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Aggression in diplomatic notes – a pragmatic analysis of a Chinese-American conflict in times of colonisation

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Abstract: This study examines veiled aggression in diplomatic language use from the point of view of speech acts. More specifically, we examine how the speech act of 'Tell' is used to realise aggression in a small corpus of diplomatic notes written between February and May 1844, exchanged between a US American and a Chinese diplomat. Tell, by default, presents a 'neutral' informative illocution. However, in contexts of diplomatic conflicts, particularly when a threat is made, realising Tell often helps the aggressor to deliver menacing messages under a veneer of civility. Tell is also often intertwined with other speech acts through which aggression is realised, such as Request and Complain. By modelling the aggressive function of Tell in the ritual genre of diplomatic notes, this paper fills a knowledge gap by studying aggression in a setting in which aggression operates within the boundaries of the ritual frame of a diplomatic genre.

Keywords: American; Chinese; diplomatic language use; speech act; Tell; veiled aggression

1 Introduction

This study examines the operation of veiled aggression in diplomatic language use from the point of view of speech acts. In particular, we explore how what we define as the speech act 'Tell' is deployed to realise aggression in a 19th century exchange of diplomatic notes between representatives of China and the United States, at a

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time when the US wanted to join other Western nations in colonising China. Tell is an informative illocution which can simultaneously convey information and become intertwined with other speech acts to realise threat.

We use the collective term *diplomatic note* to refer to a note deployed in national conflicts of interest. In modern diplomacy, this subgenre of diplomatic notes is often known as *Démarche* (*zhaohui* 照會in historical Chinese). In diplomatic notes aggression is veiled through the operation of a conventionalised ritual frame House and Kadar (2021): aggression always occurs under a veneer of civil diplomatic language. In our case study, the intensity of veiled aggression correlates with the power of the coloniser over the colonised.

In diplomacy, interaction often takes place in the form of genres with strict *conventionalised ritual features* (see Kádár 2017), including:

- The intensive use of expressions of deference, such as ceremonial forms of address.
- The operation of complex participation and ratification in Goffman's (1967, 1974) sense: while a diplomat may exchange seemingly 'personal' remarks with the recipient, ultimately s/he corresponds as a representative of a country rather than as an individual.
- The operation of a ritual frame, which manifests itself in participants' rights and obligations (see more below).

The above-mentioned ritual characteristics of diplomatic notes manifest themselves in the operation of a *ritual frame*, imposing a certain sense of ritual 'constraint' (Goffman 1967) on aggressive language use: what a diplomat can do and cannot do is tightly regulated, and it is practically impossible to cross a certain invisible conventionalised threshold in a ritual diplomatic genre. Also, while ritual has received considerable attention in pragmatic research on language and politics (see e.g. Chilton 1990; Kampf et al. 2019), little work has been done on ritual as an interactional frame facilitating and condoning aggressive political exchanges under the above-discussed polite veneer.

In diplomatic notes, aggression tends to be realised in the form of *veiled threats*, i.e. aggressive behaviour hidden behind conventional diplomatic civility, with the goal of coercing representatives of the other state to do what the aggressor wants. As Culpeper et al. (2002: 1572) argue, veiling threats is usually 'insincere', provided the goal of the language user is to realise a real threat. Considering that the veneer of diplomatic 'civility' precludes being explicitly impolite while at the same time affording aggression, in the current study we use the term *aggression*. The aggressive veneer in diplomatic language resembles what Watts (1999) defined as 'the iron fist in a velvet glove'. The 'velvet glove' implies that the aggressor not

only uses insincere 'politeness' to frame his/her aggression as 'civil' but also allows them to morally legitimise the aggression (cf. Kádár et al. 2019).

The context of colonisation provides insights into the relationship between aggressive threats and (im)politeness (cf. Kádár et al. 2019). In our case study, the coloniser who has the military might to cause significant harm and loss of face to the other practically always embeds threats in his realisation of diplomatic 'politeness' rather than impoliteness proper. In this respect, the data under investigation is very different from what previous (im)politeness-anchored research studied in the realm of language and politics.

In what follows, we provide a brief review of literature in Section 2. Section 3 is devoted to our data and methodology. Section 4 presents our data analysis and discussion, and in Section 5 we conclude the paper.

2 Review of literature

The genre of diplomatic notes has received limited attention in pragmatics, and it has been mostly examined by historians and political scientists (e.g. Beres 2015; Fendrick 2012). A major contribution to this area involves research on 'coercive diplomacy', such as George (1991), Jakobsen (2011) and Schettino (2011). Our study relates to this latter body of research: we examine a case in which a colonising state coerces a state to be colonised to 'cope' with the claimed needs of the so-called 'international community'. Such claimed needs involve the coloniser's demand to be allowed to represent themselves in the capital of the colonised and establish free trade, only benefitting the coloniser. From a contemporary point of view enforcing such demands may be more than sheer 'diplomacy', in that such coercive behaviour violates what we today understand as normal international diplomacy. However, at the time of colonisation many Western countries officially claimed that they were entitled to colonise 'underdeveloped' nations, and when making threats their representatives often argued that they were simply enforcing their countries' perceived diplomatic 'rights' (cf. Fitzmaurice 2003).

Chinese linguists have devoted particular attention to diplomatic notes, due to the humiliating role such notes played in the 19th century colonisation of the country. For example, various scholars have used such notes to explore diplomatic issues surrounding translation problems in late imperial China (see e.g. Qu 2017). Another interesting line of inquiry in this area is represented by Ding and Mao (2000). They investigated the diachronic development of diplomatic documents in China and explored the diplomatic issues which the archaic style inherited from ancient China triggered during 19th century Chinese diplomatic encounters with Western nations. Other scholars such as Guo (2003) explored how diplomatic notes

evolved in late imperial China under the influence of exchanges with Westerners. Guan (2017), conversely, examined the Chinese influence on British diplomatic notes written to the Chinese government. The present paper fills a knowledge gap by approaching 19th century diplomatic notes between China and a Western power, the US, by focusing on the ways in which an American diplomat realised aggression through veiled threats. While we mostly focus on aggression in our US American corpus, we also briefly examine Chinese diplomatic responses to the US diplomatic notes to enrich our analysis from a cross-cultural pragmatic point of view.

While a small body of studies touched on aggressive language use in diplomacy (e.g. Swain 2015) and other political settings (see e.g. Bull 2013), such research mostly focused on impoliteness rather than the role of politeness as a veneer of civility. Furthermore, although a number of scholars have studied the role of aggression in institutional language use (see e.g. Archer 2008; Grainger 2002; Harris 2001), little attention has been devoted to the institution of diplomacy. Also, in terms of the mode of realising aggression, researchers in pragmatics have frequented spoken and computer-mediated modes of interaction (see e.g. Vladimirou et al. 2021), while the type of written interaction which we analyse in this paper has been backgrounded.

3 Data and methodology

3.1 Historical background of our corpus

In 1842, the First Opium War ended between Britain and the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) with the *Treaty of Nanking*, through which Britain enforced China to open its ports. This was not a harmless 'opening of trade': the British ruthlessly swamped China with opium. Following this treaty, many Western powers, including the US, decided to follow the example of Britain. The US government appointed Caleb Cushing (1800–1879) as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary and dispatched him to the South of China to negotiate a treaty similar to the one signed between the British and the Chinese. In February 1844, Cushing arrived at Macao, then a Portuguese colony. He immediately contacted Ching Yucai (Pinyin: Cheng Yucai 程裔採 1783–1858) – China's acting Governor General of Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces – with a series of diplomatic notes. Cushing demanded Ching to allow him to proceed to Peking (Beijing) to negotiate a 'treaty of peace' (i.e. an open trade arrangement) with the imperial government. Cushing's demands rang alarm bells in the Chinese government, and Ching responded to Cushing's notes by attempting to prevent, or at least delay, Cushing's proceeding to the capital.

Cushing, however, was very well aware that China, having recently suffered a humiliating defeat from the British, had essentially no power to prevent him signing a treaty for his government. Because of this, Cushing's diplomatic notes became increasingly assertive. Not surprisingly, the exchange ended with the Chinese government giving in to Cushing's demands.

3.2 Data

Our corpus consists of the 25 diplomatic notes exchanged between Cushing and Ching, between the 27th of February and the 24th of May 1844. Within this corpus, we devote special attention to the 12 notes written by Cushing, with occasional references (for contrastive purposes) to Ching's diplomatic notes. Originally, Cushing's diplomatic notes were translated to Classical Chinese, and a sinologist in Cushing's team translated the Chinese diplomatic notes to English. In this paper we only mention translational problems in passing, as we plan to explore this area in a forthcoming project. The translations of the examples featured in this paper are the original translations.

The size of our corpus is the following:

1. Cushing's diplomatic notes: 6,700 words
2. Ching's diplomatic notes: 7,315 Chinese characters

Diplomatic notes in our corpus are publicly available.[1] Note that while our corpus is relatively small, we agree with Sharoff et al. (2013) that a certain degree of 'imperfection' of corpora does not invalidate pragmatic research, in particular if we look at historical data.

3.3 Methodology

In this study, we investigate the following research question: *How is aggression realised in the ritual genre of diplomatic notes?* The rationale behind asking this question is that one may assume that diplomatic communication is blandly professional, avoiding aggression and conflict, considering that diplomats are responsible for upholding international relationships. We assume that there is another darker side to diplomatic communication, hence our study focus.

1 See: (1) Public Documents Printed by Order of the Senate of the United States, Second Session of the Twenty-Eighth Congress, Begun and Held at the city of Washington, December 2, 1844, Vol. 2. Gales and Seaton, Washington, DC. (2) History of Sino-American Relations. Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taipei, 1968.

In pursuing our research question, we follow the logic of Karl Popper's empirical research methodology (see Edmondson and House 2011). That is, although our initial assumption was that in diplomatic notes aggression is essentially realised through upgraded Requests (see Blum-Kulka et al. 1989), we decided to explore our corpus without any pre-categorisation, by basing our work on an interactional typology of speech acts (for details see Edmondson and House 1981; Edmondson et al. 2022). In this typology, the speech act Tell, which we focus on in this paper, is defined as follows:[2]

> The Tell we might call the most "neutral" informative illocution. … The assumption behind a Tell is that the content of the illocution – the "fact" communicated – is of interest and relevance to the hearer's concerns and interests, and Tells are therefore made as a response … to the hearer's explicit or implicit desire to know the fact. (Edmondson and House 1981: 177–178)

Note that our category Tell is close to what Searle (1976) in his classic study defines as 'Representatives (Assertives)', i.e. a speech act category consisting of speech acts committing the speaker to the truth of his/her proposition. The reason why we use the category of Tell rather than 'Representatives (Assertives)' is that we pursue interest in the interactional features of Tell, i.e. we do not assume that Tell is always informative. More specifically, we focus on cases when Tell is not about committing the speaker to the truth but rather Tell serves other pragmatic functions.

Our analysis will reveal that in the US corpus the coloniser's aggression is overwhelmingly realised through the informative speech act of Tell, which not only changes its default informative function as a means of aggression, but it is also often intertwined with other speech acts, such as Request and Complain. We will define such other speech act categories as we proceed with the analysis. By the 'intertwinedness' of speech acts we mean that the speech acts under investigation in our diplomatic data cannot always be rigorously disentangled. This has a significant implication for understanding aggression in the ritual genre of diplomatic notes: whenever diplomats have the power to act as aggressors and realise threats, they often 'package' aggression in the insincerely 'harmless' informative speech act of Tell.

4 Analysis

We divide our analysis into two sections. In Section 4.1, which is the main body of our analysis, we examine how aggression is realised in Cushing's diplomatic notes

2 Since in our typology Tell is part of an Informative cluster speech acts, we always use 'Tell' instead of 'Inform'.

through the lens of speech acts. In Section 4.2 we engage in a brief contrastive pragmatic ancillary examination of the outcomes of our research.

4.1 Cushing's diplomatic notes through the lens of speech acts

Our analysis of Cushing's diplomatic notes reveals that an overwhelmingly frequent speech act type in these notes is what Edmondson and House (1981), House and Kádár (2021) and Edmondson et al. (2022) define as the speech act Tell (see our definition above). As our analysis of the corpus attests, Cushing realises many Tells to deliver aggressive threats in a seemingly informative way, often as *fait accompli*, i.e. he simply announces a menacing piece of information to Ching without justifying it. Considering the importance of Tell in our corpus, in the following we examine realisation patterns of aggression in Cushing's diplomatic notes by centering our analysis on Tell.

4.1.1 The speech act of Tell as an instrument of aggression

The analysis of the Cushing corpus shows that many of Cushing's Tells are not simply informative but also simultaneously fulfill non-informative functions. Such uses are typically aggressive, and they are not to be confounded with argumentation. The following example (1) illustrates this use of Tell:

(1) SIR: I have the honor to inform your excellency that the United States frigate Brandywine, bearing the broad pennant of Commodore Parker, proceeds this day to Whampoa [a port in Shanghai], on a visit, for a few days, of courtesy and civility to the capital of the Province.

In order to contextualise the Tell in example (1), it is relevant to note that straight after the first note in which Cushing greeted Ching and initiated an exchange of diplomatic notes, he immediately started to demand to be permitted to go to the capital in person, to sign a treaty with the Emperor. Ching tried to gain time and requested that Cushing stay in the extraterritorial Macau, which was a Portuguese colony at the time. However, following Ching's response, Cushing informed him in example (1) above that his military officer Commodore Parker is actually already *en route* to Whampoa (Shanghai area) to prepare the ground for Cushing's journey to the North. That is, in example (1) Cushing realises a diplomatic Tell presenting the other with a *fait accompli*, which is a form of threatening aggression as it signals that the other's previous prohibition to come is ignored. It is exactly due to this aggressive character that the Tell does not merely fulfill its default informative function in this example. Importantly, example (1) does not represent an intertwine between Tell and another speech act such as Request, but rather it provides

information tainted with aggressive threatening and related face-threat. To use a colloquial example, diplomatic Tell here resembles a mafia person uttering "We are coming" in a sing-song voice.

Example (1) represents a relatively 'restrained' Tell in the Cushing corpus. The following example (2) represents a more openly aggressive Tell, in which threat is cleverly packaged as informing the other about a hypothetical situation in a matter-of-fact voice:

(2) The rules of politeness and ceremony observed by Sir Henry Pottinger were doubtless just and proper in the particular circumstances of the case. But, to render them fully applicable to the United States, it would be necessary for my Government, in the first instance, to subject the people of China to all the calamities of war, and especially to take possession of some island on the coast of China, as a place of residence for its Minister.

Here Cushing demands his warship to be allowed to anchor close to Beijing and dismisses Ching's argument that not even the British colonisers have ever been allowed to do this.[3] In example (2), Cushing does not explicitly threaten his interlocutor: rather, his veiled threat outlines in detail a hypothetical situation, basically telling the other what he as an aggressor might be capable of doing.

If we observe the Cushing corpus from a sequential point of view, it emerges that Tells in Cushing's notes become increasingly aggressive, that is, there is a sense of escalation in the manner in which Tells are realised across the individual notes. While in the first three of the 12 notes in our corpus Tells are relatively 'moderate' in tone, in that they simply announce what Cushing plans to do, in later notes various Tells gradually become underhandedly menacing, and also the information they convey increasingly becomes an arrogant lecturing of the other about 'Western diplomatic manners', hence reflecting the face-threatening power talk of the coloniser. The following example illustrates this phenomenon:

(3) It is customary, among all the nations of the West, for the ships of war of one country to visit the ports of another in time of peace, and, in doing so, for the commodore to exchange salutes with the local authorities, and to pay his compliments in person to the principal public functionary. To omit these testimonies of good will is considered as evidence of a hostile or at least of an unfriendly feeling.

What makes Tell particularly threatening here is that Cushing basically announces that his warship *will be* anchored in a Chinese port close to Beijing, hence precluding

3 Both Cushing and Ching refer in their notes to Pottinger, the British diplomat in charge of signing treaty after the Opium War.

any objection. The lecturing on the part of the coloniser in this Tell operates as an escalatory mechanism, with use of the negative terms 'hostile' and 'unfriendly'.

4.1.2 Other speech acts intertwined with Tell: Complains

Tell in Cushing's notes is often intertwined with other speech acts, with the most frequent ones being Complains and Requests. By 'intertwining' we mean that Tell not only sequentially precedes other speech acts, but also there is a pragmatic 'co-operation' between Tell and other speech acts in the realisation of aggression. Let us start the analysis of these speech acts and their relationship with Tell by first focusing on the speech act Complain (see also Vásquez 2011). Our definition of Complain is as follows:

> The speech act Complain occurs when the speaker expresses his/her negative view of a past action by the addressee (i.e. for which s/he holds the addressee responsible), in view of the negative effects or consequences of that action for him/herself. Clearly, the scope of this speech act may include Complains made of third parties.

Complains are frequently employed in diplomatic notes because they point to the rationale triggering the note. Such a basic use of a Complain, combined with a Tell, is illustrated by the following example (4) where the Complain is underlined:

(4) When I addressed your excellency on the 13th, thanking you for copies of the treaty of Nanking and of that of Portugal, I was not aware of the fact, which I have since discovered with much regret, that your excellency did not deem it convenient to communicate to me the whole of the treaty of Nanking.

Example (4) shows a neat transition from the speech act of Tell to the subsequent Complain. In our corpus the use of Complains intertwined with Tells is often more complex than what we can observe in example (4). That is, Cushing often uses Tell–Complain intertwines to make Ching accountable for the threat realised by the Tell. The following example (5) illustrates this phenomenon (Complain is underlined):

(5) The people of America have been accustomed to consider China the most refined and the most enlightened of the nations of the East; and they will demand, how it is possible, if China be thus refined, she should allow herself to be wanting in courtesy to their Envoy; and, if China be thus enlightened, how it is possible that, having just emerged from a war with England, and being in the daily expectation of the arrival of the Envoy of the French, she should suffer herself to slight and repel the good will of the United States. And the people of America will be disposed indignantly to draw back the proffered hand of friendship, when they learn how imperfectly the favor is appreciated by the Chinese Government.

Here the Complain is intimately intertwined with the menacing and lecturing Tell: the Tell not simply grounds the Complain but rather describes a dreadful consequence which may be the respondent's responsibility. Here, unlike in example (4), there is a fully-fledged intertwine between the speech acts of Tell and Complain, in that there is no one single transition between the two speech acts but rather the intertwined speech acts recur in the threatening message.

4.1.3 Other speech acts intertwined with Tell: Requests

Another speech act which frequently recurs in Cushing's diplomatic notes is Request. We define Request as follows:

> In performing a Request, the speaker wants his/her hearer to do P which is in the speaker's own interest, i.e. not in the hearer's interest. When we analyse Requests, we need to distinguish between the types of goods requested. We distinguish between Requests for *non-verbal* goods and services, and Requests for *verbal* goods and services. Some requests are realised as *Request-to-do-X*, while others are realised as *Request-not-to-do-X*.

Cushing's diplomatic notes reveal the following pragmatic pattern: he rarely uses Requests-to-do-X and rather frequents Requests-not-to-do-X. This pattern is logical if one considers the aforementioned argument that Cushing often realises demands through his Tells announcing *fait accompli*. Thus, Requests in his notes often concern prohibitive behaviour, with Ching being Requested, in a rather menacing way, not to do certain things. Such Requests-not-to-do-X are always intertwined with face-threatening lecturing Tells, as the following example (6) illustrates (Request is underlined):

(6) Least of all, should such apprehension be entertained in reference to any ships of war belonging to the United States, which now feels, and <u>(unless ill treatment of our public agents should produce a change of sentiments)</u> will continue to feel, the most hearty and sincere good will towards China.

In his Tell, Cushing once again announces the *fait accompli* that his warship *will be* anchored close to the capital of China. At the same time, Cushing inserts – literally, in brackets – a Request-not-to-do-X, warning the Chinese not to try to "ill treat" the crew of the American ship.

In many cases in Cushing's notes, the Tell is not only intertwined with Request-not-to-do-X but also with the above-discussed speech act of Complain. More specifically, the Request-not-to-do-X in such Tells often fulfills a dual Requestive and Complaint-like function. This fits into a broader pragmatic pattern which Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) have already pointed out in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation (CCSARP) Project. The following example illustrates this point (Request is underlined):

(7) Foreign ambassadors represent the sovereignty of their nation. Any disrespect shown to them, is disrespect to their nation, Government, or sovereign. They possess the right, in the discharge of their public duty, to come and go, without let or hinderance. Causelessly to molest them, is a national injury of the gravest character.

Unlike in his other Tells (see e.g. example 2), Cushing here not only refers to a hypothetical clash between the US and China. Rather, his Tell is a response to a move by the Chinese, and so the strongly worded phrase "Causelessly to molest them" is a face-threatening Request for Ching not to dare do similar attempts of 'molestation' in the future, with the negatively connoted verb 'molesting' also entailing a Complain.

In our corpus, Tells including information about Ching's Requests-not-to-do-X can also become Complains. In such cases, Cushing usually gives Ching a face-threatening 'lecture' about the 'inappropriacy' of the latter's Request-not-to-do-X, as in the following case (we underline that part of the Tell where Cushing informs Ching about Ching's own Request, framing it as "importunate"):

(8) Permit me to observe, that your excellency misapprehends the nature of my communications, if you look upon them as conveying an importunate request on any subject whatever; not having understood that your excellency has any power to negotiate with foreign Ministers; and having contented myself with courteously replying to what seemed to me the importunate request of your excellency to have me abstain from going to Peking.
Indeed, my sole object, originally, in addressing your excellency was, to signify my high personal respect, and that of my Government, for the August Sovereign, by seizing the earliest moment, after my arrival in China, to make inquiry for his health.

Cushing's Requests-to-do-X in his notes mainly concern Requests for information, which are Requests for 'verbal goods'. The following example (9) represents such a Request intertwined with a Tell (Request is underlined):

(9) The United States are at peace alike with China, Great Britain, and Portugal; and I trust that this happy state of things may long continue as to all these Powers, and especially as between the United States and China. But the Government of the United States would be liable to commit errors injurious to a good understanding, and capable of disturbing mutual good will, unless it were fully and exactly informed as to the terms of the treaties existing between Great Britain and Portugal on the one hand, and China on the other, by which their political as well as their commercial relations are regulated.

In example (9), the Request legitimises the threatening Tell, i.e. the potential that the US "would be liable to commit errors" and end the 'peaceful' relationship with China.

4.1.4 Other speech acts intertwined with Tell: Suggests

Another speech act which occurs intertwined with Tells in our corpus is Suggest, a speech act category which in other research has also been referred to as the speech act of advice (see e.g. Hinkel 1997). We define Suggest as follows:

> In the speech act Suggest, the speaker states that s/he is in favour of the addressee's performing a future action, which is in the addressee's own interest. Suggest is there essentially different from the speaker-oriented speech act category Request.

In Cushing's notes, Tells can be intertwined with Suggests, which are apparently in the interest of the recipient but are certainly not 'innocent': such Suggests are often deployed as aggressive threats. The following example (10) illustrates such a use of a Suggest embedded in a Tell (the Suggest is underlined):

(10) Accordingly, in the West, foreign ministers, on arriving at the borders of the Government to which they are sent, are accustomed to enter the country immediately, and to proceed, without delay or obstacle, to the Court, where, after paying their respects to the sovereign, they address themselves at once to the appropriate minister of State, for the transaction of the business of the mission. Such are the usages followed by the West, in the general interests of humanity. For, when great nations deal together as such, they must deal through the medium either of ambassadors, the instruments of friendship, or of fleets and armies, the instruments of hostility. <u>There is no other alternative. And thus it is, that the agency of ambassadors is found to be of the greatest utility, not only as the means of terminating the calamities of war, but also as the means of securing the continuance of the blessings of peace</u>.

Such uses of Suggest are not only aggressively threatening because they are intertwined with face-threateningly lecturing Tells, but also because the recipient's 'interest' here is ambiguous at best: Ching is provided with a choice between being assaulted (unsuggested outcome) and avoiding the assault (suggested outcome).

4.1.5 Other speech acts intertwined with Tell: Excuse/Justify and Symphatise

Tells in Cushing's diplomatic notes can also be intertwined with the speech acts of Excuse/Justify (see also Searle 1976) and Sympathise (see also Nakajima 2002). While in 'ordinary' interpersonal interaction these non-future-related speech acts are typically positively connoted and relationally constructive, in Cushing's correspondence they are part of realising aggression because they tend to be embedded in threating and 'lecturing' Tells.

We define Excuse/Justify and Sympathise as follows:

> If we seek to interactionally distinguish between an Excuse and a Justify, we might say that in the first case a speaker admits that what s/he did was undesirable but suggests that there are or were mitigating circumstances which lessen the blame attached to her/himself … With a Justify, however, the speaker seeks to persuade that what s/he did was 'justified', such that *no* blame attaches to her/himself for having done it.

When we analyse naturally-occurring interaction, it is often difficult to rigorously distinguish between these two speech acts.

> A Sympathise is an appropriate response whenever the speaker hears that something unfortunate has happened to the addressee.

While in daily interaction Excuse/Justify tends to be relationally constructive because it relates to the producer of a given Excuse/Justify, in Cushing's notes this speech act always occurs in reference to other colonising powers, such as the British. Thus, in Cushing's notes this speech act aggravates lecturing Tells, usually 'educating' Ching about why his worries regarding the aggressive US moves and Complains about the actions of the British and other colonisers are unjustified. The following example (11) illustrates this use of Excuse/Justify (Excuse/Justify is underlined):

(11) I have examined the article referred to; and find that by it England is required to keep a Government vessel at anchor in each of the five ports of Kwangchow, Fuchow, Amoy, Ningpo, and Shanghai; but I find nothing in the article to limit the size and the armament of that vessel, and <u>nothing which prohibits England from keeping two or ten Government vessels in each of the five ports, if it suits her pleasure. I presume she consults her own convenience in keeping at present only one Government vessel, and that of small size, anchored at Kwangchow, which she may well do having a fleet of large vessels so near at hand, at Hong Kong</u>.

Cushing's argument here is that the British are justified keeping warships in Chinese ports. This argument also validates the US demand to anchor military ships in Chinese ports.

While Sympathise is relatively rare in our corpus, whenever it occurs it expresses anything but sympathy to Ching. Rather, Cushing's realisations of Sympathise are typical expressions of the face-threatening condescension which is typical of an interaction between the powerful coloniser and the essentially powerless colonised. The following example (12) shows this use:

(12) I have only to add, that when the Brandywine went to Whampoa, it was the intention of Commodore Parker to return so soon as the state of the tide should admit of her crossing the bar in safety; and to this original intention he will still adhere. I have no disposition to increase the embarrassments to which your excellency is already subjected, by the grave omission of the Imperial Government in neglecting to make proper provision for the American legation, immediately on receiving notice of its intended arrival.

4.1.6 Summary of analysis

Our analysis has shown that Tells are fundamental in our US American corpus for realising aggression under a veneer of civility. We have also examined other speech acts which, being intertwined with Tells, are used to realise aggression. In the following, we summarise the results of our analysis from a quantitative point of view. Note that in this analysis we only count the approximate length of aggressive speech acts in our corpus, bearing in mind all the difficulties which speech act annotation entails, and also that intertwinedness only allows us to quantify our data for illustrative purposes.[4] Based on our annotation of the data, here we simply refer to the number of words representing speech acts in our annotation, rather than arguing that Cushing used a particular 'quantity' of speech acts. In annotating our data, we manually distinguished sections which are relevant to the realisation of aggression from others which we regarded as 'neutral'; we dismissed the latter from our quantitative analysis. Table 1 below provides a summary of our quantitative findings:

4 Note that in this study we have not studied the 'frequency' of speech acts in the conventional sense of the word. Unlike either in naturally occurring face-to-face interaction or elicited spoken data, diplomatic notes represent longer stretches of written discourse and, as our analysis has illustrated, one particular Tell unfolds by using many words, i.e. it often takes a significant portion of the text. This is why we counted the number of words instead of considering how 'many' Tells there might be in a particular text.

Table 1: Quantitative features of aggression realisation in Cushing's diplomatic notes.

Type of aggression-relevant speech acts	Distribution of aggression-relevant speech acts (in words)	Proportion (overall size of the Cushing corpus: 6,700 words)
Tell	3,165	47.23%
Complains (intertwined with Tell)	587	8.76%
Requests (intertwined with Tell)	470	7.01%
Suggests (intertwined with Tell)	186	2.77%
Excuse/justify and sympathise (intertwined with Tell)	121	1.80%
Total	4,529	67.59%

In what follows, we conduct a brief comparison of the outcomes of our analysis of Cushing's notes with the pragmatic features of Ching's responsive diplomatic notes.

4.2 Ching's diplomatic notes through the lens of speech acts

Before engaging in an analysis of speech acts in Ching's diplomatic notes, it is worth noting that the aggression in Cushing's Tells appears to be at the same time exaggerated and mitigated by the Chinese translators of Cushing's notes. That is, the Chinese translators not only translated but also liberally interpreted (cf. House 2018) Cushing's notes, reflecting Chinese assessments of these notes:

1. *Exaggeration:* The translators added a 'militant' exaggerating interpretation to both the personnel and ships of Cushing. For example, while Cushing often refers to his own ship simply as "Brandywine" in his own notes, in the Chinese version of these notes the Chinese translators always refer to "Brandywine" as "warship Brandywine" (*Bolandiwan bingchuan* 沒蘭的灣兵船).
2. *Mitigation:* The translators attempted to mitigate the threat of face Cushing's notes on the Emperor by adding honorific nouns and verbs. For example, Cushing's menacing Tell that he will "deliver a letter … addressed to his Imperial Majesty" was translated to Chinese as *chengxian Dahuang yulan* 呈獻大皇帝御覽 (lit. "presenting humbly for the majestic reading of the Heavenly Emperor").

All Tells in Ching's notes are 'innocent', i.e. devoid of aggression. The following example illustrates this point:

(13) 現在大皇帝福壽安康, 遐邇同慶, 理合复知貴公使, 以答慕義之忱。
At the present time, the great Emperor is in the enjoyment of happy old age and quiet health, and is at peace with all, both far and near; of which it is proper, in reply, to inform the honorable Plenipotentiary, in order to answer his sincere desire of what is just and proper.

Here the Tell simply operates in its default informative function.

An additional pragmatic function of such 'innocent' Tells is the following: in various cases, Ching realises Tells essentially to appease the aggressor. For example, in the following example (14) Ching deploys a Tell to inform Cushing that he is trying his best to cope with Cushing's wish.

(14) 又本兼護部堂於二月十四日具奏貴公使仍請進京, 並願由內河行走一案, 本月十九日, 接奉軍機大臣字寄大皇帝諭旨, 頒給調任兩廣總督耆欽差大臣關防, 與貴公使酌商定議。
Again: I, the acting Governor General, upon the 2nd moon, and the 4th day, (April 1, 1844,) memorialized the Emperor, that the honorable Plenipotentiary still requests to go to Peking, and is willing to go by the inner rivers. This, too, is on record. Upon the 19th of the present month (May 6) I received a communication from the Privy Council, stating that the August Emperor's will has been promulgated, to deliver over the seal of Imperial High Commissioner to Tsiyeng, Governor General of the two Kwang, in order that with the honorable Plenipotentiary he may negotiate and settle deliberations.

When it comes to other speech acts, our analysis has not only shown that they are rather defensive in nature, but more importantly for the present analysis that they are rarely intertwined with a Tell. Rather, Tell simply occurs in a sequential preparatory relationship with other speech acts, providing necessary informational background for an ensuing speech act. Thus, the pragmatic dynamics of Ching's notes is very different from that of Cushing's notes: Ching responds with speech acts such as Request and Complain to Cushing's menacing Tells, instead of reciprocating with similar Tells.

Let us here refer to two Chinese examples including a Request[not-to-do-X] and a Complain respectively:

(15) 若不待奏請, 徑以兵船駛往天津, 殊與體制未協。
Again: if [the Plenipotentiary] presume to go the capital, still he must stop; for if he do not wait to memorialize the Emperor, and request permission, but proceed hastily, by a narrow passage, with a man-of-war to Tien Tsin, this will be to put an end to civility, and to rule without harmony.

The Request[not-to-do-X] in example (15) is a very direct 'hedged performative' (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989). However, this level of directness does not translate into aggression: rather, it represents an attempt to fend off Cushing's aggressive *fait accompli*.

The following Complaint in example (16) fulfils a similar pragmatic function:

(16) 軍機大臣字寄。道光二十四年三月初五日, 奉上諭: 據程矞米利堅仍復籲請進京, 並願由內河行走等語。
We, great Ministers of State, Members of the Privy Council, communicate that, on Taou Kwang, 24th year, 3rd moon, and 5th day, (22nd April) we received the Imperial mandate, that whereas Ching has memorialized the Throne, that the American Envoy still again importunately requests to enter Peking, and is willing, by the inner rivers, to make the journey,

While the Complain in example (16) is upgraded, it again represents an attempt to fend off aggression. Note that the word "importunately" in the English text was added by the American translator, supposedly to escalate the conflict between the two parties.

Our Chinese corpus reveals a major cross-cultural pragmatic difference between the two corpora of diplomatic notes under investigation. While Cushing produces mainly Tells, often intertwined with other speech acts, he refrains from realising these other speech acts in a direct manner. As an aggressor with power, it might simply not have been necessary for him to do this. The Chinese respond to Cushing's Tells by realising speech acts in a rather direct manner. While there is very little upgrading (cf. Blum-Kulka et al. 1989) in Cushing's notes, Ching's responses are generally upgraded: he uses many expressions such as *xu* 須 ('must') and bude 不得 ('should not').

From a quantitative point of view, if one counts attempts of fending off the American's aggression as aggressive behaviour and dismisses non-aggressive language use, the quantitative properties of aggression realisation in our Chinese corpus are as follows:

Table 2: Quantitative features of aggression realisation in Ching's diplomatic notes.

Type of speech acts fending off aggression	Distribution of speech act occurrences fending off aggression (in characters)	Proportion (overall size of the Ching corpus: 7,315 words)
Complains	2,251	30.77%
Requests	1,927	26.34%
Total	4,178	57.11%

As Table 2 also indicates, the aggression-related speech acts in Ching's notes are Complains and Requests.

5 Conclusion

We have examined the use of the informative speech act Tell in diplomatic notes, by focusing on its role in the realisation of aggression in an American diplomat's notes. We have investigated the research question *How is aggression realised in the ritual genre of diplomatic notes?* Our analysis has shown that in the US corpus realisations of aggression are centred on a particular speech act type – Tell – which in the context of aggression is often used beyond its default informative function. More specifically, when a Tell is used to announce a forthcoming menacing action, it gains an aggressive character. There is a cluster of speech acts which are deployed intertwined with Tell to realise aggression. The prevalence of Tell in the genre of diplomatic notes is due to the fact that diplomats are supposed to uphold the veneer of civility, especially when they realise aggressive threats. Our analysis of the Chinese corpus has shown that Tells in Ching's notes are exclusively realised with their original 'innocent' informative function. It is not a coincidence that the pragmatic qualities of Cushing's and Ching's notes are not in parallel, given the power difference between these two politicians.

The study of exchange of diplomatic notes also contributes to pragmatic research on the escalation of aggressive behaviour (see Kádár and House 2022 in press): diplomatic notes usually represent a sequence of increasingly aggressive messages, notwithstanding the fact that aggression always remains constrained by the ritual frame of this particular genre.

In future research on the informative speech act Tell, it would be important both to explore other diplomatic corpora, in order to examine whether there are other speech act types intertwined with Tell whenever aggression occurs. It would also be relevant to examine the use of Tells in aggression occurring in oral interaction, in particular in contexts in which the aggressor for one reason or another intends to sound 'civil' but threatening at the same time. We hope that the present study has demonstrated that speech acts are worthwhile exploring in the study of diplomatic conflicts and other encounters of veiled aggression.

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