

審査の結果の要旨

Yuan Muhang

The following describes the results of the committee's evaluation of Yuan Muhang's doctoral thesis, titled *A Cross-Cultural Empirical Study of Mitigation in Face-Threatening Contexts by Native English Speakers and Chinese/Japanese EFL Learners*. The committee's summary of the content of the thesis appears in a separate document.

The committee noted the importance of the thesis's topic and the originality of the author's approach. Culture-based differences in the use and interpretation of mitigation can cause misunderstandings and unintended offense in interpersonal interactions, and a deeper understanding of mitigation in English is particularly important because of the language's role in international communication. Research on mitigation, however, has tended either to be theoretical or to focus on monolingual contexts. This author's empirical, data-focused study of mitigation use among second language users is thus a significant advance in the field. It provides findings that may be useful not only to other scholars but also to second-language educators and learners.

The committee also noted the author's original contributions to the study of mitigation, including his sound, workable classification of mitigating expressions in English into four types and 19 subtypes. He makes an important contribution with his cross-cultural analysis of the use of mitigators as rhetorical strategies for expressing politeness, preserving face, and attenuating vulnerability. Although much attention in previous research has been devoted to politeness strategies, modes of face-saving, and vulnerability, this study is unique both in its analysis of the use of mitigators in these contexts and in its cross-cultural application to specific groups. Furthermore, the author makes a valuable contribution in his attempt to quantify the weight of face-threatening scenarios, thus actualizing the theoretical equation developed by Brown and Levinson (1987) for quantitative analysis. The author discovered limitations in his application of the formula that will be useful for future refinements in this area. The committee also praised the author for his diligence and perseverance in pursuing this study with little institutional support, and they noted his careful preparation of the thesis itself.

The committee did, however, identify areas of weakness. Although the author did an extensive review of and draws important insights from the rich and complex literature of the field, the connection of that literature to his own research questions and experimental methodology was not sufficiently clear. His overall argument would have been clearer if he had focused more on previous experimental studies in pragmatics and related fields. Furthermore, his hesitation at drawing broad conclusions from his analysis of his data makes the connection between the previous literature and his own study insufficiently clear. The committee also noted that, by treating his interview data only as complementary, he missed an opportunity to obtain deeper insights.

Several members of the committee also raised questions about several fundamental assumptions made by the author. For example, he foregrounds the categories “Chinese,” “Japanese,” and “native English speaker” and seems to accept largely uncritically the notion that there is an essential homogeneity within each group. All of his study participants were apparently college or university graduates, whom he seemed to assume represented second-language users in general. While he looked at differences in gender and age, he did not consider the possible effects of socio-economic background or individual personality characteristics on the participants’ language use.

As the author himself notes, his statistical analysis of his data was limited to univariate linear regressions, Pearson correlations, and one-way ANOVA. A multivariate analysis might have yielded unexpected findings. His failure to conduct a deeper analysis appears in his brief and cautious conclusion as well. While his hesitation to draw sweeping generalizations from his data is admirable, the committee would have liked to have read more insights about what his findings might suggest about the issue of culture-dependent linguistic pragmatics in general as well as his proposals for how the teaching and learning of mitigation strategies in English and other languages might be improved.

One question raised during the defense was the academic field to which this thesis belongs. The author’s response was that it is interdisciplinary, like the Graduate Program on Global Society in which the author has been enrolled. The final degree granted to graduates of that program is a Ph.D. in Global Studies, which is indeed an interdisciplinary field. After thorough deliberation and discussion, the committee concluded that the weaknesses noted above are easily outweighed by the fundamental scholarly value of this thesis and they unanimously agree that the degree of Ph.D. in Global Studies should be granted to Yuan Muhang.