

Internship Experience Report

Research Assistant at RIHSS

Major: Digital Humanities

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Introduction

During last semester, I worked as a research assistant at the Research Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (RIHSS). My primary responsibility was assisting in a linguistics project focusing on refusal strategies (RS) in Arabic (particularly Jordanian Arabic), English, and Chinese. The research aimed to compare and analyze the differences and similarities in how speakers of these three languages refuse in various situations. My tasks involved questionnaire development, data collection, translation, literature review, and framework refinement.

Initial Discussions and Research Preparation

At the beginning of the internship, I met with my supervisor to discuss the research interests and determine how my expertise in digital humanities and linguistics could contribute to the project. After a preliminary discussion, we confirmed the research topic and designed a questionnaire that simulated various refusal scenarios. The questionnaire was first developed in English and later localized for Chinese and Arabic contexts.

Questionnaire Translation and Data Collection

One of my key responsibilities was translating the questionnaire from English to Chinese while ensuring linguistic and cultural accuracy. The translation process was relatively straightforward for English but required extra effort to capture the nuances of Arabic expressions in Chinese. Once finalized, I distributed the questionnaires via social media platforms and monitored the response quality. The data collection process resulted in over 100 completed responses, each containing 10 refusal strategy answers.

Data Processing and Manual Translation

After collecting the responses, I transferred the data into an Excel sheet and conducted data cleaning. Due to the complexity and volume of the dataset, some of the formatting had to be manually adjusted. Additionally, I manually translated all Chinese responses into English, focusing on maintaining the intended meaning, tone, and pragmatic nuances, such as exclamative expressions.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

A significant part of my work involved conducting a literature review on refusal strategies across Arabic, Chinese, and English linguistic studies. The literature review covered research from 1990 to the present, revealing a gap in direct comparative

studies between Chinese and Arabic. This finding underscored the significance of our research.

After drafting the literature review, I received feedback from my supervisor, who suggested incorporating more background on speech act theory, refusal strategies in cross-cultural communication and education, and additional references. Based on this feedback, I refined the review, adding a clearer research focus and citing key studies.

Framework Development and Final Adjustments

In the later stage of my internship, I helped establish a theoretical framework for analyzing the refusal strategies in our dataset. We adopted the framework from Beebe et al. (1990), which categorizes refusal strategies into over 20 subcategories. I selected concrete examples from the dataset to illustrate these categories, although some subcategories required a more thorough review of responses to ensure accuracy.

Final Stage and Reflections

As my internship came to an end, I took the initiative to discuss the work handover with my supervisor to ensure a smooth transition. Throughout the four months, I had diligently completed a range of tasks, from data collection to translation and literature review. In the final phase, an additional task was introduced, requiring a restructuring of my previous translations from an answer-by-answer format to a sentence-by-sentence alignment. This was a substantial task involving over 1000 responses, which had not been anticipated earlier in the process. Given the time constraints, I focused on prioritizing the core research contributions that aligned with my expertise in digital humanities and linguistics.

While I was unable to complete this last-minute task in its entirety before my departure, my prior work—including questionnaire translation, data processing, and literature review—laid a strong foundation for the project. The experience reinforced my ability to manage complex linguistic data and make strategic decisions under time constraints, ensuring that my contributions remained meaningful and impactful.

Conclusion

This research assistantship provided valuable experience in linguistic research, data processing, and academic writing. I developed skills in translating linguistic data across languages, conducting literature reviews, and refining research frameworks. Additionally, I gained insights into the complexities of cross-linguistic pragmatics and the challenges of data-driven linguistic analysis.

Overall, my internship at RIHSS was an enriching experience that strengthened my research capabilities and deepened my understanding of refusal strategies across different languages and cultures.