

Implicit Conflict Talk: An Introduction

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Abstract—Differing from previous studies which not only focused on explicit conflict talk but also considered it as the central subject for research, this paper classifies conflict talk into two types, “implicit conflict talk” (ICT for short) and “explicit conflict talk” (ECT for short). It first presents a working definition to ICT and draws a dividing line between ICT and ECT from three aspects. It then discusses how ICT relates to other types of conflict talk, such as indirect conflict talk and cool conflict talk. It goes further to discuss the organizations of ICT: its local organization—adjacency pair and its overall organization—pre-sequences and insertion sequence. The whole research is done by illustrating 12 examples from well-known literature, popular movies and television series both in English and Chinese. The aim of the paper is to arouse interest in research on ICT. (Abstract)

Keywords—*conflict talk; ICT; ECT (key words)*

I. INTRODUCTION

Recent decades have seen much research on conflict talk done by anthropologists, sociologists, linguists, psychologists and lawyers. Some of these studies have focused on disagreement or the act of disagreeing [1][2][3][4], on argument or the act of arguing [2][5][6], on dispute or the act of disputing [7] and even on the act of insulting [8]. Others have been done under relatively general terms such as confrontational talk [9], (verbal) conflict episodes/sequence [1], adversative episode [10], battle [11], disorderly discourse [12] apart from the term conflict talk itself [5][13]. Literature regarding conflict talk is not to be reviewed here as Hu & Yang [14] have presented a relatively complete and far-reaching review.

Nevertheless, there is one point that deserves attention. That is, whatever focuses were chosen and whatever terms were used in the previous studies, it seems that they are mainly concerned with the types of conflict talk with which one interlocutor disagrees with, disputes with, opposes, refutes, and/or even insults another in an explicit way, and the present paper terms it explicit conflict talk (hereafter abbreviated as ECT). What makes things worse is that previous scholars only targeted explicit conflict talk and in fact, considered explicit conflict talk as the only kind of conflict talk. So far few studies have touched upon another kind of conflict talk in which the interlocutors perform face-threatening acts in an implicit way, despite the fact that this is a common occurrence within verbal interaction.

To address this deficiency, the present paper aims to propose that there exists a new type of conflict talk, implicit conflict talk (hereafter abbreviated as ICT), which deserves investigation. By using examples from well-known literature, popular movies, television series and historical story, the paper makes an introduction to ICT with an attempt to arouse interest in it so that the study of conflict talk can be deepened.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although previous studies have made no mention of ICT, some scholars have discovered from their data, the existence of implicit disagreement, which closely relates to ICT. Gruber [1] classifies disagreement into overt disagreement and pragmatic disagreement according to three features. Scott [3] discusses a quantitative and qualitative investigation into American CNN television news shows and she identifies two types of disagreements, backgrounded and foregrounded disagreements, according to “the implicit or explicit nature of the disagreement.” She believes that the two types of disagreement “exist on the poles of a continuum” and between the two poles lie mixed disagreements, which show the characteristics of the two. In short, pragmatic disagreement and backgrounded disagreement discussed by the above two scholars can be called implicit disagreement, which is related to ICT that may consist of an implicit disagreement and an implicit opposition to it. Other scholars also claim the existence of implicit disagreement although they do not coin any term for them. The research of Georgakopoulou [2] is “motivated by the salience of acts of disagreement in the data corpus” and her research demonstrates that disagreements in informal Greek conversations between young people are “systematically implied and indirectly constructed.” Another scholar, Robles [4], based on talk in the British political setting, proposes that “‘talking around the issue’ is an important practice that accomplishes disagreement in the House of Lords” and “it is shown to be a contextually appropriate means for dealing with conflicting conversational goals.”

Besides implicit disagreement, other types of implicit “face threatening act” (hereafter abbreviated as FTA) are investigated. Webber [6] states that “there are many samples of ... veiled criticism” among the “corpus of taped recordings

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of scientific conference proceedings on similar topics held in English in various parts of the world.” Zhuang [15] discusses different types of strategies that an interlocutor makes to implicitly refute offensive utterances from others. Duchesne & Haegel [16] conduct an experimental research in France with focus groups dealing with delinquency and it proves that “conflict in public discussion is generally latent and often repressed.” They go further to “analyze specifically which processes contribute to the rare transformation from latent to overt conflict.” False Honda [17] uses the terms “overt confrontations” and “overt conflict” to describe the data in his research, which suggests that data involving covert conflict is excluded. These studies indicate that some scholars have noticed the fact that an FTA is, in certain context, performed in an implicit way, although none has done research on ICT exclusively.

Previous scholars not only notice (albeit incidentally) some implicit FTAs from their data but also develop theoretical thinking on the issue. For example, Grimshaw [5] maintains that conflict talk “can be summarized by identification of dichotomies and continua which differentiate instances of conflict talk in terms of ... manifest and latent ends....” Unfortunately, over two decades have since elapsed and there has been no researcher who has made any response to his announcement.

III. THE DEFINITION OF ICT

To discuss the definition of ICT, it is necessary to introduce five terms. The first two are pertinent to the participants involved in interaction, for which Levinson [18] uses “speaker” while Sperber & Wilson [19] use “speaker,” in addition to “hearer” or “addressee.” Similar terms such as “one party” and “the other party” are also often used in pragmatics, studies of communication and relevant disciplines. They are easy to understand; however they seem to be so common and general as to be suitable for any kind of interaction. Nevertheless, it seems that these terms neglect the fact that different types of interaction have their own unique feature(s). Perhaps that is why Grimshaw [5] coins new terms, particularly for the study of conflict talk, to highlight its feature(s). He classifies participants into “contenders” and “non-contenders.” The former refers to a participant involved in conflict talk while the latter to a third party who is present when a conflict talk happens but not actually involved in it, like a judge in a trial who may see himself as a disinterested rule-interpreter, or parent(s) as interested but impartial arbitrators for their children’s dispute, or even a friend acting as a mediator. In addition, to stress different roles that different contenders play in conflict talk, Grimshaw [5] makes a distinction between “initiators” and “defendants” according to the participant willingness of participation, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. Therefore, in this paper, we adopt Grimshaw’s terms and use “initiator” to refer to the participant who voluntarily initiates attack and “defendant” for the participant who comes under the attack and fights back. The fifth term is related to what the

contenders contend for, namely the goal, which previously is referred to as “intention” or “intentionality” amongst other terms.

After new terms are introduced, here comes the task of giving a rough definition to ICT. This can be done by comparing it with ECT, its closest neighbor. Two helpful examples are dialogues from the American novel, *Hotel*, written by Arthur Hailey and published in 1965. In the novel, a couple, the Duke and the Duchess, flee a hit and run. In constant fear, they hide in their hotel room all day long. However, their secret is soon discovered by the chief house officer, a man named Ogilvie. In order to blackmail the couple, Ogilvie visits them without being invited, which makes them increasingly frightened. The following is the dialogue between Ogilvie and the couple:

Ex (1) **Ogilvie:** *Pretty neat set-up you folks got.*

Duchess: *I imagine you did not come here to discuss décor.*

Ogilvie: *No, Ma’am; Can’t say I did. I like nice things, though. (lowering voice) Like that car of yours. The one you keep here in the hotel. Jaguar, ain’t it?*

Duke: *Aah!*

In the above dialogue when Ogilvie enters the couple’s room, the initiator opens the conversation by complimenting the “neat set-up.” Preferably, a compliment is expected to be followed by gratitude. Yet the couple, as the defendant, does not reply to him with a preferred response. Rather, the Duchess ignores his complement by mentioning his purpose of visiting. Then Ogilvie, understanding the intention of the Duchess’s utterance, skillfully answers the Duchess’s request by connecting his purpose of coming to their car, the Jaguar, which causes the Duke to utter “Aah!” showing shock and fear as he realizes what is happening. At the superficial level, the two parties are talking about room décor and nice things such as automobiles. Yet at the deeper level, there exists a conflict which may not be easily detected by a third party who is ignorant of the context. In other words, when the hidden conflict is uncovered, the conversation is not as harmonious as it initially appears to be.

With the development of the plot, the conflict implied in example (1) becomes increasing explicit and it becomes more obvious in the subsequent dialogue between them.

Ex (2) **Ogilvie:** *Now then, you two was in the hit-’n-run.*

Duchess: *What are you talking about?*

Ogilvie: *Don’t play games, lady. This is for real. You saw the papers. There’s been plenty on radio, too.*

Duchess: *What you are suggesting is the most disgusting, ridiculous...*

Ogilvie: *I told you — Cut it out!*

In the example (2), the house officer, Ogilvie, definitely tells the couple that he knows for sure that they were involved in a “hit-’n-run.” The Duchess first wants to deny it by questioning him “What are you talking about?” Ogilvie explicitly asks her not to “play games.” The Duchess then abuses Ogilvie by saying “disgusting” and “ridiculous” and Ogilvie orders her to “cut it out.” It can be seen that the conflict between them becomes increasing overt with the occurrence of FTAs like charging, questioning, refusing, abusing and ordering. Compared with example (2), in example (1) the conflict is latent, hidden and covert, whereas in example (2) it is evident, obvious and conspicuous.

The above comparison shows that ICT, as its name suggests, is the kind of conflict talk in which FTA is performed implicitly or “off record” whereas ECT is the kind of conflict talk in which FTA is performed explicitly or “on record,” borrowing the terms of Brown & Levinson [20]. In other words, ICT can be roughly defined as the kind of conflict talk through which both the initiator and the defendant in interaction perform FTA in an implicit way. Put simply, ICT can be viewed as conflict talk covered with “veils.”

IV. DISTINCTION BETWEEN ICT AND ECT

Since ICT is a type of conflict talk covered with “veils,” here arises the question: which aspect(s) of FTA is/are covered so that the conflict talk containing it becomes ICT? Or, what factor(s) make(s) FTA less salient so that the conflict talk containing it becomes ICT? Our data shows that three factors or aspects influence the salience of FTA to a great extent. These are: the cause of FTA, the target of FTA and the appraisal from the doer of FTA. The first factor, which is the cause of FTA, refers to for what one party in the conversation threatens the face of another. This can be something that does harm to the speaker. It can also be something incorrect, improper or illegal in the mind of the speaker. The second factor, the target of FTA, refers to whose face is threatened. Normally, if someone is not referred to specifically, the target is the hearer or the people who have connection with the hearer. The third factor, the appraisal from the doer of FTA, refers to the doer’s evaluation of the cause and target of FTA, or of something related to the cause and target of FTA. Generally, the evaluation carried out by the doer of FTA is negative, so that it performs FTA. However in certain context this act wears the disguise of using neutral or even positive appraisal. The following gives examples to illustrate.

A. The Causes of FTA

The cause of the particular FTA can make the FTA [or conflict] salient. And if it is covered in one way or another, the FTA becomes less salient. A case in point is example (1) concerning the couple involved in the hit-’n-run. In that example, the cause of FTA is the car accident caused by the couple and its illegal implication. Ogilvie, visiting the couple with a purpose of blackmailing them, does not make this

cause manifest at the beginning of his chat. Rather, he merely mentions their car, the Jaguar. This way of giving association clue to the car accident, to some degree, covers the cause of FTA. However, the sheer mention of the car poses a threat to the couple so that the husband utters, “Aah!” Contrasting with this implicit way to threaten the face of the couple, Ogilvie definitely mentions “hit-’n-run” in example (2), which makes the car accident evident and thus makes the FTA salient. Brown & Levinson [20] have also discussed “giving association clues” as one of the strategies for doing FTA off record. However, what they have not discussed in detail regards what clues can be given. Our data shows that the speaker gives association clue as to the cause of FTA.

There are other examples, among which the following is one, where the contender hides the cause of FTA:

Ex (3) **Tong:** What is this stuff?

Wen: It is coffee.

Tong: I know it’s coffee—I mean why [did] you make coffee.

Wen: I wanna drink it!

Tong: Why don’t I know that you like to drink coffee?

Wen: I didn’t know you like smoking, either!

Tong: Are these the same thing?

Wen: Yes, they are!

The above example, from the Chinese TV series “Golden Wedding,” is a dialogue between a couple, Tong and Wen. The background is that the wife, Wen, often speaks highly of her former teacher, a man who suffered the loss of his true love. Thus, Tong suspects that Wen has affection towards the teacher. Furthermore, after Wen and her classmates were treated for coffee by the teacher, Wen now makes coffee at home and this behavior convinces Tong that his suspicion is right. This suspicion is the cause for his FTA towards his wife. Though he has the suspicion on his mind, he does not display this to his wife by making an explicit statement, like “you love him,” or by asking her whether or not she loves her teacher, etc. Instead, he covers his suspicion by asking her, “Why [did] you make coffee” and “Why don’t I know that you like to drink coffee?” The second question implies that she did not like to drink coffee in the past and it is only after her meeting with the teacher, she begins to love coffee. This way of covering the cause of FTA is also giving an association clue. On the other hand, the wife, as the defendant, refutes the husband by pretending not to understand his suspicion and by comparing her drinking coffee to his smoking, which she has long objected to. In short, covering the cause of FTA makes conflict talk implicit.

B. The Target of FTA

When doing FTA, sometimes the contender deliberately blurs or even hides the target so that the one whose face is threatened is not literally identified. The following example,

from the well-known Chinese play “Sunrise” written by the playwright Caoyu, illustrates this:

Ex (4) **Pan:** *I'm sorry. I almost forgot you've been my assistant for the last two days.*

Li: *What do you mean, sir?*

Pan: *Nothing. Mr. Li, do you know those bonds I'm holding are now cash?*

Li: *Yes, sure.*

Pan: *And this little bit of profit will be enough to pay off Mr. Jin's debt in full?*

Li: *According to my reckoning, yes and there'll be some left.*

Pan: *Excellent! Now, think: with this surplus, plus the influence and ability I possess, is it likely that I'm going to stand for any nonsense from **anybody**?*

Li: *I'm afraid I don't quite see what you're driving at, sir.*

Pan: *It's possible that **someone** might start putting it around that my bank has insufficient reserves---*

Li: *Eh?*

Pan: *Or go round saying I've mortgaged all the bank's property.*

Li: *Eh?*

Pan: *Or go around saying my bank has made no profit for the entire year and will be closed down soon.*

Li (with an ingratiating smile): *What's the point of going into all this, sir? It's not---*

Pan: *I've no wish to bring the subject up, but **someone** else insisted on bringing it up.*

Li: *That's rather far-fetched, sir.*

Pan (looking at him coldly): *No. Only six or seven days ago somebody said it to my face, Mr.Li.*

Li: *Now, don't vex yourself over it, sir. To quote the classics: "If one is not patient in small things one will never be able to control great ventures." It seems it always be better for a man in charge of great affairs to be patient, rather than impatient.*

Pan (with a glare at him): *I think I've been patient enough these last few days. Let me tell you quite plainly, though, I dislike intensely having a self-opinionated person keep blowing his own trumpet to me; and I don't very much like having people think I'm easy meat, and imagining that I'm going to submit willingly to blackmail. What is most detestable is when my colleagues in the bank call*

me a blind old fool behind my back because I have an uneducated third-rater as my assistant!

Li (controlling himself with a great effort): *It wouldn't hurt you to be a little more polite, sir. You might weigh your words a shade more carefully before coming out with them.*

Pan: *I've weighed my words with the greatest care. Every word is so polite that I need no reconsideration.*

The above dialogue is between a bank manager, Pan, and his assistant, Li, and the two have long been in a poor relationship. Before the dialogue takes place, Li, in order to make trouble for Pan, spreads rumors to the effect that Pan would soon go bankrupt. After Pan's financial situation improves, he launches a verbal attack at Li. Although he lists the causes for his criticism like “putting it around that my bank has insufficient reserves” and “saying I've mortgaged all the bank's property,” and so on and so forth, yet he does not make the target of the attack clear. On the contrary, he uses such vague words as “anybody,” “someone,” “someone else,” or “somebody” (marked in bold in the above example) to hide who he is attacking. On the other hand, Li, as the defendant, understands fully that he himself is the target of Pan's attack and thus requests Pan to “be patient” and “to be a little more polite.” In short, in this example the target of the FTA is covered and this makes the FTA less salient. When discussing off-record FTA, Brown & Levinson [20] also mention “being vague about who the object of the FTA is” as a strategy for off-record FTA.

C. The Appraisal from the Doer of the FTA

As previously mentioned, the appraisal from the doer of FTA refers to the doer's evaluation of the cause of FTA, the target of FTA, or the doer's evaluation of something related to the cause and target of FTA. Normally, when doing FTA, the doer often gives negative appraisal to correspond with it. Nevertheless, in certain context the doer makes seemingly neutral or even positive appraisals so that s/he does not sound as if doing FTA. This means that sometimes the negative appraisal wears the disguise of neutral or even positive appraisal. The following is an example where such appraisal occurs:

Ex (5) **Annabel:** *I must say, Lynette, your home is warm and inviting, your children are absolutely precious — this whole evening was practically a commercial for the perfect family.*

Lynette: *You think?*

Annabel: *You couldn't have planned it any better, — and I mean that.*

Lynette: *Good.*

The above dialogue, from the American TV series “Desperate Housewives” (Episode 20, Season 1), happens

between one of the female protagonists—Lynette and her rival, Annabel. As Annabel is her husband's ex-girlfriend and presently her husband's secretary, Lynette invites Annabel to their home for a dinner in order to show her that her family is harmonious and happy. Annabel understands her goal well and at the beginning of the dialogue; as she seems to highly praise the "perfect family" by using words like "warm and inviting" and "absolutely precious." Yet, this positive appraisal implies sharp satire when she, as the initiator, later says that everything is "commercial." Her goal of mocking Lynette is proved by her subsequent utterances, "You couldn't have planned it better, —and I mean that." On the other hand, Lynette, as the defendant, first replies by asking a question for confirmation, and later she makes a positive appraisal of Annabel's satire by saying, "Good." This can be interpreted as "If you know my goal, that's good, but please do not interfere in our life." So the goal of this positive appraisal is dissuasion. Thus, in example (5), the initiator's mocking is implied in positive appraisal and the defendant's dissuasion is also covered in positive appraisal.

It should be noted that our data shows appraisal does not always accompany FTA. In some conflict talk, the contenders merely do FTA by uttering something about the cause and the target of FTA. That is why no appraisal can be seen in example (1), (2) and (3). In example (4), however, appraisal is carried out by Pan's choice of such derogatory expressions as "a self-opinionated person", "blackmail" and "an uneducated third-rater." This means that sometimes the appraisal from the doer of FTA can be found in his or her choice of words. This is different from what happens in example (5), where the whole utterance makes up appraisal.

D. Covering Two or Three Factors

It is not the case that the contenders always cover one factor and leave the other(s) explicit. Sometimes, the contenders cover two factors or even three, which makes FTA more implicit than when only one of them is covered. The following example, again from the popular American TV series, "Desperate Housewives" (Episode 20, Season 1), covers both the target and the cause of FTA simultaneously:

Ex (6) **George**: *So are you going to make a purchase today?*

Bree: *Do you know, I have finally convinced Rex to buy his first orchid.*

George: *Make sure you study up. I hate **people** who own **precious flowers** — who don't know how to take proper care of them.*

Rex: *You know what I hate? **Weeds**. They just pop up out of nowhere, and you have to work so hard to get rid of them.*

George: *I find with the **right chemicals**, you can get rid of almost **anything**. See you Friday.*

The above dialogue implies conflict between two men, George and Rex. In the story, George loves Rex's wife Bree, who is one of the female characters in the series. When George meets the couple at a flower show, he initiates a

greeting and his greeting is responded to by Bree. Taking the opportunity that Bree mentions her husband Rex, George performs a FTA to him by implying that he hates him. However, he does not do so explicitly. Instead, he does so by covering two aspects. One aspect is the target of FTA, which is done by using the word "people" [in "I hate people"], which is relatively general, instead of "you," the real target of FTA. The other aspect George makes hidden is the cause of FTA. This is done by mentioning the owning of "precious flowers" and "don't know how to take proper care of them." These remarks, which have the cause of FTA covered, involve the usage of two metaphors: first, he compares Bree to "precious flowers"; second, he compares taking care of flowers to taking care of one's wife. By using metaphors, George makes the cause of FTA implicit. On the other hand, the defendant Rex uses the similar way to fight back by making two aspects implicit: the target of FTA by comparing George to weeds; the cause of FTA by describing weeds popping up "out of nowhere" and "hard to get rid of." Finally, the conflict between the two becomes more intense when George responds to Rex' FTA by saying that he can find "the right chemicals" to "get rid of almost anything." It is also an implicit threat because as a pharmacist in the story, he ultimately murders Rex, [who regularly needs medicine for his heart,] by adding some unnecessary medicine to his prescription to make his heart slowly deteriorate and suffer cardiac arrest. When discussing doing FTA off record, Brown & Levinson [20] mention using metaphors as a type of strategy. They have also analyzed over-generalizing as a strategy to "leave the object of the FTA vaguely off record."

The initiators and the defendants do not always cover the same factors by using the same strategies as shown in example (6). In some context, the initiator covers one factor and the defendant another. The following is an example from a Chinese novel written by Mo Yan, who won the Nobel Prize in 2012 for his work entitled "Big Breasts and Wide Hips:"

Ex (7) **Mother**: *Commander Sha, today is my eldest daughter's engagement day, and this rabbit is the engagement gift.*

Sha (with a laugh): *What an extravagant gift!*

Mother (chopping down on the rabbit's head): *Today she is engaged, tomorrow the dowry will be settled, and the day after that she will be married. (Turning and staring at Sha) Don't forget to join us at the wedding banquet!*

Sha: *How could I forget? Definitely I won't!*

The background for the above dialogue⁴ is that "mother" dislikes Sha who is a commander of a civilian anti-Japanese group during the Second World War. What causes her threatening Sha's face is that Sha is in love with one of her daughters. If "mother" told Sha that she would not allow him to marry her daughter, she would perform the FTA explicitly. Yet, she does not do so. In fact, she chooses to tell him about her daughter's engagement gift, which implicitly tells Sha

that his love with her daughter will end in vain. Her way of doing FTA is “giving hints,” a strategy discussed by Brown & Levinson [20]. The defendant, Sha, does not use the same strategy and he responds by making an appraisal saying, “What an extravagant gift!” which sounds much like a positive one. Yet, actually it is ironic because the novel mentions that rabbits run everywhere in the fields of this area and rabbit’s meat is very cheap. Then “mother” goes on to threaten Sha’s face by telling him the schedule for her daughter’s marriage, and by inviting him to the wedding banquet. Sha’s final response, “How could I forget? Definitely I won’t!” is a pun. On the surface level, he means that he would not forget the wedding banquet, but at the deeper level, what he means is that he would never forget the date of the marriage and the event. This is further evidenced by what happens later--Sha and the daughter of “mother” secretly flee the village before the wedding ceremony. When it comes to doing FTA off record, Brown & Levinson [20] have discussed being ironic as a strategy, but they do not mention the use of pun. The lack of discussion of puns as a strategy for off-record FTA is likely because most of the data they use is one-party utterance(s) with no context involved.

To sum up, there are three factors or aspects that make FTA salient and the contender in conflict talk can cover them or one of them to make FTA less salient. So far, it is found that most of the tactics to make FTA less salient in conflict talk data have been discussed in Brown & Levinson (1987). However, there is one tactic we discover is missed by them. That is pun. The lack is likely because Brown & Levinson (1987) base their analysis on one-sentence utterances, whereas ours is based on talk, which offers more contexts for FTA.

E. Division between ICT and ECT

The above analysis shows that the salience of FTA in conflict talk is influenced by three factors or aspects, which are the cause, the target of FTA and sometimes the appraisal from the doer of FTA. It is naturally followed that these three factors or aspects can be used as criteria to differentiate ICT from ECT. In other words, if a conflict talk has any one of the three factors covered, it becomes ICT. If a conflict talk makes all of the three factors explicit, it becomes ECT. If, in certain context, the contenders do not make appraisal at all, like in example (2), the two factors—the cause and the target of FTA are then sufficient to make ECT. In short, along two dimensions, and sometimes three, conflict talk can be divided into ICT and ECT, as demonstrated in the diagram below.

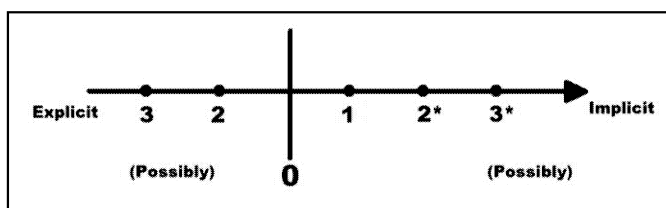


Diagram 1: Division between ICT and ECT from three aspects

In Diagram 1, the lateral axis represents conflict talk, which is a continuum. From the left side to the right side, conflict talk shifts from explicitness to implicitness. The vertical axis marked with “0” represents the dividing line between ICT and ECT. To illustrate, the number “1” on the right means that only one factor is covered, either the cause of FTA or the target of FTA, and the number “2” on the left means that the two factors are not covered, both the cause of FTA and the target of FTA. Likewise, the “3” on the left means that all three factors, the cause, target and possible appraisal, are not covered. This means that only when the two (the cause and target) or three factors are explicit, the conflict talk becomes ECT. In addition, on the right, “2*” means that the two factors are covered, both the cause of FTA and the target of FTA; “3*” means that the three factors, the cause, target and the possible appraisal, are covered. Therefore, when at least one factor, either the cause or the target of FTA, are covered, the conflict talk becomes ICT.

V. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ICT AND OTHER TYPES OF CONFLICT TALK

Section III gives a rough definition to ICT and Section IV distinguishes it from ECT, its closest neighbor. This section is going to discuss its relationships with other types of conflict talk in an attempt to further clarify the scope of ICT.

As can be seen in Section IV, the ICT/ECT distinction is drawn along the dimension of salience of conflict. There are other dimensions along which conflict talk can also be distinguished, for example, the dimension of directness and the dimension of intensity. Grimshaw [5] also claims that “conflict talk, like all discourse, can be: (1) direct and indirect; (2) cool or passionate...” although he gives no explanation to what they mean exactly. Following his distinction, we can hereby classify conflict talk into direct and indirect conflict talk along the dimension of directness, and cool and passionate conflict talk along the dimension of intensity. As ICT is very likely to be mixed with indirect conflict talk and cool conflict talk, this section is concerned with the distinction between ICT and these two types.

A. *The Relationship between ICT and Indirect Conflict Talk*

As far as the present paper is concerned, direct conflict talk happens between the “initiators” and “defendants” in face-to-face situation. All of the seven examples we have seen so far are direct conflict talk. Among them only example (2) is ECT and the other six are ICT. This means ICT can be direct conflict talk. On the other hand, an indirect conflict talk takes place when one of the contenders, whether it be the initiator or the defendant, talks to a non-contender at the scene with the goal to attack another contender who is also at the scene. “Scolding the locus while pointing at the mulberry” describes the nature of this kind of conflict talk. As it is uttered to the non-contender but intends to attack a contender, this kind of talk avoids a face-to-face conflict. Therefore, it is called indirect conflict talk. The following is

an example from the novel *The Rouge of the North* written by the famous Chinese writer Eileen Chang:

Ex(8) Ch'i-ch'iao: *Isn't it the same with money? We're always told to save, — save money so others can take it out by the handfuls to spend. That's what I can't get over.*

Tai-chen (coldly): *That can't be helped. When there're too many people, if it doesn't go in the open it goes in the dark. Control this one and you can't control that one.*

(Little Shuang: *Lady, Master-in-law is here.*)

Ch'i-ch'iao: *Master-in-law's coming here is nothing to hide. You've got a lump in your throat or what? You sound like a mosquito humming.*

Tai-chen: *So master-in-law has come to Shanghai too. It seems all our relatives are all here.*

In the above dialogue, Ch'i-ch'iao and Tai-chen are the wives of brothers in a wealthy family living in Shanghai during the early 1900s. Both of them first criticize the younger brother of their husbands, who is a playboy and takes the money out “by the handfuls to spend.” Then Tai-chen turns to implicitly blame Ch'i-ch'iao by saying money “goes in the dark,” meaning to say each time when Ch'i-ch'iao's brother, the master-in-law, comes for a visit, some properties in their house disappear. That is why Tai-chen complains “you can't control that one.” Ch'i-ch'iao understands whom that “that one” refers to and is about to refute Tai-chen, yet at this moment the servant, Little Shuang, happens to come to inform Ch'i-ch'iao that the master-in-law, her brother, has come. Ch'i-ch'iao then cursed Little Shuang for sounding “like a mosquito humming.” On the surface, she scolds Little Shuang for the way he releases the news. But at a deeper level, her scolding is aimed at Tai-chen who has just implicitly charged her brother of stealing the properties, by saying the coming of the master-in-law “is nothing to hide.” Understanding Ch'i-ch'iao's implicit refuting of her, Tai-chen mocks her by saying that all their relatives have come there. Although she is saying this to Little Shuang, her goal is to fight back at Ch'i-ch'iao's refute. Therefore, although both Tai-chen and Ch'i-ch'iao are talking to Little Shuang, who is a non-contender not involved in the conflict, and either by scolding or mocking him, both are, as a matter of fact, fighting against each other verbally. In this sense, the part marked in bold is indirect conflict talk. In addition, in the same section the target of the FTA is covered. Therefore, it is also a case of ICT. This example shows that ICT in certain context can be indirect conflict talk.

It can be seen from the analysis that ICT can be direct conflict talk as example (1), (3), (4), (5), (6) and (7). It can also be indirect conflict talk as example (8). Therefore, the relationship between ICT and indirect conflict talk can be shown in the following diagram 2:

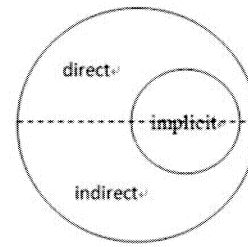


Diagram 2: Relationship between ICT and indirect conflict talk

B. The Relationship between ICT and Cool Conflict Talk

As discussed in the previous sections, ICT contrasts with ECT along the dimension of conflict salience while cool conflict talk contrasts with passionate conflict talk along the dimension of conflict intensity. This does not mean that ICT has no relationship with cool conflict talk. As a matter of fact, in some contexts, ICT overlaps with cool conflict talk and this is why the two are sometimes confusing. Put in another way, in certain context, an ICT is simultaneously cool conflict talk. The typical example is example (5). In that scenario, both the initiator and the defendant use positive appraisal to do FTA so that it becomes an ICT. On the other hand, if the dialogue is seen from cool-passionate perspective, it is rather mild as the two parties seem to talk to each other in a friendly way. That is, their talk does not seem to be fierce [aggressive]. Thus the dialogue is simultaneously an example of cool conflict talk as well as implicit conflict talk.

Example (5) shows a coincidence that on some occasion ICT can be cool conflict talk. But this is not always the case. There are examples which show that ICT can be passionate conflict talk. Example (4) supports this. Example (4) is ICT because the target of the FTA is covered. Yet in that example Pan's choice of words, such as “self-opinionated person” and “uneducated third-rater,” shows that Pan's attack of his enemy is considerably fierce. As a matter of fact, Li has to request him to “be a little more polite” or to “weigh” his words. From this perspective, the above dialogue is simultaneously a case of passionate conflict talk, as seen in example (5) where ICT can also be passionate conflict talk.

This section shows that ICT should not be mixed with cool conflict talk because it can be cool conflict in some contexts and it can be passionate conflict talk in others. The relationship between ICT and the two types can be shown in diagram 3 below:

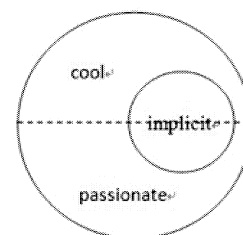


Diagram 3: Relationship between ICT and cool conflict talk

VI. ADJACENCY PAIR OF ICT

With ICT clarified, the next question comes to what constitutes ICT. A conflict talk can be identified as ICT only under the condition that both the initiator and the defendant involved in conflict talk perform FTA implicitly. If only one party, whether it be the initiator or defendant, does so while the other party, whether it be the defendant or the initiator, does not do so, the outcome can not be ICT. In other words, for an adjacency pair to be ICT, it must take the form of an implicit first pair part (FPP for short) plus an implicit second pair part (SPP for short), namely, implicit FPP + implicit SPP. Otherwise, ICT as defined does not occur. The previous studies on implicit disagreement or refutation discussed in the "Literature Review" emphasize the implicit SPP without taking into consideration the FPP. On the other hand, the previous studies on implicit criticism stress the implicit FPP without taking into consideration the SPP. This is why they can only be considered as "related to ICT." To make this point clearer, the following section illustrates the two cases which are not likely to constitute ICT:

A. *An Implicit FPP + an Explicit SPP*

The above formula can be interpreted as "the initiator performs a FTA implicitly while the defendant does so explicitly." That is the case with a dialogue between Jia Zheng and his mother in the well-known ancient Chinese story *A Dream in the Red Mansion*. The background is that Jia Zheng has just severely beaten Baoyu, his son, for his misbehaviour. This angers Grandmother Jia, Jia Zheng's mother, also Baoyu's Grandmother. Immediately after being informed of the incident, Grandmother Jia hurries to the house where Jia Zheng lives and Jia Zheng initiates the talk⁵:

Ex (9) **Jia Zheng**: Surely, Mother, in such hot weather as this there is no need for you to come here. If you have any instructions, you should call for me and let *me* come *to you*.

Grandmother Jia: Oh, Are you speaking to *me*?—Yes, as a matter of fact I *have* got instructions, as you put it; but unfortunately I've never had a good son who cares for me, there's no one I can give them to.

Jia Zheng: How can I bear it, Mother, if you speak to me like that? What I did to the boy I did for the honour of the family.

Grandmother Jia: A single harsh word from me and you start whining that you can't bear it. How do you think Bao-yu could bear your cruel rod? And you say you've been punishing him for the honour of the family, but tell me this: did your own father ever punish you in such a way? I think not.

In example (9) Jia Zheng, as the initiator, first politely addresses his mother and asks why, on such a hot day, she does not ask him to go to her house for instructions, but

instead comes to his house. It sounds like a considerate utterance, but actually it is an implicit attempt to prevent Grandmother Jia from spoiling Baoyu. Grandmother Jia, as the defendant, is so angry with his beating of her grandson as to blame him explicitly by saying she does not have a good son to whom she can call. Then Jia Zheng explains that the purpose of giving a lesson to Baoyu is to honour ancestors⁶ of the clan and this explanation further serves as an implicit attempt to prevent Grandmother Jia's interference in the incident. But Grandmother Jia questions him by asking him how his father disciplined him. From the way they argue with each other, it can be seen that Jia Zheng, as the son, tries to convince his mother in an implicit way that his beating of Baoyu is the right thing to do. On the other hand, Grandmother Jia, as the mother, criticizes her son in an explicit way. Thus the dialogue does not constitute ICT because the implicit talk is one-sided. At most it can only be considered as semi-ICT.

B. *An Explicit FPP + an Implicit SPP*

The above formula can be interpreted as "the initiator performs a FTA explicitly while the defendant does so implicitly." An ancient Chinese story from *Spring and Autumn Annals of Yanzi* can be used to illustrate this point. During the historical Spring and Autumn Period, Yanzi was the most eloquent and witty minister of Qi State. Before he was sent as an ambassador to the State of Chu, the King of Chu had discussed with his courtiers how to humiliate him and his country when he arrived. On the day of Yanzi's arrival, he was treated by the King of Chu in the standard way, that is to a banquet. Later Yanzi became intoxicated, and two officials brought a man bound with ropes to the King. The King first pretended to know nothing about the man and asked the courtiers who the man was and why he was treated this way. The two officials told the King that he was a man from Qi and guilty of theft. The following is the dialogue between the King and Yanzi:

Ex (10) **King** (looking at Yanzi): Are men of Qi born to be adept thieves?

Yanzi (leaving his seat): I heard that oranges grown south of the Huai River are true oranges; once transplanted to the north side, they become trifoliate oranges. Although they resemble each other in the shape of their leaves, they differ widely in taste. What accounts for it? The differences in water and soil. Now people born in Qi are incapable of theft, but when in Chu they commit crime. Could it be that Chu's water and soil have something to do with it?

King (smiling): A sage is indeed not to be trifled with. The ridicule has recoiled upon us.

In the above dialogue, the King's question on whether men of Qi were born to be adept thieves is apparently insulting. Yet Yanzi did not respond with "yes" or "no." On the contrary, he compared the similarities and differences of oranges which were grown in the north and the south of

the Huai River. The conclusion was that water and soil determined their taste. Then he drew an analogy between oranges and people and explained that it was social environment (like water and soil for fruits) that determined human behaviors. This analogy clearly shows by saying when people lived in the Qi State, they obeyed the law and were good citizens whereas when they moved to the Chu State, they became thieves, Yanzi not only gave the King of Chu a negative answer, but also criticized him implicitly for creating a poor social environment. The King finally had to end the talk by saying that he and his courtiers were ridiculed. In the example (9), the King of Chu insulted Yanzi's country in an explicit way, yet Yanzi defended his country in an implicit way. This kind of talk does not fall into the scope of ICT, either. Nevertheless, it can also be considered as semi-ICT.

To sum up, ICT is formed only when both initiator and defendant perform FTA in an implicit way. If one of them or neither of them does so, an ICT is not likely to come into being. In other words, ICT is characterized by mutual direction.

C. Pre-sequences

ICT not only has insertion sequences but also pre-sequences. In other words, before an initiator launches an implicit attack on the defendant, s/he sometimes makes the defendant ready for the attack. The following is an example from the well-known American play "A Streetcar Named Desire":

Ex (11): **Stanley (contemptuously): Halt! (He advances a little as he knots his tie) Say, do you happen to know somebody named Shaw?**

Blanche: Why, everybody knows somebody named Shaw!

Stanley: Well, this somebody named Shaw is under the impression he met you in Laurel, but I figure he must have got you mixed up with some other party because this other party is someone he met at a hotel called the Flamingo.

Blanche: I'm afraid he does have me mixed up with this "other party." The Hotel Flamingo is not the sort of establishment I would dare to be seen in!

The above dialogue takes place under the following background: the female protagonist Blanche comes to live with her sister after being laid off for improper behavior as a teacher, but her sister's husband Stanley can not get along well with her. After Stanley discovers from his friend, Shaw, that Blanche once worked in the Flamingo Hotel, where women provide sexual services, he decides to humiliate her by informing her that he knows her secret. However, he chooses to do so implicitly by allowing the target of humiliating to vary between "you" and "some other party." Before he makes the announcement, he first asks her whether

she knows a person named Shaw. This functions as getting Blanche prepared for the coming attack. His question is followed by Blanche's vague reply. The question-answer dialogue forms the pre-sequence (marked in bold) for the forthcoming ICT. Stanley then initiates the attack by saying to her in a feigned and uncertain tone, that Shaw has the impression of meeting her in the Flamingo Hotel. Faced with such a scandal, Blanche says she is mistaken for the "other party" and denies that she has ever been in such a place. In the above dialogue, there are also two adjacency pairs: the first (marked in bold), the pre-sequence, serves as the preparation for the second adjacency pair, a typical example of ICT.

D. Insertion Sequences

The above section stresses a point that a typical case of ICT must use the formula "an implicit FPP + an implicit SPP." But this does not mean that the SPP of ICT must immediately follow its FPP. As Levinson (1983:304) comments, "strict adjacency is actually too strong a requirement." Insertion sequences frequently occur as seen in the following example:

Ex(12): **Wang Xifeng:** Well, if you two want to have a private talk, why not stay in the room? Why one stays in and the other out of the window?

[Wang's husband speaks...]

Ping'er: There is nobody else in the room. Why should I stay with him?

Wang Xifeng: *It would be more convenient when no one else was in the room.*

Ping'er: You refer to me?

Wang Xifeng: Who else except you?

Ping'er: *Don't make me tell every good thing to you!*

The above dialogue, from *A Dream in the Red Mansion*, the same novel from which example (9) is taken, contains two adjacency pairs. The background for the scene is that Wang is hostile to Ping'er, a concubine of Wang's husband. That day she sees that Ping'er is with her husband alone and again becomes jealous. Then she mocks them by suggesting that they should stay in the room. And Ping'er explains why she should not do so. These form the first adjacency pair of the conversation. Wang continues to mock them by saying that "It would be more convenient when no one else was in the room." This is the beginning of the second adjacency pair. It should be followed by the response to the mock from Ping'er. However, it is followed by a question from her regarding whom Wang is referring to [because Wang's husband is meanwhile at the spot]. Wang then identifies Ping'er as the target of the FTA. Wang's clarification makes Ping'er pose an implicit threat to her: she would tell her how her husband lives a private life with other women⁷. In this example, Wang's utterance, "*It would be more convenient*

when no one else was in the room,” forms the FPP of the second adjacency pair. The SPP, *Don't make me tell every good thing to you*, does not follow it immediately. Instead, between them the insertion sequence (marked in bold) occurs, which contains a tag question and a rhetorical question. This shows that ICT allows insertion sequences between its FPP and SPP.

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

By illustrating 12 examples from well-known literature, popular movies, television series and historical story both in English and Chinese, this paper aims to arouse academic interest in the type of recurrent conflict talk: implicit conflict talk. It gives a working definition for ICT, divides ICT from ECT from three aspects and discusses the relationships between ICT and other types of conflict talk, namely, indirect conflict talk and cool conflict talk. It also discusses the local and overall organization of ICT. However, all these are just a beginning of the study of ICT and the study is far from complete.

As ICT is a newly explored subject in the field of conflict talk, many topics on the subject are left for further studies. Among them are: to begin with, we need to make a comprehensive description of ICT, including its linguistic feature(s), its developmental course, the respective strategies of covering the cause, the target of FTA and the appraiser from the doer of FTA on the basis of more data. If possible, corpus study can be conducted. Secondly, we need to study its mechanism in interaction. For example, we must explain why human beings choose ICT rather than ECT when faced with conflict, despite the fact that mental effort for ICT is greater than that for ECT. Next, we need to explore how ICT is related to such factors as power, distance, identity, etc. Finally, is ICT culturally bound? Is ICT in one context, like political context, different from that in another context, such as academic context? In the future, comparative studies can be done to explore the difference(s) and similarities of ICT between different cultures and different contexts. In summary, implicit conflict talk is a new area that deserves further research. More studies will surely promote our understanding of conflict talk between individuals and groups, especially as the world becomes a global community.

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