

Metapragmatics and the Chinese Language

Metapragmatics and the Chinese Language

Edited by

Xinren Chen

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



Metapragmatics and the Chinese Language

Edited by Xinren Chen

This book first published 2022

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2022 by Xinren Chen and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-8848-3

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-8848-6

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables.....	vii
List of Figures.....	ix
Acknowledgements	x
Contributors.....	xii
Chapter One.....	1
Introduction	
<i>Xinren Chen</i>	

Part I. Conceptual Foundations

Chapter Two	14
Conceptualizing metapragmatics	
<i>Xinren Chen</i>	
Chapter Three	52
Conceptualizing metadiscourse	
<i>Hui Jiang</i>	

Part II. Metapragmatics of Chinese in Interpersonal Contexts

Chapter Four	100
“ <i>Bushi wo shuo ni</i> ” (“I’m not criticizing you”): Doing mitigating in interpersonal communication	
<i>Xiaohong Liu</i>	
Chapter Five	135
“ <i>Bushi kaiwanxiao</i> ” (“I’m not joking”): Intention clarification in interpersonal encounters	
<i>Hao Liu</i>	

Chapter Six	168
“ <i>Ranhou (then)</i> ” on social media: Novel usages and functions of a Chinese temporal connective	
<i>Jing Gao</i>	
Chapter Seven.....	196
“ <i>Shuishuo ...?</i> ” (“Who says ...?”): Stance marking with a rhetorical question	
<i>Xiaojing Wang</i>	
Chapter Eight.....	224
“ <i>Ni limao ma?</i> ” (“Are you polite?”): A memetic metapragmatic commentary on Chinese social media	
<i>Ruixin Cheng</i>	
Part III. Metapragmatics of Chinese in Institutional Contexts	
Chapter Nine.....	268
Chinese police officers’ use of metapragmatic expressions in mediation	
<i>Wenjing Feng, Mieke Vandenbroucke, Xinren Chen</i>	
Chapter Ten	306
Chinese college teachers’ use of confirmation checks in classroom interaction	
<i>Li Sun, Jing Yang</i>	
Chapter Eleven	341
Chinese celebrities’ use of honesty markers in televised social commentary programmes	
<i>Yingzhe Jin, Xinren Chen</i>	
Chapter Twelve	378
Chinese doctors’ use of metapragmatic expressions in disagreements	
<i>Xin Zhao, Yansheng Mao</i>	
Subject index	408
Author index.....	418

LIST OF TABLES

- Table 2-1 Typology of metapragmatic awareness based on dimensions of a communicative event (Chen 2020)
- Table 2-2 A functional taxonomy of metapragmatic acts (based on Hübler and Bublitz 2007, 18)
- Table 2-3 Metapragmatic management of face
- Table 2-4 Metapragmatic management of interactional goal
- Table 2-5 Metapragmatic management of sociality rights and obligations
- Table 2-6 Metapragmatic management of emotions
- Table 2-7 Metapragmatic management of benefit and cost
- Table 3-1 An Interpersonal model of metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005)
- Table 3-2 Degrees of text reflexivity (Mauranen, 1993)
- Table 3-3 Classification of meta-discourse based on metapragmatic awareness (Chen, 2020)
- Table 4-1 Distribution of different types of remarks
- Table 4-2 Distribution of the illocutionary acts modified
- Table 4-3 Distribution of the functions
- Table 5-1 Overview of the types of positions of SMs in our data
- Table 5-2 Context of SM occurrence in our data
- Table 6-1 The novel usages and percentages of “*ranhou* (then)” on Sina Weibo
- Table 8-1 Frequencies and percentages of occasions of use of “Ni limao ma?”
- Table 8-2 Different categories of objective impolite events
- Table 8-3 Frequencies and percentages of objects of comment in objective impolite events
- Table 8-4 Frequencies and percentages of objects of comment in subjectively construed impolite events
- Table 8-5 Frequencies and percentages of offenders in objective impolite events
- Table 8-6 Frequencies and percentages of (construed) offenders in subjectively construed impolite events
- Table 9-1 Information about the two cases for detailed analysis

Table 9-2 Classification and linguistic representations of MPes

Table 10-1 Linguistic representations of confirmation checks in TCFL classes

Table 10-2 Types of TCFL teachers' metapragmatic awareness reflected in their use of confirmation checks

Table 11-1 Frequency and percentage of situations and acts performed by celebrities' MCUs (N=101)

Table 11-2 Frequency and percentage of the locations of HMs in MCUs (N=101)

Table 12-1 Classifications and selected examples of MPes in disagreements

LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 3-1 Jakobson's Analytic Schema for Language Functions (1990, 73)
- Figure 3-2 Configurations of 'metatext' and 'writer-reader' interaction (Ädel, 2006)
- Figure 7-1 The stance act represented in the form of a stance triangle in Du Bois (2007, 165).
- Figure 8-1 An image macro derivative of "*Ni limao ma?*"
- Figure 8-2 Baidu Search Index of "*Ni limao ma?*" from January 2021 to February 2022 (retrieved on February 22, 2022)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge with gratitude those who have contributed in one way or another to the launching and completion of the current volume.

First, I would like to say a big “thank you” to Professor Rong Chen, who always stands behind me to offer encouragement and support, from the co-editing of *East Asian Pragmatics* to the endorsement of this volume. To Professor Jef Verschueren, Professor Jacob Mey, Professor Jonathan Culpeper, Professor Michael Haugh, and many others, whose work on metapragmatics provides me with immense inspiration. Special mention needs to be made of Professor Michael Haugh, not just because he kindly agrees to offer an endorsement for the volume, but more because his most influential work on interpersonal pragmatics has been a constant and extensive guide to my own research.

Second, my heart-felt thanks go to Mr. Adam Rummens, Commissioning Editor from Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Upon the close of the 17th International Pragmatics Conference on 27 June – 2 July, 2021, at which I organised a panel titled “Metapragmatics in Chinese”, he emailed and invited me to submit a proposal to publish an edited book of selected papers from the panel. His invitation, which came to me as a pleasant surprise, encouraged me to develop a quick and successful proposal, and soon led to a contract with me as well as my collaborators. Meanwhile, I

also extend my heart-felt thanks to Jamie George, Marketing Liaison, who kindly reminded me to attend to marketing opportunities while preparing the manuscripts of this volume.

Finally, cordial thanks are due to the very one of the contributors, Professor Hui Jiang, who generously shares many valuable references on metapragmatics; to my doctoral students, Yeming Yang, Mingxin Yao, Chao Dai, Yanling Lin, Chuting Song, and Jijia Yang, who spend time helping proofread the pieces of work in the volume.

CONTRIBUTORS

Xinren CHEN is Professor of English/Linguistics, School of Foreign Studies/Department of Applied Foreign Language Studies/China Research Centre for Language Strategies, Nanjing University; interpersonal pragmatics, metapragmatics, critical pragmatics.

Ruixin CHENG is a doctoral student at the School of Foreign Studies, Nanjing University; Internet pragmatics, cultural pragmatics.

Wenjing FENG is Associate professor of English/Linguistics, School of Foreign Studies, Nanjing University of Posts and Telecommunications; interpersonal pragmatics, metapragmatics.

Jing GAO is lecturer of English/Linguistics, doctoral student at the School of Foreign Studies, Nanjing University; ethical pragmatics, cultural pragmatics.

Hui JIANG is Professor of English/Linguistics, School of Foreign Studies, Liaoning Normal University; interpersonal pragmatics, metapragmatics.

Yingzhe JIN is lecturer of English/Linguistics, Department of Applied Foreign Language Studies, Nanjing University; interpersonal pragmatics, metapragmatics.

Hao LIU is a doctoral student at School of Foreign Studies, Nanjing University; interpersonal pragmatics, metapragmatics.

Mieke VANDENBROUCKE is tenure track research professor of Linguistics, Department of Linguistics, Antwerp University; linguistic pragmatics, metapragmatics, urban studies.

Xiaohong LIU is Associate professor of English/Linguistics, doctoral student at School of Foreign Studies, Nanjing University; interpersonal pragmatics, metapragmatics, pragma-rhetoric.

Yansheng MAO is Professor of English/Linguistics, School of Foreign Studies, Harbin Engineering University; interpersonal pragmatics, metapragmatics.

Li SUN is Associate professor of English/Linguistics, School of Foreign Languages and Literature, Nanjing Tech University; interpersonal pragmatics, metapragmatics.

Xiaojing WANG is lecturer of English/Linguistics, School of Foreign Languages, China University of Geosciences (Wuhan); interpersonal pragmatics, metapragmatics.

Jing YANG is MA student of English/Linguistics, School of Foreign Languages and Literature, Nanjing Tech University; interpersonal pragmatics, metapragmatics.

Xin ZHAO is Assistant professor of English/Linguistics, School of Studies, Nanjing University; interpersonal pragmatics, metapragmatics.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

XINREN CHEN

This edited book has two major goals. One is to contribute some new ideas on the issue of metapragmatics, and the other is, drawing on the new ideas as well as those of previous scholars, to present an array of contexts and manners in which Chinese communicators from different walks of life employ metapragmatic expressions for various purposes. Drawing on first-hand data, it attempts to contribute to understanding how contemporary Chinese people do transactional and relational work by way of metacommunication. Specifically, it demonstrates empirically how they use some meta-level expressions to monitor their exchange of information, management of interpersonal relations, and/or organization of text/discourse. Thus, it distinguishes itself from previous stylistic or pragmatic books on Chinese communication by its metapragmatic perspective.

1.1 Scope of the volume

The object of our inquiry into the pragmatics of metalinguistic utterances is an array of metapragmatic acts which are performed, pre-emptively or retrospectively, through the use of various metapragmatic utterances or markers for varied purposes in Chinese interpersonal or institutional

contexts. Specifically, on empirical basis, we explore some critical issues such as what the acts are like, what they modify, who is acting, by what means and when, and to what end the acts are performed (Hübler and Bublitz 2007, 14).

Theoretically, the volume seeks to join existing inquiries into the notion of metapragmatics, as well as the related notion of metadiscourse. Following Bublitz and Hübler (2007), we will focus on the more linguistic and pragmatic aspects of metapragmatics rather than its more philosophical or disciplinary aspects. In other words, the studies covered in our volume concern its “instance- and performance-related aspects”, rather than “system- and competence-related aspects” (Hübler and Bublitz 2007, 7). Thus, they do not attempt to exhaust all the metapragmatic expressions in the Chinese language or any other language; nor do they seek to explore what metapragmatic knowledge and how much metapragmatic knowledge native or non-native speakers of the Chinese language command about the Chinese language. Apparently, Chapter 2 provides a fairly comprehensive functional categorization of Chinese metapragmatic expressions, but it has by no means offered a complete or systematic picture; nor has it investigated what abstract knowledge Chinese speakers possess about the individual metapragmatic expressions concerned and how they have acquired it, if at all. Instead, the volume focuses on how native speakers of Chinese employ them in specific contexts, interpersonal or institutional, online or offline, to satisfy their communicative needs. For this purpose, to better understand the nature and property of the metapragmatic expressions used, we attempt a new way of categorizing that distinguishes three fundamentally different types of metapragmatics, namely ideational

metapragmatics, interpersonal metapragmatics, and textual metapragmatics. Thus, the scope of metapragmatics in this volume exceeds that of many previous books (e.g. Bublitz and Hübler 2007; Culpeper and Haugh 2014), going beyond “the pragmatics of actually performed meta-utterances that serve as means of commenting on and interfering with ongoing discourse or text” (Hübler and Bublitz 2007, 6). In keeping with the new categorization of metapragmatic awareness (Chen 2020) with respect to the various aspects of communicative events, Chapter 3 provides a new taxonomy of metadiscourse from the perspective of metapragmatic awareness, as an alternative approach to metadiscourse that differs from existing approaches. Underlying the new categorization is the new and broad conceptualization of metadiscourse as formulaic or non-formulaic linguistic realizations of metapragmatic acts, ideational, interpersonal or/and textual. In this sense, we do not categorise previous research that merely explores the diverse functions of discourse markers as falling within the scope of metapragmatics because it does not investigate how particular communicators deploy the markers or metadiscourse for specific purposes in particular contexts.

Empirically, the volume seeks to complement existing sporadic studies on Chinese metapragmatics by bringing together a collection of empirical metapragmatic studies about interpersonal and institutional communication in the context of contemporary Chinese society. For instance, Yuan (2011) addresses the identity marking function of Chinese address terms from the metapragmatic perspective, suggesting that the choice of address terms signals communicators’ metapragmatic awareness of the need to adapt to dynamic contextual correlates. Zhao (2021) provides a metapragmatic

account of explicit irony markers (e.g. “讽刺的是”, “ironically”), which are considered indicators of the speakers’ metapragmatic awareness. Dong (2022) discusses the functions of hypothetical clauses introduced by “如果” (“if”), contending that they serve the metapragmatic function of enhancing coherence when post-positioned. However, these studies are often based on limited few selected examples. Moreover, they represent the phenomenon of metapragmatic in very limited types of contexts, also with scant attention to Chinese metacommunication in virtual contexts. For these reasons, sizable online or offline interactional data, collected from diverse contexts of interpersonal communication or existing corpora of Chinese communication, are subject to primarily qualitative analysis to derive usage patterns of the Chinese metapragmatic expressions and exhibit their role in performing relational work.

1.2 Overview of chapters

The title of the volume is kind of inspired by the monograph titled *Pragmatics and the English Language* written by Culpeper and Haugh (2014). Thus, primarily, the volume consists of theoretical inquiries on metapragmatics and practical metapragmatic applications onto the Chinese language. Specifically, apart from this introductory chapter, the volume consists of three major parts. The first part, composed of Chapters 2 and 3, provides the theoretical foundation for the subsequent empirical studies in Parts II and III. The second part, made up of Chapters 4-8, addresses metapragmatic phenomena in interpersonal Chinese contexts. Part III, comprising Chapters 9-12, presents metapragmatic phenomena in institutional Chinese contexts. The following is a detailed description of

the individual chapters.

In Chapter 2 “Conceptualizing metapragmatics”, Xinren Chen, editor of the volume, undertakes the definition and categorization of metapragmatics, both as a form of language use and a sub-area of pragmatic research. After differentiating the various senses of the term “metapragmatics”, the chapter presents a spectrum of metapragmatic awareness corresponding to the aspects of a communicative event. Drawing on previous research, it ends by distinguishing three major types of metapragmatic acts, namely ideational, interpersonal and textual, each comprising many sub-categories.

In Chapter 3, “Conceptualizing metadiscourse”, Hui Jiang reviews a rich assortment of related and well-cited literature on metadiscourse. After comparing the various definitions of metadiscourse, proposition-based, pragmatic-based, and reflexivity-based, she outlines four major models for conceptualizing and characterizing metadiscourse, notably the systemic-functional model, the interpersonal model, the reflexive model, and the metapragmatic model. In particular, the metapragmatic model, based on the characterization of metapragmatics in Chapter 2, will serve as the one for the study of metapragmatic expressions used in Chinese communicative contexts.

Chapter 4, “‘*Bushi wo shuo ni*’ (‘I’m not criticizing you’): Doing mitigating in interpersonal communication”, Xiaohong Liu seeks to provide new and hard evidence for the argument that the use of “*bushi wo shuo ni*” performs an interpersonal metapragmatic act, serving as a mitigator of face or rapport threat. Based on an extensive analysis of 156

extracts collected from two leading Chinese corpora, she finds four types of evidence, i.e., the negative characteristic of relational acts, the location of “*bushi wo shuo ni*” within an utterance, the author’s assessments, and changes of address terms. Adopting both etic and emic perspectives, her study could extend the scope of research on mitigation by attending to metapragmatic expressions used for mitigating purposes.

Focusing on the issue of intention framing in Chapter 5, “‘*Bushi kaiwanxiao*’ (‘I’m not joking’): Intention clarification in interpersonal encounters”, Hao Liu investigates how the Chinese pragmatic marker is used to claim one’s serious intent. She finds that speakers tend to employ *bushi kaiwanxiao* to clarify their serious intent in either a prospective or retrospective manner in contexts where recipients’ understanding/affiliation has emerged as relevant or (potentially) problematic. She demonstrates that the marker, both ideational and interpersonal in function, serves purposes such as inoculation, repair of prior utterances, and premonition of upcoming messages worth seriously taking, and as such contributes to the overall maintenance of both intersubjectivity and solidarity between interactants. The author ends by arguing that uses of the marker are indicative of speakers’ metapragmatic awareness of these nascent problems arising in interactions, and hence their ongoing efforts to handle them.

Chapter 6, “*Ranhou (then)* on social media: Novel usages and functions of a Chinese temporal connective”, contributed by Jing Gao examines the prevalent use of the Chinese temporal connective “*ranhou (then)*” as a discourse marker on social media. She finds that “*ranhou (then)*” exhibits three novel usages in Chinese social media interaction, i.e., repetitive use,

participatory use, and mixed use with modal particles. These usages may fulfill three main pragmatic functions respectively: intensifying the speaker's emotion, engaging the hearer, and narrowing the interactants' online social distance. The usages and functions of the discourse marker on social media manifest the role of metapragmatic awareness, the influence of social media, and the Bandwagon effect. Her study could shed light on how temporary connectives may acquire new functions from their extension into multifunctional markers.

In Chapter 7, “‘*Shuishuo ...?*’ (‘Who says ...?’): Stance marking with a rhetorical question”, Xiaojing Wang investigates the Chinese rhetorical question “*shuishuo...?*” as a stance marker from the perspective of metapragmatic awareness. She reveals that the marker is often found in contexts where the speaker needs to signal strong refutation or disagreement, ostensible strong refutation, or ostensible strong agreement for purpose of either divergent or convergent alignment. Furthermore, she finds that the stance marker can be used to indicate the speakers' reflexive awareness of intensified divergent and convergent attitudes to the proposition as well as disalignment and alignment with the other interlocutors. In terms of metacommunicative awareness, the use of stance marking expression can represent the speaker's awareness of designing the conversational content with the other speaker in mind, such as trying to show considerateness, shift the responsibility of causing face-threat from him/herself to others, catch the other interlocutor's attention, shift the topic (the proposition to be evaluated), etc.

Chapter 8, “‘*Ni limao ma?*’ (‘Are you polite?’): A memetic metapragmatic commentary on Chinese social media”, explores the use of an Internet

catchphrase widely used on Chinese social media, namely “*Ni limao ma?*”. Based on the analysis of data collected from *Weibo*, Ruixin Cheng finds that the catchphrase is used in contexts where an objective impolite event has happened or where an event has been subjectively construed as impolite. In the former case, it is used as a memetic metapragmatic commentary on impolite events that can be categorised into four types of rapport management. In the latter case, where its objects of comment and the (construed) offendees are often inanimate objects, it functions to create humor by footing manipulation or incongruity generation.

In Chapter 9, “Chinese police officers’ use of metapragmatic expressions in mediation”, Wenjing Feng, Mieke Vandenbroucke, and Xinren Chen direct attention to police officers’ reflexive awareness of their identity construction. The study explores the role of metapragmatic expressions (MPEs) used by Chinese police officers in mediation context, with data drawn from an ethnographic investigation involving 19 police officer-mediated interactions. It is found that the Chinese police officers mainly used such types of MPEs as performatives, hedges, commentaries, stance displayers, evidentials, summary, and message glosses. The authors argue that the MPEs used by the Chinese police officers indicate their effort to manage the ongoing mediation interactions, in order to achieve both the transactional goal of conflict resolution and the relational goal of rapport management.

Chapter 10, “Chinese college teachers’ use of confirmation checks in online class”, contributed by Li Sun and Jing Yang, addresses the linguistic representations and pragmatic functions of confirmation checks, with a view to uncovering the metapragmatic awareness reflected in their

use through classroom observation on two TCFL (Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language) teachers from Nanjing Tech University. They find that the majority of confirmation checks used by teachers in TCFL classes are represented in the form of yes-no questions and alternative questions to fulfill pragmatic functions such as error correction, fact confirmation, and responding to students' questions. The use of confirmation checks is driven by metapragmatic awareness such as that of epistemic status, information status, beliefs or thoughts, desires or intentions, attitudes or emotions, interpersonal relations, and interactional status.

In Chapter 11, "Chinese celebrities' use of honesty markers in televised social commentary programmes", Yingzhe Jin and Xinren Chen investigate Chinese celebrities' use of honesty markers like "*shuoshihua*" (literally "*to tell the truth*"), "*tanbaishuo*" (literally "*frankly speaking*") for their purpose of metapragmatic management of rapport and impression in interviews. Based on naturally occurring data, they find that Chinese celebrities tend to use honesty markers when they are posited in several situations. As their use of the markers at different sentential locations indicates their effort of managing risks and the acts might also trigger unexpected interpersonal risks on rapport or impression, the study suggests that their use of the honesty markers might reflect their metapragmatic awareness of the risks involved and hence their efforts to manage rapport and impression, by placing significant emphasis on their sincerity.

Finally, in Chapter 12, "Chinese doctors' use of metapragmatic expressions in disagreements", Xin Zhao and Yansheng Mao analyze 25 episodes of doctor-patients' dialogues, reporting on the types of metapragmatic expressions (MPEs) in disagreement used by Chinese

doctors at non-verbal and verbal levels. They offer a novel perspective into the study of how Chinese doctors use these MPEs in disagreement to turn divergent ideas into alignment with patients in online medical dialogues. They find that whereas non-verbal MPEs in disagreement include short pauses and responsive laughter, verbal MPEs in disagreement include hedges and token agreements. The findings in their study provide preliminary empirical support for the idea that some MPEs in disagreement can be seen as a sign of constructing working alliance and may strengthen doctor-patients' relations.

It will be demonstrated that Chinese communicators may employ an array of distinct metapragmatic expressions to do a range of relational work such as facework (Brown and Levinson 1987), identity work (Chen 2022a), and image work (Chen 2022b), as well as frame or modify the message to be conveyed and facilitate the course of interaction. Some of the expressions have no counterparts in the English language, while some others only partially correspond to those in it. The findings will contribute to existing scholarship on metapragmatics and interpersonal pragmatics on the one hand and enable cross-linguistic comparative or contrastive metapragmatic research concerning the Chinese language on the other. Practically, the book will shed light on the understanding of Chinese people in interpersonal communication and their language.

Bibliography

- Bublitz, Wolfram and Hübler, Axel. (Eds.) 2007. *Metapragmatics in Use*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Brown, Penelope and Levinson, Stephen. 1987. *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chen, Xinren. 2020. "A New Taxonomy of Metadiscourse Based on Metapragmatics". *Foreign Language and Their Teaching*, No. 4: 1-10.
- Chen, Xinren. 2022a. *Exploring Identity Work in Chinese Communication*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Chen, Xinren. 2022b. "Image Construction: Its Connotations, Types and Discursive Practices". *Foreign Language Teaching Theory and Practice*, No. 3: 1-8.
- Culpeper, Jonathan and Haugh, Michael. 2014. *Pragmatics and the English Language*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hübler, Axel and Bublitz, Wolfram. 2007. "Introducing Metapragmatics in Use". In *Metapragmatics in Use*, edited by Wolfram Bublitz and Axel Hübler, 1-26. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Dong, Xiuying. 2022. "Types and Functions of Post-positioned Metalanguage Hypothetical Clauses in Chinese". *Journal of Chinese*, No. 2: 47-55.
- Zhao, Minyan. 2021. "A Metapragmatic Account of Explicit Irony Markers". *Zhejiang Social Sciences*, No. 9: 115-121+159.
- Yuan, Zhoumin. 2011. "A Metapragmatic Study of Vocatives Functioning as Identity Markers". *Journal of Northeastern University (Social Science)*, No. 3: 263-267.

PART I

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUALIZING METAPRAGMATICS

XINREN CHEN

This chapter aims to provide the theoretical foundation for the whole volume. It starts by defining the notion of metapragmatics, while clarifying the various interpretations of the term “metapragmatics”. Then, it moves to explore a variety of metapragmatic awareness underlying meta-level use of language. Finally, drawing on existing research, it differentiates and illustrates three important categories of metacommunication.

2.1 Defining metapragmatics

The term “metapragmatics” is an English word formed by means of affixation, involving a prefix, *meta-* (originally “μετά” in Greek) and a stem “pragmatics”. The prefix, which means “shift” or “change” (Mey 2001, 173) or “above”, “beyond” or “among” (Culpeper and Haugh 2014, 237), also occurs in other words such as “metalanguage” and “metadiscourse”¹. The former, which originated from Tarski (1935) in his

¹ Linguists generally use “text” to refer to a complete, coherent and cohesive written product of communication, with the focus on its formal analysis, while using “discourse” to refer to the product or process of written or spoken communication, with the focus on its functional analysis. Correspondingly,

discussion of Metasprache (cf. Overstreet 2015) as opposed to object language, refers to the language we use to talk about language. Although “metalanguage” is often associated with terminology, it can refer to a quoted or cited word or chunks of words used for the purpose of commenting on a text. For example, Jakobson used the term to include what we mean by metapragmatics here (1960, 359), e.g. “I don’t follow you — what do you mean?”. The latter, “metadiscourse”, which dates back to Harris (1959/1970), means discourse about discourse (Ädel 2006; Crismore 1989; Crismore, Markkanen, and Steffensen 1993; Ifantidou 2005; Vande Kopple 1985). Another related term is “meta-talk”, which refers to organizational and evaluative brackets in discourse (Schiffrin 1980).

Analogously, “metapragmatics”, a term which dates back to Silverstein (1976), a linguistic anthropologist, literally means a portion or level of language use about another portion or level of language use (Chen 2020) if we use “pragmatics” to denote the use of language. Here, “meta-” denotes a shift up in the level of language use. For example, compared to utterance (1a), which involves only one level of language use, utterance (1b) involves two levels:

(1a) 我不参加明天的会。

I will not attend the meeting tomorrow.

“meta-text” generally occurs in written texts, whereas “metadiscourse” occurs either in written communication or spoken communication.

(1b) 很遗憾, 我不参加明天的会。

Unfortunately, I will not attend the meeting tomorrow.

For (1b), we may call the non-italicised part (“I will not attend the meeting tomorrow”) the primary level of language use (or what Tarski or Mey calls object language), whereas the italicised part (“Unfortunately”) the metapragmatic level or, simply, “meta-level” (Culpeper and Haugh 2014, 237). The latter, or metalanguage in Mey’s and Jakobson’s terms, reflects language users’ reflexive awareness (or metapragmatic awareness, which we will elaborate in section 2.1).

Now compare the following utterances (2a), (2b) and (2c):

(2a) 我明天会来参会。

I’ll come and attend the meeting tomorrow.

(2b) 我*保证*我明天会来参会。

I promise I’ll come and attend the meeting tomorrow.

(2c) 我告诉你我*保证*我明天会来参会。

I tell you that I promise I’ll come and attend the meeting tomorrow.

According to Caffi (1984, 454), (2a) is a promise showed, (2b) is a promise displayed, and (2c) is a promise exhibited. Both “保证” (“promise”) and “告诉” (“tell”), which are performative verbs, are metalanguage, or metapragmatics, or metadiscourse (Chen 2020) in nature.

Metapragmatics is “a sub-category of reflexive language” (Hübler and Bublitz, 2007, 5). According to Lucy (Lucy 1993), “reflexivity is so