styles used in different cultures, but in differences in contextual assumptions that hearers with distinct cultural backgrounds draw on in response to an utterance. It is this difference that leads to the difference in interpretation of a given utterance in a specific context, and it is also the cause of the perceived differences in ‘style’ identified by existing studies of culture and communication. I also concluded that the distinction between direct and indirect communication is not appropriate as a means of characterising cultures.

I believe that my present research contributes to our understanding of the phenomenon of cultural differences in communication in several ways. Firstly, my study changes the way of studying and analysing cultural differences in communication. As my literature review shows, scholarship in culture and communication tends to address cultural differences in communication according to the distinction between direct and indirect styles. However, as I also show in Chapter Five, communication styles used by callers from China and Britain are both indirect. These findings suggest therefore that cultural differences in communication are not directly related to the communication style. And as a result, the analysis of directness
and indirectness in communication cannot reveal the way in which cultural differences are realised in real life interactions. My argument is that a focus on hearers’ interpretative processes enables an analyst to show that cultural differences in communication can be traced to differences in the contextual assumptions hearers from different cultures draw on in response to an utterance. My findings have important implications for our understanding of cultural differences in communication, in that they suggest that further research in the similar field should focus on what hearers actually do in the process of communication. Since the data in this empirical study is of a relatively small size, discussions and conclusions are based on data collected from two cultures only. This has led to, however, some suggestions that larger-scale studies of cultural differences in communication are needed in the future. If larger-scale studies reveal similar trends that communication styles of speakers across cultures are all indirect, and that cultural differences in communication result from differences in contextual assumptions hearers with different cultural backgrounds draw on in response to an utterance, then this will add new strength to my findings.

Secondly, my study adds several levels of new explanations to the approaches adopted by the existing literature of culture and communication. My literature review shows that earlier studies of culture and communication assume that inference is only required for communication in collectivistic (HC) cultures, but not necessary for communication in individualistic (LC) cultures. By drawing on Relevance Theory, my present study reveals that understanding utterances produced by speakers from cultures that have been categorised as collectivistic (HC) and individualistic (LC) involves some degree of inference in a context. Only when one draws some inference
in a context can one identify the meaning intended by the speaker. As I have shown, previous studies of culture and communication see context as an element that exists before the interpretation process takes place, and as a result they are unable to explain how meaning is generated in a specific context. I have also shown that such studies assume that culture is a fixed set of values and norms, and that people who belong to a specific culture are a homogeneous group and therefore those bicultural individuals are not included. Because of these assumptions, as I have shown, these studies are unable to explain how culture informs the behaviours of the bicultural individuals. In the light of the rapid progress of globalisation and an increasing phenomenon of biculturalism or even multiculturalism, I argue that this is a significant omission. I also argue that the very significant omission must be considered by all who work in the area of culture and communication. By drawing on Relevance Theory, my study engages with the systematic way in which that theory addresses how context is a product of dynamic process of selection, and an interpretation is a synthesis of old and new information, a result of interaction between the two. By drawing on the insights from Relevance Theory and by adopting a dynamic constructivist approach, my study reveals that culture is dynamic, in that hearers draw on general cultural knowledge as their contextual assumptions in their construction of meaning. My study also reveals that culture informs the behaviours of bicultural individuals, in that it shows how the bicultural individuals rely on two distinct sets of cultural knowledge and shift between them in response to an utterance, as proposed by Hong and her colleagues. However, an important insight that my study adds to Hong’s approach is that it demonstrates that the bicultural individuals are very flexible in using their two cultural meaning systems. They may use their English cultural knowledge in response to a Chinese cultural clue, and vice versa. Since the characteristic of flexibility has not been
discussed in Hong’s approach, I believe that my present research has brought into play a fruitful new approach to studying cultural differences in real life interactions.

Thirdly, my research provides data which enriches our understanding of cultural differences in interpretation. My literature review shows that previous literature on culture and communication suggests that people from the same culture will generate the same interpretation for the same utterance. Drawing on Relevance Theory, my study reveals that interpretation varies from individual to individual as well as from culture to culture. I show that even two people whose cognitive environments overlap with each other do not always generate the same interpretation, in that if they draw on different contextual assumptions in response to an utterance, they will generate different implications. As my analysis shows, when this occurs, they interpret the utterance in radically different ways. This also indicates that in intercultural communication encounters, the difference in contextual assumptions people from different cultures draw on is likely to lead to intercultural misunderstanding. Since the primary aim of studying cultural differences is to learn as much as possible about ourselves and others in order to avoid misunderstanding (Hall 1983, 185), I regard the identification of differences in interpretation as important, because it offers supporting evidence for any claims about differences in interpretation between cultures.

The findings from my empirical study have implications for the way in which culture and its relationship with communication can be explored further, in that my findings suggest that contextual assumptions are important contributors to cultural differences in communication. My assertion is that contextual assumptions that hearers from different cultures draw on should be studied systematically.
We have moved into a new century, and biculturalism or even multiculturalism is prevailing in many parts of the world. With rapid globalization in the world, there is a need for more precise theorization of cultural influence on communication. Therefore, I argue that it may no longer be useful to treat the distinction between direct and indirect communication as the way to characterize cultures. Rather, the differences in the use of communication styles between cultural groups revealed in previous studies of culture and communication could serve as a point of departure from which researchers further their exploration of the process of interpretation which gives rise to different contextual assumptions.
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Appendix 1: Conventions of transcriptions

. The utterance is uttered with a falling contour.

, The utterance is uttered with a low-rise contour.

? The utterance is uttered with a high-rise contour.

(.) A micropause of less than one tenth of a second is heard.

// An interruption occurs.

! The utterance is uttered with an exclamative tone.

< > The speech between them is noticeably slower than surrounding speech.

> < The speech between them is noticeably quicker than surrounding speech.

… A longer than usual pause is heard.

AA The capitalised word or phrase is uttered with extra loudness or extra duration.

[ha heh] Laughter is heard.

AA The bolded word or phrase in Chinese is uttered with a lengthened duration.
Appendix 2: English extract 1 (E01GT)

H: I believe that you’re with your partner for sometime how long.
C: All in all about (. ) 6 years.
H: 6 years ok.
C: Yeah.
H: Were you living together?
C: No no. I’ve never had (. ) not really had a place of my own to live in.
H: Ok so you were living at home with parents were you?
C: No (. ) I’m living in a shared house… this is the second time I’ve had to do this…coz I’ve had nowhere else.
H: Ok now I believe that he was borrowing money from you.
C: Yeah.
H: how much money we’re talking about.
C: Quite a lot of money… probably about < > over five hundred pounds I would think really altogether cos.
H: So what was what was he borrowed five hundred quid for.
C: Oh (. ) it was always something he needed, and oh crikey (heh) money for his phone sometimes < > I’m trying to think what else.
H: Alright so why was he borrowing cash off you then.
C: Oh … I’m trying to think what he used to come out with.
H: But there was always an excuse for him borrowing cash off you.
C: Yeah money wasn’t BORROWED from me (. ) which he was doing such a lot (. ) there is another…my back was turned if I was making a couple of tea or something. He’s taking money anyway …as well.
C: Yeah yeah (. ) I know it’s horrible.
H: Well (. ) what did you say to him about this.
C: Well for a long time I (. ) I couldn’t say anything you know.
H: Why.
C: I (. ) I don’t know (. ) I.
H: Couldn’t you say…when I’m making you a couple of tea you know and I’m turning my back and you’re nicking money outta my purse > < what are you doing.

C: It’s just something about his manner and everything (.) and.

H: In what way, what do you mean.

C: I don’t know, I just couldn’t.

H: What’s controlling over you?

C: Yeah he’s got the funny sort of personality, I dunno, but on one occasion I deliberately chucked my purse outta my bag to make him a cup of tea and he saw me doing it. And you know (.) I know his mood (.) I know his face and I know his expressions and everything so well, but it really make, but I could tell I gave him a bit of shock.

H: Now I know that you’ve split up haven’t you.

C: Yeah.

H: And he owes you money?

C: Yeah.

H: Money you need?

C: Yeah. I mean sometimes I’ve I’ve been quite in urgent need of money. I have a hundred pounds a week to live on for everything, and some sometimes just not (.) not quite enough.

H: Well let’s let’s face it, we all need money don’t we, really.

C: Yeah, yeah.

H: And if someone’s been nicking money off us we want it back. and what do you intend to do, (.) what do you intend to do Lisa about all these.

C: I don’t know. I just (.) the only thing I … the only thing I could think of was to put a quite big notice on the front door where I’m living now, pinned it on …saying I don’t want to see you anymore.

H: And you think that will work?

C: Well, he came back three times, about half past two in the morning, ringing and ringing my front door bell, and I wouldn’t answer and the people who I live with wouldn’t answer it either.
H: So is this the issue here, I’m trying to get my head what the issue actually is here Lisa, are you trying to finish with him //

C: //Yeah.

H: Or are you just trying to get the money off him? What are you trying to do?

C: well it’s (.) it’s going to be waste of time get trying to get the money off him. I just I want him out of my life, and he’s hurt me so much, I’ve lost all my feelings to him.

H: So the question the question tonight is how do you get rid of the man that you don’t want any longer, yeah?

C: Yeah.

H: Ok. Well let’s ask the question tonight on late night love, Lisa wants this man out of her life, he’s nicking money off her, he is causing all sorts of problems, what does Lisa do, how does she get shut off this guy, give us a call let’s share what we can do, all right?
Appendix 3: English extract 2 (E01JD)

H: Hello there (. ) what’s happening with you at the moment then.
C: Well we would (. ) we were invited to my niece for Christmas, she lives quite away
   from us.
H: This is your niece’s house.
C: Yeah.
H: Right.
C: Yeah. we’ve ALWAYS spent family (. ) family Christmas together ALWAYS.
H: Um-hum.
C: But as I say they’ve just recently moved away. Now my husband …because OUR
   two children aren’t going although our two children have left home with their
   partners, they are going to their (. ) their girlfriends’ mothers. Because they are not
   going he is refusing to go.
H: Right.
C: Which now causes the problem we just …because I can’t get to my niece
   otherwise I would have GONE. So now my my other sister and my mother said
   that they are not gonna to go there now because they don’t want to leave ME on
   my own.
H: No of course. so the situation is ramification and (. ) and causing all sorts of splits
   and problems.
C: Yes it is. big time.
H: Oh dear.
C: You know it really causes family argument.
H: Ok Lindsey I (. ) I have …I have to go to the news now, but will you < > hang on
   there //
C: //Yeah.
H: And we’ll come back to your story in a moment and we’ll get Mo to take on that
   for you just a few minutes time. Sorry that …we’ve just we are coming up to the
   news, so I’ve got to take this quick break (. ) but we’ll come back to Lindsey’s
   story in just a moment Mo, if that’s all right.
E: That’s //
H: //And …get you to take on it.
H: Just before the news, we got a glimpse of Lindsey in Hillingdon’s story. Let’s get straight back to that. Lindsey, thank you for holding over the news for me.

C: Ok.

H: Let’s just quickly reiterate the story for those who have just joined this and you’ve been invited to your niece’s for Christmas, but because she lives quite a way away …that’s causing some problem, because your husband doesn’t want to go that far and it’s creating a bit of split in the family.

C: That’s right.

H: So that’s the the situation in the nutshell shall we say.

C: A disaster (heh heh).

H: Yeah. Well just before I get to Mo and Mo takes on your situation (.). Lindsey, how (.). how are you feeling about it. What what would you really want to do.

C: I would like to be sort of all together like we normally do. As I said both of my children have left home, he really wants children to co, to come here.

H: Um-hum.

C: And make our other arrangement.

H: Right.

C: And so I think you know it’s been like … but you know because of what’s happening, but you know (.). I’m not doing anything else.

H: So what do (.). what’s what’s the likely scenario at the moment that you you and he will be at home alone over Christmas?

C: We’ll we’ll be home and now … my mother and my other sister who were to go to my niece, and now goanna to stay local to me.

H: Um-hum.

C: So (.). that her (.). you know (.). they are about for (.). for my sake really.

H: Ok but obviously it’s causing you a little bit tension between the rest of the family.

C: Oh yes, yeah, yeah.

H: Ok all right Mo, this is the situation you’ve probably come across in (.). in various different permutations over the year, what do you make it to Lindsey’s story?

E: Right, it’s it’s one of the examples of many of how difficult Christmas can be, and how it can affect the extended families, affect couples and so on and so forth.
Appendix 4: English extract 3 (E07AD)

H: So what do you want to talk about Margo?
C: I’ve just had a baby about eight weeks ago.
H: Congratulations.
C: Thank you (heh, heh). And my partner Mark (.) he is ok. I love him to pieces and all that, but he is just … he’s not very happy with like all the stretch marks and all that. We haven’t made love about eight weeks.
H: Right, so he < > he thinks that you’ve kind of changed physically.
C: Yeah, he’s not happy with the figure and everything. He thinks that I’ve put on a lot of weight during pregnancy.
H: Have you spoken to him about it have you actually talked to him about it?
C: Yeah. I’ve talked about it, the stuff he just said …you know… maybe when you can exercise a bit, but it’s just very different between us since we’ve had the baby and everything.
H: You know this happens to quite a few people, you’re not (.) you’re not on your own there.
C: I feel like I am.
H: I know it does, but you know… just to remind you … this is (.) this is a perfectly normal situation to find yourself in afterwards. I think the part of the problem though is that, really he needs to well he needs to think a little before he speaks, because it sounds like he’s done quite a bit damage by saying this to you.
Appendix 5: English extract 4 (E08AD)

C: Well I hope you can help me tonight.
H: Well come on and tell us your story, maybe I will.
C: I confronted her the other day.
H: Em.
C: And I phoned her today for lunch.
H: Em.
C: And of course she denied it, and you know (.) you know how women are they never treat straightly, they never ruin anything else.
H: What what did she deny.
C: Wh(.) Anthony you won’t …please promise not to laugh.
H: Well I promise not to tell anyone, I can’t guarantee I won’t laugh Mitch. I won’t tell anyone.
C: Ah it’s so, I don’t know if I should be worried about it.
H: Well, just tell me what it is and I will be the judge there.
C: Well, what it is yeah.
H: What is it.
C: Basically the (.) she’s getting her tongue pierced, and I’m just thinking it’s going to ruin my SEX LIFE, you know well the.
H: Well sorry, ba ba ba ba.
C: (heh) yeah (heh) I know.
H: Ba ba ba ba, let’s just rewind (.) rewind, excuse me, both of listeners, let’s just rewind for a moment if we can.
C: I know it’s silly //isn’t it.
H: //No no zip it. she’s get her tongue pierced,
C: Yeah.
H: That’s all of these about you’re worried her get her tongue pierced is going to your sex life,
C: Yeah but wouldn’t it, Am I worried too much?
H: Mitch, have you goanna sex life before you worried about a pierced tongue.
C: But seriously Anthony.
H: //look.
C: //You think about it,

H: You have to understand some of the sexist people in the world you and myself excluded, of course, for the purpose of this conversation.

C: (hah,hah).

H: Have some sort of piercing whether it be in the tongue or in the navel or on the ear or elsewhere, the point is that it is (. ) it is the sign Mitch (. ) of enhancing sexuality and desire.

C: Yeah.
Appendix 6: English extract 5 (E08GT)

H: Ok you’re a twenty-three year old guy and have been for (..) a relationship with your girlfriend for about six months now yeah?
C: Yeah six months exactly actually this month.
H: Ok and she’s just turned around and said what to you.
C: She told me yesterday morning that she’s been seeing and < > having um sexual relationships … with ANOTHER MAN.
H: Ok not the sort of information you want to hear from your girlfriend is it.
C: No. I was very hurt and I feel very troubled by it, I’m you know just wondering, I mean she is behaving like she’s a complete cow.
H: Em.
C: And I’m just you know I I love her, and I’m not sure how to take this, because I don’t want to take it lying down, I want to do something about it.
H: Em.
C: And I’m not sure what.
H: Ok so (..) your girlfriend of six months said to you yesterday I’ve been sleeping around and having sex with an another guy, you know another guy or another guyS?
C: Yeah it was it was TWO men, I I mean she said she’s been doing some rather ridiculous things, she (..) she even said she’s been in (..) relationships with two men at one time in (..) in one room. She’s had (threesome) with two men.
H: Right ok (..) well my question to you is, do you want to be in a relationship with a girl like that?
C: I’m not sure because I love her ever so dearly.
Appendix 7: English extract 6 (E03JD)

H: Hi there what’s happening in your life at the moment then.
C: Well basically (. ) I’ve been on a (. ) I’ve seen this guy eight times over two months.
H: Um-hum.
C: And he’s kind of like DUMPED me and said that the connection doesn’t feel right.
H: Right.
C: He’s gone abroad for three weeks and //
H: //When when did this happen. When did he (. ) when did he finish with you.
C: About a week and a half ago.
H: Ok. that’s so fairly fresh then.
C: Yeah. And basically he (. ) he’s currently like a kind of saying < > the connection doesn’t feel right. But he …while we were dating, he did make a big thing about how would be great to be friends of somebody first …and even when he dumped me (. ) said we can still be friends, but I didn’t say anything cos I was upset.
H: Ok.
C: Basically, I’m just wondering I’m thinking about, maybe calling him when he < > comes back and saying < > well, be nice and clearly I want to be friends, but I’m thinking is that too needy, or is that a good way to try to win somebody back.
H: It’s difficult isn’t it. I know exactly what you mean I mean if he’s called (. ) you know called it a day you know.
C: Yeah.
H: I’ll be tempted to to say, well you know (. ) fair enough, that’s the decision, that’s it, move on, but you still feel that some kind of connection there.
C: I do.
H: That’s worth investigating and I can understand very much that urge that want to contact him. Mo, what do you, what do you think.
Expert (Mo): Well, I think, it’s, it’s very interesting. It sounds to me, like, you Kelly would very much like to have a relationship with him.
C: Yeah.
Appendix 8: Chinese extract 1 (C03SX)

C: 我 有 个 我 遇到 个 难 题, 我 想,  
    I have a I meet a difficult issue I think  
    I have a problem and hope you can help me.

H: 你 请 说.  
    You please say  
    Please go ahead.

C: 我 处 了 一 个 男 朋 友, 我 是 离婚 的.  
    I get along a male friend I be divorced  
    I’m divorced, and now I have a boyfriend.

H: 噢.  
    Oh.  
    Right.

C: 我 是 90 年 离婚 的.  
    I be 1990 year divorced.  
    I got divorced in 1990.

H: 噢.  
    Oh.  
    Right.

C: 离婚 了 以 后 我 处 了 一 个 男 同志 他 六十 来 岁 我 五 十 多 岁.  
    Divorced after I get along a male friend he 60 come year I 50 over year.  
    After divorce, I have had a boyfriend. He is about sixty and I am over fifty.

H: 噢.  
    Oh.  
    Ok.
C: 我发现他有家，我就退出来了。
    I find he has family I so withdraw come sentence final particle.
    I’ve found he is married, so I withdrew.

H: 嗯。
    Em
    Em.

C: 我从那时候起，我就不理他了。
    I from that time begin I so no notice him (sentence final particle)
    From then on I just ignore him.

H: 嗯。
    Em
    Em.

C: 我不理他，可他现在总赖着我。
    I ignore he but he now always cling to me.
    I ignore him, but he keeps harassing me.

H: 那不行。你必须得告诉他，你又有家，你本身欺骗了我。
    That no you must tell him you have family you itself be cheat me
    Oh no. You must tell him that since he’s married, he’s cheated on you.

这非常不道德的。第二你有家，我本身是不可以去扮演第三者的。
This is very immoral second you have home I itself be no may go play third of
This is immoral. Second, tell him ‘I don’t intend to play a role of a third party’.

所以你必须退出来。如果你要再来纠缠我那我可以报警了。
So I must withdraw if you want again harass I then I so can call the police
So you must withdraw. If he keeps harassing you, then you can call the police.
C: 可是, 他 现在 跟 我 在一个 屋里 住 呀.
    But he now and I in a room live!
    But now he lives in the same room with me.

H: 那 不行. 你 必须 让 他 出去.
    That no you must let him out
    Oh no. You must let him move out.
Appendix 9: Chinese extract 2 (C02LY)

C: 我有 一桩 感情的 事儿，我想 跟 你 说 一 说。
    I have a love issue I want and you say a say
    I have a problem of love that I’d like to talk with you.

H: 好.
    Good.
    Ok.

C: 我 是一个 打工的，我是 一个 农村 打工 的。
    I be a causal employee I be a countryside hit work of
    I am from a rural area and doing some casual work here.

H: 嗯.
    Em
    Em.

C: 我今年 22 岁。
    I this year 22 year
    I am twenty-two.

H: 嗯.
    Em
    Em.

C: 怎么说呢？我喜欢上了 一个 比 我 大 一轮 的 一个 女的。
    How say I like (particle) a than I big a round of a lady
    How to put it? I’m in a relationship with a lady a round older than me.

H: 哦 (hah hah hah).
    Oh (hah hah hah)
    Oh (hah hah hah).

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C: 她有家，也有孩子。
She have home also have children
She is married and has children as well.

H: 嗯。
Em
Em.

C: 她是一个开商店的，我这个单位离她很近就是隔壁
She be a open shop of I this unit away she very near so be next door
She has a shop very close to where I am working, only next-door.

我们时间长了我们就喜欢上对方了。
We time long we then like up opposite
Gradually we love each other.

H: 嗯。
Em
Em.

C: 我们现在已经相处了将近二年了并发生了关系。
We now already get along nearly two years and happen relation
We’ve been in a relationship for about two years and have sex life together.

H: 嗯。
Em
Em.

C: 这件事儿，我应该怎么处理呢？
This issue I should how deal with？
Do you think I should maintain the relationship and become closer to her?
H: 你必须得撤出来呀！这是一种错爱。人家有家庭孩子。
You must withdraw out！this be a wrong love other have family children
You must withdraw. This is wrong love since she is married and has children.

你再介入，你就是第三者，你就是扮演了不道德的角色。
You again involve you so be third person you so be play immoral of role
If you are involved in her family, you are playing an immoral role of third party.

而且，你们两个人也不会有前途啊。
Moreover you two person also no can have future！
Moreover, you two can’t have a future.

C: 嗯。
Em
Em.

H: 所以，要和对方马上一刀两断。
So must and opposite horse up a knife two break.
So you must end the relationship with the lady straightaway.
Appendix 10: Chinese extract 3 (C03HM)

C: 我 现在 特别 困惑，早 就 想 给 你 打 个 电话.
    I now very perplexed early so want give you hit a call
    I‘m now very perplexed, and I wanted to phone you a long time ago.

H: 啊.
    Ah
    Ah.

C: 性格，你 应该 能 听 出来，但 爱人吧 性格 挺 暴 噪的.
    Personality you should can hear out but lover personality quite hot
    My temper is ok, but my husband’s temper is very bad.

H: 嗯.
    Em
    Em

C: 但是，他 是一个 顾 家 的 男人，不 能 说 他 不 好.
    But he be a care home of man not can say he no good
    But he does care about the family, so he is ok.

H: 明白. 这样的 男人 也 不 少 (heh.heh).
    Understand such of man too not few
    I understand. There are a lot of men like this.

C: 对. 我 现在 有 一个 很 伤心 的 事儿.
    Right I now have a very upset thing
    Yeah. But now I am very upset.

H: 嗯.
    Em
    Em.
C: 就是 我们俩常常吵架, 哎呀 无法形容.
   Just be we two often argue ah no way describe
   We often argue, fight. It’s hard to describe.

H: 嗯
   Em
   Em

C: 昨天又打起来了, 吵起来了
   Yesterday again fight up argue up
   Yesterday we argued again.

H: 嗯.
   Em
   Em.

C: 我们俩打嘴仗.
   We two fight mouth fight
   We two just argue.

H: 你应该和他谈谈过?
   You should and he talk talk talk past
   You should have a talk with him. Have you talked to him about this?

C: 没有. 我都麻木了.
   No. I all numb.
   No. I even feel numb.

H: 你应该在他心情好的时候和他谈谈
   You should in he mood good of when and he talk talk
   You should talk to him when he is in a good mood.
Appendix 11: Chinese extract 4 (C01LY)

C: 我想问一件事儿.
I think ask a issue
I have something to ask you for help.

H: 好.你请讲.
Good you please talk
Ok, please go ahead.

C: 我认识一个比我小五岁的男人.我想和他在一起.
I know a than I small five year of man I want and he in together
I know a man five years younger than myself. I want to be with him.

可他的家里不愿意,我该怎么办?
But his family no will I should how do
but his family do not agree. How should I do?

H: (heh,heh) 他家里不愿意,你今年多大了?
He family no agree you this year many big
His family do not agree, then how old are you?

C: 二十七.
Two ten seven
Twenty-seven.

H: 啊你今年二十七岁了.
Ah you this year two ten seven year
Oh. You’re already twenty seven.

C: 嗯.
Em
Em.
H: 对方才二十二岁，是吗？

Other only two ten two year be？

Your young man is only twenty-two, right?

C: 嗯。Em

Em.

H: 那你们年纪的确相差五岁呀人家说五岁就有力代沟了。

That you two age indeed gap five year other say five year just have generation gap

But you two indeed have a five-year age gap. People often say five-year age gap is a generation gap.

C: 是吗？Be (?)

Really?

H: 当然，我们说爱情是不受年龄限制的。

Of course we say love be no receive age limitation of

Of course we always say love is not constrained by age.

C: 对呀。

Right (!)

Yeah.

H: 但是毕竟呢，年龄差距比较大的话就会有代沟。

But after all age distance compare big of words so may have generation gap

But after all, if there is a big age gap, then there will be a generation gap.

他今年才刚刚22岁，但你27岁，应该说是一个成熟的年龄段了。

He this year just only 22 year but you 27 year should say be a ripe age period

He is only twenty-two, but you are already twenty-seven, which is a mature age.
Appendix 12: Chinese extract 5 (C08SX)

C: 我 有点 事 想 麻烦 你.
   I have bit thing want bother you
   I have something to bother you.

H: 好， 说 吧.
   Good say (!)
   Please go ahead.

C: 我 有个 女朋友， 跟 她 相处 有 半 年 多了.
   I have a girlfriend and she get along have half year more
   I have a girlfriend, and we’ve been together for about half a year.

H: 嗯.
   Em
   Em.

C: 现在， 她 怀孕 有 四 个 半 月  活好了 今天 去 打胎，
   Now she pregnant have four a half month book good today go abortion
   Now she’s been pregnant for four months. We’ve agreed she should have an abortion today.

   可 她 现在 躲避 我． 她 现在 准备 把 孩子 生 下来，
   But she now hide me she now prepare hold child bear down
   but she is hiding from me. She is now planning to give birth to the baby,

   然后 把 孩子 给 我 家 送去
   then hold child give my home send
   and then take it to my home.

H: 你 俩 是 谈 恋爱 还是你 有 家庭 ?
   You two be talk love or you have family
   Are you in a relationship or are you married?
C: 没有家。
No family
No, I’m not married.

H: 那你俩是在恋爱?
Then you two be in love
Then you two are in a relationship?

C: 对。
Right
Yeah.

H: 噢。那你本来也不应该和她发生这种关系呀!
Oh. That you original too no should and her happen this kind relationship
Oh. Even if you are in a relationship, you shouldn’t have had sex relations now!

C: 如果她把孩子生下来那我该怎么办呢
If she hold child bear down then I should how do?
If she gives birth to the baby, what should I do?

H: 那就是个法律的问题了你可以不娶她
That then be a law issue you may no marry her
Then that’s the issue of law. You can decide not to marry her.

但你是孩子的父亲你必须得承担法律的责任了
But you are child of father you must undertake law responsibility
But you are the father, and you must take legal responsibility for the child.

C: 对。你看这件事儿我该怎么办?
Right. You see this piece thing I should how do?
Year. What do you think I should do now?
This issue very tough I suggest only you first find she only can talk down a step. This is indeed a problem. I suggest you can only talk about what you will do next if you can find her.
Appendix 13: Chinese extract 6 (C02HM)

C: 我 给 你 打 过 电 话 的 我 和 我 前 夫 的 女 儿 向 我 要 电 脑 的 事.
    I give you hit past call of I and I before man of girl to I ask computer issue
    I phoned you before, regarding that the daughter that I have with my ex-husband asked me for a computer.

H: 噢. 我 想 起 来 了.
    Oh. I think up
    Oh. I remember that.

C: 但 是 孩 子, 春 节 之 前, 我 见 了 一 次 面,
    But child spring holiday of before I see a meeting
    I saw the child once before the New Year.

H: 嗯.
    Em
    Em.

C: 给 了 她 三 千 元 钱.
    Give she three thousand yuan money
    I gave her three thousand yuan.

H: 嗯.
    Em
    Em.

C: 这 孩 子 到 现 在 过 了 春 节 这么 长时 间 了,
    The child till now gone spring holiday such long time
    Even such a long time after the New Year,
    一 直 也 不 给 我 来 个 电 话. 就 是 等 我 给 她 挂 电 话
    Always too no give I come a call so be wait I give she hang call
    She hasn’t given me a call yet. She just waits for ME to call HER.
C: 我心里不 平衡 红梅，我现在给不给她挂这个电话？
I heart no balance Hong Mei I now give no give her hang this a call
I’m very upset Hong Mei, do you think I need to call her?

H: 你 现在 给 她 发 短 信 吗？
You now give her send short letter？
Have you sent her a message?

C: 我 一 直 也 没 给 她 挂，也 没 给 发 短 信。现 在 是 春 节
I always too no give she hang too no give send short letter. Now be spring holiday
No. Now it’s New Year.

她 没 给 我 挂 个 电 话，也 没 叫 个 妈妈。
She no give I hang a call too no call a mum
She has neither phoned me nor called me mum.

H: 我 想 这 样 从 今 天 开始 每 天 给 她 发 短 信，
I think such from today begin everyday give she send short letter
Shall we do it this way? You send her messages everyday from today,

问候 她，看 她 如何 反应。
ask she see she how react
greeting her and see how she will react to it.