Ritual frames
A contrastive pragmatic approach

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Our study provides a corpus-based contrastive pragmatic investigation of the expressions please in English and qing 请 in Chinese. We define such expressions as ‘ritual frame indicating expressions’ (henceforth RFIEs) and argue that RFIEs are deployed in settings where it is important to show awareness of the rights and obligations. ‘Ritual frame’ encompasses a cluster of standard situations. On the one hand the corpus-based investigation of ritual provides an innovative complement to sociopragmatic approaches to ritual behaviour because they reveal how RFIEs that indicate ritual spread across a cluster of standard situations. On the other hand, it allows the researcher to contrast the scope of ritual across lingua-cultures by comparatively looking into the standard situations in which a particular RFIE is deployed. Findings of our data analysis point to intriguing differences between English and Chinese RFIEs, as well as relevant lingua-cultural reasons behind such differences.

Keywords: standard situation, ritual-frame indicating-expression (RFIE), contrastive pragmatic analysis, corpora, Chinese, English

1. Introduction

1.1 Introducing ritual frame indicating expressions

In this paper, we investigate the claim that expressions such as please in English and qing 请 in Chinese are markers of standard situations and, more importantly, that they indicate a ‘ritual frame’. By so doing, we aim to make a pragmatic and contrastive pragmatic contribution to previous research on interactional rituals.

As House (1989, 115) argues, in the context where a request is realised by means of an expression,
The notion of a standard situation involves participants’ rather fixed expectations and perceptions of social role. Role relations are transparent and predetermined, the requester has a right, the requestee an obligation, the degree of imposition involved in the request is low, as is the perceived degree of difficulty in realizing it. In a nutshell, the participants know where and who they are. Clearly, the distinction between a standard and a nonstandard situation is not clear-cut.

For example, in an interaction where a policeman is reprimanding a car owner, when, for instance, the policeman utters a request to move the car, it is evident that the expression please takes place in a standard situation and thus has been formulated with the goal of indicating this situation. Note that the concept of standard situation does not only include what is commonly known as ‘institutional discourse’, but rather covers any situation where rights and obligations prevail. For instance, House (1989, 108) refers to the utterance ‘Please clean up the kitchen’ as a request made between people sharing a flat. It is also important to note that a particular standard situation represents a cluster of contexts.

Due to the prevalence of rights and obligations in any standard situation, such situations are ritual in nature. ‘Ritual frame’ refers to a cluster of standard situations in which rights and obligations prevail, and one is expected to follow these rights and obligations to maintain one’s sacred face (Goffman 1967). We borrow the concept of ritual frame from anthropology. As Turner (1979, 468) argues,

To look at itself, a society must cut out a piece of itself for inspection. To do this it must set up a frame within which images and symbols of what has been sectioned off can be scrutinized, assessed, and, if need be, remodelled and rearranged.

Turner described ritual frame as a physical space: in many tribes there is a separated area in which a ritual takes place, and once one enters this area, specific behavioural rules will apply, in which rights and obligations are clearly defined. In a Goffmanian vein, in modern urbanised societies we may have fewer such spaces, and the indication of ritual frames often takes place virtually vis-à-vis language in particular expressions that indicate awareness of the ritual frame. In this paper we define such expressions as ‘ritual frame indicating expressions’ (henceforth RFIEs). Our definition of frame differs somewhat from how it has been used, in a cognitive sense, in a body of research which has been conducted by, for example, Schank and Abelson (1977), Tannen (1979), Fillmore (1982), Barsalou (1992), Chafe (1994), Terkourafi (2005) and Bednarek (2005).

The idea of ritual frame is as much rooted in the Goffmanian (1967) concept of ‘face’ as the much more widely studied phenomenon of politeness. However, unlike politeness – provided that one interprets politeness as being predominantly an individually performed behaviour – ritual is the opposite of politeness in that it is a communally oriented form of behaviour (Bax 2010). Our interpreta-
tion of ‘communality’ is the following: in interactions anchored in standard situations, in which rights and obligations are always lurking, there is an omnipresent sense of a community even though the community itself might only be imaginatively present. A ritual frame of an interaction, therefore, also differs from the concept of abiding norms or ‘politic behaviour’ (Watts 2003): it covers all instances of language use that display a decreased sense of individualistic interactional engagement and related face-work. The deployment of ritual frames in an interactional engagement can be referred to as ritual framing, according to Goffman’s (1974) definition. Ritual frame, as we interpret the concept here, clearly correlates with conventionalisation (Terkourafi 2001). In other words, the more conventional the meaning of a particular RFIE becomes, the less directly related it will be to individualistic politeness (House 1989; Wichmann 2004; Terkourafi 2011; see also Kádár and House forthcoming), and the more open it is to being deployed as an indicator of ritual frame.

The notion of RFIE is not a stand-alone concept, in that expressions indicating an awareness of Malinowski’s (1935) ‘context of situation’ and the interpersonal relationships in the context have been studied in previous research. Typical examples of such expressions cover terms of address (Braun 1988), honorifics (Ide 1989) and so-called ‘politeness markers’ (House and Kasper 1981). In this paper we only focus on ‘politeness markers’ as in our case study, and assume that our approach is replicable in the study of other formal expressions. The concept of RFIE calls for a bottom–up and corpus-based approach to ritual. In other words, instead of focusing on a particular type of ritual – which, in turn, pre-sets the pragmatic context of our investigation – the concept of a ritual frame of interaction prompts us to investigate the occurrence of an RFIE in a particular corpus as an indicator of a set of standard situations. In turn, the contrastive research of datasets across different lingua-cultures allows us to engage in a bottom–up, contrastive pragmatic investigation, which is more rigorous and replicable in scope than what top–down inquiries, such as intercultural pragmatics, would provide (see also Section 5).

Note that the study of RFIEs is also relevant to other related areas (see a detailed discussion in Kádár and House forthcoming). Let us use politeness research as a representative example. A framework of RFIEs can facilitate a comparison of the pragmatic scope of expressions which are conventionally associated with ‘politeness’ (e.g. Lakoff 1972; House and Kasper 1981; Gleason, Perlmann, and Greif 1984; Ide 1989; Van Mulken 1996). Such expressions constitute a key aspect of our day-to-day communication and, as such, they need to be kept on the

1. The important notion of ‘context of situation’ was further developed in Systemic Functional Linguistics (British Contextualism) by Firth and Halliday.
agenda of pragmatic research. However, in recent years they have been somewhat marginalised, although some researchers – most notably Agha (2007) – have kept alive an academic interest in them, albeit from outside the politeness paradigm. Yet, the assumption that such expressions are in some way interrelated with politeness clearly prevails: the expression ‘politeness marker’ continues to be used, particularly outside the scope of mainstream pragmatic theorisation (e.g. Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis 2010; Andersen 2014) despite criticisms that politeness theorists such as Watts (2003) and Pizziconi (2003) have voiced about the politeness–form interface. Recently, Kádár (2017) has argued that this controversy surrounding the relationship between formal forms and politeness is a result of the tendency for these forms to be ritual in nature, while they only have a casual relationship with linguistic politeness. In other words, while ritual and politeness often coincide, if we envisage them as being at two ends of a scale, RFIEs are closer to the ritual than the politeness end. A bottom–up framework of RFIEs can help to prove this hypothesis: the corpus-based investigation of such expressions reveals that they are indeed used in ritual standard situations. Note that, in the course of our analysis (Section 4), we will occasionally refer to politeness phenomena to illustrate why RFIEs indicate an awareness of the ritual frame rather than politeness.

The advantage of studying forms, which we are prioritising here, is that, pragmatically speaking, they are much more complex than first thought. For instance, as Wichmann’s (2004) noteworthy study has revealed, there are all sorts of intonational complexities surrounding the use of pragmatic markers such as please. This is why we hope that the exploratory study we are presenting here will encourage further – more differentiated – research.

1.2 Positioning the concept of RFIE in the field

The concepts of standard situation and the broader ritual frame represent a pragmalinguistic counterpart to what Levinson (1979) has called ‘activity type’, which refers “to a fuzzy category whose focal members are goal-defined, socially constituted, bounded events with constraints on participants, setting and so on, but above all on the kinds of allowable contributions” (p.368). Levinson’s definition provides a key approach for interpreting language use in contexts where rights and obligations prevail. This concept is predominantly top–down in nature, in that it is usually deployed in discourse analysis, and it is closely interrelated with the concept of ‘discourse type’ (Sarangi 2014). Standard situation and ritual frame are rather similar, however their analytical direction is decidedly bottom–up as far as the focus of our RFIE-theory is concerned, i.e. starting from the level of expressions and moving upwards towards the situation. It could be argued that activity type and standard situation and ritual frame are complementary notions.
It should be noted that RFIE theory is only bottom–up in terms of the analytical unit it departs from (and the pragmalinguistic focus that this departure triggers), while at the same time it operates with pre-set criteria for the contrastive study of RFIEs. In this latter sense, it is not a fully-fledged bottom–up framework.

Previous pragmatic research with an interest in expressions – including Mey’s (2001) concept of ‘pragmemes’ and Kecskes’s (2016) ‘situation-bound utterances’ – has not utilised such a departure point, but has instead pursued a primary interest in the situation which triggers the use of a particular utterance. Thus, while these approaches have provided insight into the situated use of expressions, they do not help analysts to systematically capture how expressions indicate situations and broader ritual frames. Even Terkourafi’s ‘frame-based approach’ (e.g. Terkourafi 2005) – which is the closest approach to our own – departs from situations in its analysis of expressions, and instead investigates the relationship between such contextually-situated expressions and speech acts. That is, Terkourafi investigates data collected in “a variety of settings, distinguished into: at home/informal social gatherings, at work (mainly offices and shops), and at formal discussions/on radio/TV” (Terkourafi 2005: 101), and so her model operates with pre-set situations. In addition, Terkourafi pursues an interest in intentionality, which assumes a top–down take on language use. In summary, our pragmalinguistic framework fills a knowledge gap in the field due to its focus on form – rather than situation – as a starting point for analysis.

2. **Analytical framework**

In this paper we intend to establish the foundation of a contrastive pragmatic analytical framework, by means of which we can analyse RFIEs, and the consequent standard situational spread of ritual behaviour, in a bottom–up fashion. The framework is based on our previous work (see Kádár and House forthcoming) in which we argued – by focusing on the relationship between RFIEs and speech acts – that RFIEs are the fundamental means by which synergies can be created between pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. We believe that the current approach is replicable, and the results of our research thus far have attested to this. However, further work is required to rigorously cross-test the proposed framework across various RFIE types (e.g. honorifics rather than ‘politeness markers’) and lingua-cultures. We have chosen the RFIE pair *please* in English and *qing* 请 in Chinese to test the validity of this framework because, according to our panel of native-speaker informants, these are the most frequently used expressions in the speech act of requesting in the lingua-cultures we have studied (see below for more detail on the frequency criteria which have justified this choice).
The following figure illustrates our replicable model, which constitutes the basis of the methodology we have used here:

**Figure 1. Analytical model**

The procedure consists of 2 levels. On the first level, the initial task is to identify the RFIEs in the lingua-cultural data that one is intending to compare. Various criteria can be used to identify comparable RFIEs; in our case study, the criterion for their selection was frequency, as confirmed by panels of native speakers of the languages being studied (see Culpeper 2010 on the relationship between frequency and conventionalisation). In our view, it is necessary to involve at least three native speakers per lingua-culture in the identification of comparable RFIEs. In the quest to find such RFIEs, the key task is to identify expressions with the closest meaning and pragmatic use. For instance, regarding the English and Chinese forms of the 'request' formulae studied in this paper, one can refer to a wide variety of expressions, such as:

**English:** (1) please; (2) if you please; (3) can/could you please?; etc.

**Chinese:** (1) qing 请 (please); (2) qing ni ... keyi ma? 请您 ... 可以吗? (could you ...?); (3) nengfou qing nin ...? 能否请您 ...? (do you agree to ...?); etc.
In the search for the most ‘standard’ – i.e. most frequently and widely used – RFIEs in the lingua-cultures being studied, we first requested our informants\textsuperscript{2} to produce variations of an RFIE with different syntactic complexities and styles. For instance, all our English-speaking informants referred to both ‘please’ and ‘if you please’, the use of which have different pragmatic scopes and frequencies. As part of the contrastive approach, one can only rigorously compare expressions of similar frequency, and in the current project we decided to only focus on the shortest/syntactically simplest and most ‘standard’ forms of ‘requests’ in Chinese and English. Second, we interviewed our respondents with regards to whether there were any other alternative RFIEs to the ones that we had chosen. These interviews revealed that there were virtually no alternative RFIEs to please and qing, demonstrating that, in both lingua-cultures, these are the only expressions (rather than longer sequences) by means of which the speech act of requesting is realised. Note that we did not reveal to our respondents that we wanted them to produce contrastive ‘equivalents’ of another lingua-culture. This would have been counter-productive because – as our analysis will also illustrate – such RFIEs cannot be translated as equivalents, due to their different pragmatic scopes. Therefore, for the contrastive analysis that we wanted to conduct, it would not have been productive to ask the language users about their perceptions of RFIEs in both languages, should an informant speak both of them.

After the RFIE pair was chosen, we then needed to collect a sample universe. Based on the experience gained during previous research, we collected a minimum of 200 examples featuring an RFIE. Note that there are various ways in which one can collect a sample dataset of 200 examples. For instance, we collected 200 hits by randomly sampling batches of 10 examples in our corpora. We excluded examples that we classified as being invalid, such as metareferences to an RFIE. Due to this approach, our data sampling took place in two stages, firstly by collecting an initial dataset, and then by replacing the invalid examples with valid ones that occurred before the batches of 10 examples in the corpus.

The next criterion in the first level of analysis is to identify the standard situations which are indicated by a particular RFIE. To ensure that a manageable number of such standard situations were obtained, we applied a threshold of 5 for our dataset of 200 examples. In other words, we proposed implementing a minimum 2.5% rate of occurrence threshold to ensure that a particular standard situation was sufficiently recurrent. For instance, we encountered cases when a particular RFIE indicated an academically significant standard situation only 2 times in a set of 200 examples. While it may be important to study such uses because they may

\textsuperscript{2} All our informants were females between 30 and 50 years old who worked in higher education.
not be simple idiosyncrasies,\(^3\) such an exploration is outside of the scope of our contrastive corpus-based model (reaching a set threshold of frequency is a basic contrastive pragmatic principle; cf. Kádár and House forthcoming). Note that the figure of 2.5% is not only an empirical, experience-based recommendation – i.e. it is not set in stone (see more below in this section) – but also in actual practice it may be higher than 2.5% if the number of invalid occurrences of an RFIE in a sample dataset is taken into account, which is unavoidable in corpus-based research. Our suggestion of the threshold of the figure of 2.5% has two reasons:

1. In our research on various RFIEs thus far, in a dataset of 200 examples a particular standard situation was indicated at least 7 times, while those standard situations that we discounted usually occurred only 1 or 2 times in a sample of this size. Thus, the amount of 5 (2.5%) represents an experience-based ‘safety threshold’ for including a standard situation in the scope of analysis.

2. Our research operates with two pre-set standard situations, namely ‘institutional with power-salience’ and ‘institutional without power-salience’. The former encompasses scenes of daily interaction in which power is important, while the latter includes interactions in which power is not salient. We deployed these standard situations because (a) ‘institutional with power-salience’ and ‘institutional without power-salience’ represent interactional scenes in which conventions and/or ritual behaviour very often become relevant (Kádár 2013), and (b) these standard situations are recurrently indicated by all the RFIEs that we have studied thus far. Due to the use of these replicable standard situation categories, it was necessary to limit other standard situations contrasted to those that occur above the aforementioned threshold.

It is worth noting that the number of standard situations and the size of the dataset are supposed to correlate: in our model the four standard situations are in proportion with the dataset of 200 utterances. Should a research project operate with a larger amount of data, we would recommend that the quantity of data is increased in a proportionate fashion. It is also possible not to limit the number of standard situations contrasted to four, in particular if a particular RFIE indicates more than four standard situations above the 2.5% threshold in a dataset (we have not encountered such a case in the present research).

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3. We agree with contrastive researchers such as Bartsch (2004) who argue that dismissing instances of language use in corpora as ‘idiosyncracy’ is problematic because such dismissals represent the researcher’s own interpretation of their data. Thus, we have excluded certain cases in our corpora simply on the basis of low frequency, which would make their contrastive analysis problematic (see more information on this point in the present section).
So far, we have provided an overview of the first (top left-hand) box in Figure 1. We now turn our attention to the top right-hand box, which illustrates the application of the variables of the participatory framework that are used to analyse each RFIE, before a contrastive pragmatic analysis is performed. We utilise the three aforementioned categories, which we define as ‘interpersonal scenarios’, including (1) ‘dyadic’, (2) ‘multiparty’ and (3) ‘public’, as in the following:

- **Dyadic**: Interactions in private where there are no overhearers.
- **Multiparty**: Any interaction involving two participants with either overhearers or situated in a scenario in which dyads are part of a broader relational network. Multiparty interactions tend to feature complex participatory frameworks.
- **Public**: Interactions which are designed to be accessible to unratified participants (see also Goffman 1981).

In order to ensure that the dataset of one RFIE is comparable with another, we suggest creating a cluster of interpersonal scenarios and standard situations by breaking down the occurrences of each standard situation that a particular RFIE might indicate across the interpersonal scenarios. The tri-fold categories of ‘dyadic’, ‘multiparty’ and ‘public’ are interesting in that they can throw light on the relationship between a particular RFIE and ritual pragmatic use.

After completing the preparatory work, we can now move to the bottom right-hand box of the diagram and engage in contrastive pragmatics. If the research in question is the study of RFIEs in typologically differing languages, such as Chinese and English, then one needs to relinquish any a priori assumptions regarding the standard situations which an RFIE indicates. For instance, it is poor academic practice to superimpose the set of standard situations – which research on, for instance, ‘please’ has revealed – onto its RFIE counterpart ‘qing’. Yet, it is logical to deploy the two recurrent standard situation categories of ‘institutional with power-salience’ and ‘institutional without power-salience’ in studying the contrasted dataset because these categories help us

a. to replicate the contrastive work across RFIE types, and
b. avoid ‘reinventing’ the same standard situation with different labels.

Note that the standard situation of ‘institutional with power-salience’ encompasses interactions in which the speaker is either higher ranking or lower ranking that their speech partner. Once research into each individual language is completed, we recommend a contrastive pragmatic ‘harmonisation’, primarily to avoid unnecessary proliferation in the number of standard situation categories. In our study, we proposed a limit of four standard situations (two additional situations to those of ‘institutional with power-salience’ and ‘institutional without power-
salience’) per RFIE, which has proven to be a manageable figure. The goal of harmonisation is to identify largely comparable standard situation categories, as far as possible, to ensure that the comparison is valid and reliable. For instance, in our research the English use of ‘please’ includes advertisements and public signs, whereas its Chinese counterpart only includes public announcements. We harmonised this discrepancy by referring to the standard situation of ‘public displays’.

The harmonisation process does not imply that all standard situation categories are essentially comparable. For instance, in our research presented below, there was one category per RFIE which was not comparable. This is a situation where the power of contrastive pragmatics is evident, because such differences have significant explanatory value. It should be noted at this point that such sociopragmatic inferences only represent a follow-up step in our essentially bottom-up pragmalinguistic methodology, considering that they are inferential to a certain degree. However, this inferential feature can be decreased if one compares contrastive pragmalinguistic findings with previous sociopragmatic research on the phenomena being studied.

As part of the analytical procedure being presented here, we must also engage in the analysis of the quantitative results that are revealed by the contrastive research. This analysis needs to focus on the question of whether the conventional use of an RFIE leans towards ‘dyadic’ interpersonal scenarios or not, or – from the other perspective – whether its ritual use leans towards ‘public’ scenarios.

At this point, we should repeat that this framework is not to substitute, but rather to complement top-down sociopragmatic research on ritual. Since it is a corpus-based approach, it is suitable for identifying divergences (and, of course, many similarities) between the standard situations which a particular RFIE pair indicates across different lingua-cultures. Once such divergences are identified, the next task is to engage in a detailed sociopragmatic and/or top–down investigation of the particular context in which the divergence is observed. Such a follow-up investigation represents the second analytical layer in this framework, which is featured in Figure 1 by the ‘Explanation’ blurb in the bottom left-hand box. For instance, one can deploy frameworks such as Spencer-Oatey’s (2000) ‘rapport management’ theory to rationalise why rights and obligations differ in a particular standard situation across different lingua-cultures. One can also examine the sociopragmatic reasons why a particular RFIE is present or missing in a standard situation in a particular lingua-culture. Since such a follow-up investigation is only complementary to the framework we are proposing here, we will not conduct an investigation of this nature here because of space limitations.
3. **Method of data collection**

Our data collection is based on Mandarin Chinese and English corpora of comparable size and comprehensiveness. The Chinese dataset consists of 200 valid occurrences of the RFIE *qing* (‘please’). We compiled this dataset on the basis of the Modern Chinese General Balanced Corpus (MCGBC), a collection of approximately 100 million characters, which includes dialogues, political articles, legal documents, news reports and various literary works. The texts in the corpus cover the period from the early 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century. The English corpus consists of the same number, that is, 200 valid uses of the RFIE *please* from the British National Corpus (BNC). The BNC is a 100-million-word collection of samples of written and spoken language from a wide range of sources, designed to represent a cross-section of British English from the latter part of the 20th century. The BNC includes extracts from regional and national newspapers, specialist periodicals and spoken language collected in different contexts, ranging from formal business or government meetings to radio shows and phone-ins.

We are aware that no corpus is perfect nor representative (see Sharoff, Rapp, Zweigenbaim, and Fung 2013). For instance, the BNC is different in terms of diachronic span from its Chinese counterpart; no other Chinese corpus has proven to be as useful, as our search has revealed, because they are either less comprehensive in scope than the MCGBC, or they do not contain data from the Chinese Mainland. We believe that a certain degree of ‘imperfection’ in the corpora does not invalidate contrastive pragmatic research of this scope, due to the bottom–up pragmalinguistic focus of such research. In contrastive pragmatics, the primary goal is to gain a general overview of the pragmatic scope of the use of RFIEs. It is possible to combine such research with additional methodologies, such as historical pragmatic research on the development of RFIEs, the sociocultural investigation of their use, and so on, which would provide us with a clearer understanding of how the use of an RFIE has developed over time. However, in this paper, we do not venture into such areas of inquiry because our goal is to lay the foundations for a replicable, pragmalinguistic framework of the pragmatics of ritual.

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4. See: www.cncorpus.org
4. Data analysis

We will divide the current section into two parts, first examining the English BNC data and then moving on to the Chinese dataset based on the MCGBC.

4.1 The English dataset

The proportional use of the RFIE please across the interpersonal scenarios in the sample of 200 occurrences is as follows:

Table 1. The proportional use of the RFIE please across the interpersonal scenarios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall number</th>
<th>Dyadic</th>
<th>Multiparty</th>
<th>Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td>59 (29.5%)</td>
<td>66 (33%)</td>
<td>75 (37.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of the standard situations across the various interpersonal scenarios, the analysis has revealed the following:

Table 2. The number of standard situations across the various interpersonal scenarios in the case of the English RFIE please

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpersonal scenario standard situation</th>
<th>Dyadic (59)</th>
<th>Multiparty (66)</th>
<th>Public (75)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service encounters</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional with power-salience</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional without power-salience</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public display</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.1 Service encounters

The most significant standard situation – from a contrastive pragmatic point of view – which we have identified is ‘service encounters’, and it is worth considering that such encounters are absent in the Chinese data. Service encounters encompass a set of contexts in which a service is provided, including shops, restaurants, railway stations, and so on. In the majority of these contexts there is no significant power relationship between the service provider and the customer, while at the same time they are not in any intimate or working relationship. We categorised all service encounters as dyadic, because in such encounters it is the service provider and the customer who interact with each other, whereas other customers are only overhearers of the interaction.

Service encounters in the English corpus can occur in restaurants and shops, as the following examples illustrate:
Other standard situations that we have identified include the replicated standard situations of ‘institutional with power-salience’ and ‘institutional without power-salience’, as well as the harmonised standard situation of ‘public display’. The following examples illustrate the use of the RFIE please across these standard situations.

4.1.2 Institutional with power-salience

In our corpus, the most common contexts of ‘institutional with power-salience’ include classrooms and courtrooms. These are typical examples of a situation where people know exactly who and where they are, the rights and obligations are transparent to everyone, it is not difficult to make a request and the likelihood of compliance is high (Edmondson 1985). This definition is also in accordance with what discourse analysts, such as Harris (1995), have argued about ‘institutional power’ in general. The fact that, in terms of interpersonal scenarios, the institutional use of the RFIE please is spread more or less equally across ‘multipart’ and ‘public’ scenarios (46 versus 45 uses; see Table 2) complies with the fact that some forms of institutional interaction, such as classroom interactions, are typically multiparty in nature, while others, such as political interactions in the British Parliament, are inherently public. There are less dyadic uses of this RFIE (10 in our dataset).

The fact that please is an RFIE which indicates an awareness of a standard situation, and the broader ritual frame, is particularly evident in the classroom context when it is used by teachers, as is shown in the following example:

(3) Sit down on your bottoms and close your eyes, please.

This utterance represents an order in a standard situation, and it helps the teacher to frame, and the students to interpret, an unusual command as being a legitimate request made by a ratified person (Goffman 1967) in a classroom setting. This is quite different from the following routine classroom usage (Coulmas 1981) of the RFIE please, such as:

(4) Quiet, please.
(5) Please concentrate.
(6) Put your hands up, please.

These are typical classroom utterances which are immediately recognisable as resulting from teacher–student interactions. What interconnects the routine and
non-routine applications of *please* within the ritual frame is that this RFIE is needed to uphold the frame whenever such types of requests occur.

Within the standard situation of ‘institutional’, courtroom interactions represent extreme power relations (Lakoff 1990), and a notable characteristic of courtroom data in our corpus is that all the participants, including the judge, tend to deploy the RFIE *please*. In keeping with our classroom data, the use of this RFIE in such contexts of power difference could be redundant from the point of view of conventionally understood politeness, particularly if it is employed by the more powerful party. While one can attempt to frame such instances of language use by rationalising them vis-à-vis norms – such as the importance placed on democracy in the British legal system – ultimately, the primary function of the RFIE *please* appears to be as a reminder to the participants of the validity of the ritual frame which determines language use in the standard situation that is created by the institutional interaction. The following examples illustrate this point:

(7) Could you take the oath, please?

(8) What is your date of birth, please?

(9) I would please ask you to wait until you have been called.

(10) Secondly, members of the jury, please do not do what the press is always doing.

(11) May it please Your Worship, it was the 21st of June in the morning.

In terms of ‘politeness’, the sense of redundancy that we noted in the analysis of the classroom examples, is even more salient in courtroom interactions. This is particularly the case when a judge uses *please*. The judge has been invested with legal authority, which makes an explicit request marker unnecessary, since the ‘interactional order’ and consequent ‘line’ of the interaction (Goffman 1967) ensures that his role is largely requestive, and this role is clearly evident to all the participants. In terms of the examples given here, (7) and (8) are routinised, and are thus widely expected in a courtroom context, whereas (9) is similar to the classroom Example (3) above, in that it is less routinised and less expected, and is thus more likely to invite the upholding of the ritual frame. Basically, in the case of a challenge in an institutional frame, a judge may deploy the RFIE *please* not necessarily to mitigate, but rather to remind the addressee of who and where (s)he is (see House 1989). Example (10) differs from the previous examples, in that the judge is speaking to members of the jury rather than to the defendant, which implies a more balanced power relationship. Furthermore, Example (11) features the situation where a defendant, and not the judge, uses the RFIE *please*. Arguably, this is the most mitigatory use of *please*, given the power relationship between the
judge and the defendant. This last example demonstrates that, here, the meaning of *please* is closer to politeness, in a conventional sense, than in any of the other above cases. As these examples illustrate, the RFIE *please* is used in a wide variety of courtroom scenarios, which clearly shows that this RFIE is ultimately deployed to uphold and reconfirm the ritual frame, i.e. it is used to fulfil a communal relationship, rather than an individualistic/interpersonal relationship (see Collins 2004 on the communal nature of ritual).

In addition to classroom and courtroom settings, another relevant setting in our data is political debates in the British Parliament and other formal political meetings. Such political debates provide examples where the speaker – i.e. the Speaker in the case of Parliament and the chairperson in other public debates (see also Bull et al., in this issue) – is invested with authority over the other participants:

(12) Can I ask for contributions to be short and sharp, please, so we can finish at a reasonable hour?
(13) Right, can I have your attention, please?
(14) Will the Honourable Gentleman please not use the word ‘stolen’?
(15) Briefly please, Mr Adley.
(16) The honourable gentleman must bring this question to a conclusion, please, Mr Ward.
(17) Will he please come to the rescue of the Wolverhampton parents?

Examples (12) and (13) are taken from interactions conducted outside of Parliament. Unlike (13), Example (12) is not routinised, and here the RFIE *please* mitigates the request, even though this request does not require mitigation, given that the chairperson acts in everyone’s interests and not just his own interests, as the words ‘reasonable hour’ clearly insinuate. Examples (14), (15) and (16) are parliamentary interactions, and we have chosen these examples because they illustrate the ritual function of the RFIE *please* perhaps more clearly than any other in our English data, as they feature *please* in the form of a reprimand. In all these examples, *please* indicates that the speaker has already lost, or is about to lose, his patience with the addressee and therefore uses the marker *please* to exacerbate the request. The ritual character of the parliamentary setting influences such usage: anyone who steps outside the narrowly defined boundaries or ‘line’ (according to Goffman) of the ritual frame in terms of time or other constraints needs to be verbally sanctioned. Yet, as demonstrated by other examples in our dataset, the RFIE *please* can be used in very diverse ways in the seemingly uniform parliamentary setting: for instance, Example (17) illustrates the case of a plea being made. Note
that even with this use of the RFIE *please* there is no personal involvement, in the respect that the speaker talks on behalf of a ratified community, and even though it may have a mitigatory function, this is secondary to its communal ritual use. In fact, the requester uses the RFIE here as a reminder of duties.

### 4.1.3 Institutional without power-salience

The standard situation of ‘institutional without power-salience’ encompasses contexts in which the participants are in an institution, but power is not pragmatically significant in the context of their interaction. From a contrastive pragmatic point of view, it is fundamental to distinguish these contexts from those that we have defined as the setting of ‘institutional with power-salience’, because of the potential pragmatic implications of different power balances in these two settings. Institutional without power-salience standard situations, as we have interpreted them here, are either ‘dyadic’ or ‘multiparty’ in character (24 versus 20 uses; see Table 2). The following are examples where the RFIE *please* is used to indicate this standard situation:

(18) Please supply a valid directory name.
(19) Please contact me if you are able to help.
(20) Please do not hesitate to contact me.

In all these examples, the RFIE *please* functions as a reminder to the participants that they are interacting with one another in a context with overhanging rights and obligations, irrespective of the fact that there is no power imbalance.

### 4.1.4 Public display

Our final (harmonised) standard situation is that of ‘public display’, which includes public signs and reminders of the public’s rights and obligations. The following examples illustrate these uses:

(21) Please display the poster in your window.
(22) If you have any query, no matter how trivial, please ask us.
(23) Please keep out.
(24) Every penny counts in the battle to save the forests. Please reply today if you can.

What connects these seemingly unrelated examples – which are all ‘public’ in terms of the interpersonal scenario they represent (see Table 2) – is the total lack of personal involvement. There is little pragmatic incentive for the creators of these messages to mitigate the requests being made, as there is no clearly identifi-
able addressee who requires mitigation in order to comply with the request. These examples conform with our model of ritual frame, in that they all take place in the physical domain of public communication and are thus de-individuated. Also, these messages are made on behalf of a community and they operate with the ratified voice of authority.

So far, we have only focused on our English dataset. In the following, we will consider the analysis of our typologically rather different Chinese data.

4.2 The Chinese dataset

The analysis of the Chinese dataset immediately reveals that, in terms of grammaticalisation, the RFIEs qing and please clearly have different scopes (see also Ma 2003), namely qing is more integrated into Chinese grammar than please is into English grammar, in the respect that it is difficult to disentangle the normal and disjunct verbal uses of qing in Chinese. It is relevant here to note that qing has an honorific background (see Lee-Wong 1994), and is interrelated with the verbs invite and request, as our examples below will also illustrate.

The proportional use of the RFIE qing across the interpersonal scenarios in the sample of 200 occurrences is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall number</th>
<th>Dyadic</th>
<th>Multiparty</th>
<th>Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td>24 (12%)</td>
<td>91 (45.5%)</td>
<td>85 (42.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On their own, these figures are noteworthy because there are relatively few dyadic uses of the RFIE qing. This confirms our aforementioned statement that qing has an honorific background, which implies a strong degree of formality. Such formality is generally redundant in dyadic settings, even though various examples such as (27) and (28) below will illustrate that whenever the RFIE qing is deployed in such settings, it operates with a sense of ‘pragmatic heaviness’, unlike its English counterpart.

Table 4 illustrates the way in which the RFIE qing is spread across the standard situations in our dataset. As the table reveals, the standard situation of ‘service encounters’ is completely absent from our Chinese corpus.
Table 4. The number of standard situations across the various interpersonal scenarios in the case of the Chinese RFIEqing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpersonal scenario standard situation</th>
<th>Dyadic (24)</th>
<th>Multiparty (91)</th>
<th>Public (85)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ceremonial</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional with power-salience</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional without power-salience</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public displays</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.1 Ceremonial

The standard situation of ‘ceremonial’ encompasses all types of contexts in which a formal ceremony takes place. In this standard situation, the RFIEqing is deployed in all the interpersonal scenarios, including dyadic (9), multiparty (42) and public scenarios (13) (see Table 4). The relatively low number of dyadic settings in a ceremonial context is logical, when it is considered that ritual ceremonies tend to take place in situations with a complex participatory framework. Therefore, we use the expression ceremonial rather than ‘ceremony’ here: as Examples (27) and (28) will illustrate, the RFIEqing can be used to indicate formal situations with ceremonial features which are not actually ceremonies in the strict sense of the word.

From a broader contrastive pragmatic viewpoint, ‘ceremonial’ is the most significant standard situation in which the RFIEqing is deployed because this standard situation has no equivalent in the English corpus. The standard situation ‘service encounters’, indicated by the RFIEplease in English, appears to be much more relevant to our English dataset than its Chinese counterpart, but the situation appears to be reversed with the standard situation of ‘ceremonial’. The prevalence of qing in the ‘ceremonial’ standard situation may be due to its aforementioned honorific origin.

The following examples are indicative of the use of qing in ceremonies:

(25) Jiazhang shuodao: “Qing laozuzong-laozutaimen lai chi baba la, chile baoyou zisun kuaichang-kuaida, pingping-an’an, facai-fugui.”
家长说道: “请老祖宗老祖太们来吃粑粑啦, 吃了保佑子孙快长快大, 平平安安, 发财富贵”。

(26) You jiazhang qingdao: “Lao zuzong-laozutaimen qing cong tianshang huijialai guonian luo, jintian guo sanshiye, mingtian guo chuyi, guole nian yihou zai huiqu, zai tianshang baoyou zisun ronghua, laoshao ping’an.”
The head of the household made the following request: “I hereby request our ancestors and forefathers to visit our household from Heaven, stay with us today on the eve of the 30th of the (lunar month) and the first day of the new lunar year, and return to Heaven only after, and help their sons and grandchildren to prosper and bring peace to the whole family.”

As these conventional ritual examples illustrate, in Chinese, *qing* is clearly more integrated into the grammar of an utterance and also functions as a requestive marker. In these cases of language use – which still occur in present-day Chinese family ceremonies (Johnson 2009) – there is no mitigation involved in the conventional sense, as the requester is actually supposed to make the request according to the nature and script of the ceremony. Therefore, although the deceased spirits that these requesters are addressing need to be treated deferentially, the request is supposed to be made directly, since it is the head of the household’s *duty* to make it. In other words, making the request is actually an obligation, and this sense of obligation is present in the broader dynamics of the ritual, as the request is accompanied with ritual gifts (such as the *baba* bread in Example (25)) and is supposed to be reciprocated with spiritual protection from the powerful side (see Mauss 1954 on the role of gift exchange in ritual).

Note that a key ceremonial (as opposed to ceremony) setting in which the RFIE *qing* is used is the context of formal apology, which is extremely important in Chinese society (see Kádár, Ning and Ran 2018). Some of these apologies are public ones (cf. Kampf 2009), as illustrated by Example (27), while others are conducted in private dyadic settings, as Example (28) illustrates. The latter is typical of all the dyadic ceremonial uses of *qing*.

(27)  *Qing dajia yuanliang.*

请大家原谅。

*Please everyone forgive me.*

(28)  *Qing nin yuanliang, wo duibuqi nin!*

请您原谅，我对不起您！

*Please forgive me, I wronged you!*

In these two examples, the RFIE *qing* occurs with the ‘apology formula’ *yuanliang* 原谅. The use of the RFIE in the form of an apology is not being ‘polite’, but rather supports the ritual frame in that it does not *mitigate* a face-threat in the here and now, but rather indicates the speaker’s awareness of the overhanging situational constraints.
4.2.2 Institutional with power-salience

The RFIE *qing* is very frequently used in power-salient institutional settings. This use is in accordance with the fact that it is a ‘pragmatically-heavy’ expression. Its use spans across all the standard situations, as the following examples illustrate:

(29) *Qing ba zhefen wenjian song gei loushang de Sun xiansheng.*  
Please send this document to Mr Sun upstairs.

(30) *Chen buzhang, qing chongxu wo haohao kaolv ba.*  
Deputy Department Head Chen, please allow me to carefully consider this.

(31) *(Zhan qi) Fengyun, qing yuanliang wo, wo zhende meiyou banfa, anqing tai zhongda le!*  
(Stands up) Fengyun, please forgive me, I really don’t have a solution, the situation is extremely serious!

(32) *Nimen xinku le, qing zuoxia!*  
You all have worked hard, please have a seat!

(33) *Gewe gongming, xianzai, qing dajia fenwei liang dui*  
Dear citizens, please divide into two groups

Examples (29), (30) and (31) represent a dyadic use of the RFIE. Example (29) occurs during a workplace encounter between a secretary and his/her manager. Here the power difference is clear, and so the RFIE is deployed to mark the speech act of order and, as such, it is clearly an indicator of the ritual frame rather than of interpersonal politeness. Examples (30) and (31) are more closely related to politeness: the former is a particularly deferential utterance where the RFIE clearly marks the power relationship between the participants, and so the politeness that it indicates is ritual, in the respect that it is not individualistic. The latter example, (31), is also highly deferential: in a similar way to the public apologies previously studied, the RFIE *qing* co-occurs here with the ‘apology formula’ *yuanliang*, but it represents a private apology and, as such, is not ceremonial. Example (32) is an example of the multiparty use of the RFIE *qing*. In this example, it is uttered in a powerful position and, as such, it indicates the ritual frame rather than politeness per se (see Dai 2007 on the role of *xinku* as used in Example (32), which in this utterance indicates that the speaker is of a higher rank than the recipients). Finally, Example (33) takes place in a public setting.
4.2.3 Institutional without power-salience

The RFIE qing occurs in a variety of institutional situations in our Chinese dataset where power is not salient. Typically, such situations include workplace meetings and interactions between language users in the workplace and in business negotiations. The following examples illustrate these settings:

(34) Buxiangxing, jiu qing suanyisuan.
不相信，请算一算。
If you do not believe me, please count it.

(35) Xiaoping laoshi, qing fa gei luquzheng.
肖萍老师，请发给录取证。
Teacher Xiao Ping, please send me the letter of acceptance.

(36) Zhang Wei buchong shuo: “Gancui ba wenzhang yinchulai, jiao quanti laoshi taolun, qing laoshimen ‘dafen’.”
张伟补充说：“干脆把文章印出来，交全体老师讨论，请老师们‘打分’。”
Zhang Wei added: “Simply print out the sheets, give them to the teachers to discuss; following this, all teachers please give them a ‘score’.”

(37) Qing dajia zhunbei shang feiji
请大家准备上飞机
Please everyone prepare to board the plane

Example (34) is a business transaction in which the RFIE qing is clearly not being used politely, but rather emphasises a request following a complaint and, as such, is ritual in nature. Similarly, Example (35) occurs in a dyadic setting: the RFIE is uttered here in a private collegial setting where the institutional context is clearly important, as witnessed by the form of address laoshi 老师 (teacher), and the RFIE indicates an awareness of this context. Example (36) occurs in a multiparty classroom setting, but there is no overhanging power relationship here between the participants. In this example, the RFIE again indicates an awareness of the context. Finally, in Example (37), an airline employee is prompting passengers to board a plane. Clearly there is no overhanging power relationship involved in this dyadic setting, and while the RFIE expresses a sense of politeness, this politeness is not personalised but simply indicates who and where everyone is.

4.2.4 Public displays

Finally, the RFIE qing also occurs in the (harmonised) standard situation of ‘public displays’, as the following examples illustrate:
In Example (38), the public is alerted about certain duties and, as such, the RFIE does not involve politeness, but rather strongly articulates the speech act of requesting. When it comes to Example (39), the RFIE is uttered in the interest of the entire audience who do not want to be disturbed by latecomers and, as such, is highly ritual in nature.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have provided a new bottom–up, corpus-based, contrastive pragmatic framework, which reveals how ritual frame indicating expressions (RFIEs) are deployed to indicate (a) standard situations, which are ritual in nature, and (b) the related awareness of ritual frames. The framework presented here contributes to this Special Issue and pragmatic research on ritual in various respects. Most importantly, a bottom–up investigation of this scope into ritual complements sociopragmatic approaches to ritual behaviour because it reveals how expressions which are in some way interrelated with ritual are spread across a cluster of standard situations. On the other hand, it allows the researcher to contrast – with the aid of corpora – the scope of ritual across different lingua-cultures by comparatively studying the standard situations in which a particular RFIE is deployed. In addition, this approach can contribute to the field in three other respects.

Firstly, it can help us to interconnect ritual behaviour and a cluster of formal forms. Let us now recall the argument that we advanced in Section 1 above, namely, that in pragmatics there have been discussions regarding the relationship between expressions and sociopragmatic function, such as the relationship between honorifics and ‘politeness’ (Ide 1989; Pizziconi 2003). This discussion has also emerged in ritual research. For instance, Kádár (2017) has argued that an issue with the politeness versus form relationship is that many formal forms, such as honorifics and formal personal pronouns, are indicative of ritual language use rather than politeness in the strict sense of the word. The framework of RFIEs presented in this paper fits squarely into this argument.

Secondly, this framework is replicable. It can help researchers to investigate the pragmatics of many other pairs of expressions. This study of a single RFIE pair
has already revealed interesting lingua-cultural variations. A replication of this study will not substitute, but rather will complement sociopragmatic research. For instance, it is important to follow up this study by dedicating targeted comparative research to service encounters in both Chinese and English, to test the validity of the differences discovered in our study. In addition, it would be useful to investigate the diachronic development of the RFIEs being studied.

A third advantage of studying RFIEs is that they can draw our attention to various sociopragmatic issues behind any lingua-cultural differences that the corpus-based investigation has revealed. Let us refer here to a recent case study by Kádár and House (2020), in which RFIEs were investigated in the context of language learning. This investigation has revealed that although such expressions are seemingly quite simple, they can cause significant problems for language learners. As part of this project, we created pragmalinguistically inappropriate uses of the RFIEs studied in this paper, and asked foreign learners of Chinese and English to assess these utterances. For instance, we created the following completely inappropriate utterance involving the RFIE qing, and presented it to British learners of Chinese:

(40) The following example takes place in a store (uttered by the vendor):

先生，您这个大衣请付149块。

Sir, this is going to be RMB 149, please.

To our surprise, a significant number of the students that were interviewed believed this example to be acceptable, apparently due to pragmatic transfer (it is acceptable to use ‘please’ in service encounters, as this paper has illustrated). This demonstrates that the theory of RFIEs is also relevant to language acquisition and related areas.

In sum, we hope that our study provides synergies between pragmalinguistic and sociolinguistic studies, the research of ritual, second language acquisition and other related areas.

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