

Experimental pragmatics meets audiovisual translation

Tackling methodological challenges
in researching how film audiences
understand implicatures

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Introduction

Pragmatics and psycholinguistics are among the disciplines that have investigated the mechanisms and dynamics of utterance comprehension albeit from different perspectives and often applying different research methods. Principally having its origins in the philosophy of language and linguistics, pragmatics tends to largely rely on intuitive analyses and observations of everyday communication (Sperber & Noveck, 2004). Psycholinguistic research, however, is strongly influenced by the empirical methods of psychology (*ibid.*).

It was not until the late 1980s/early 1990s with Gibbs' pioneering work (e.g. Gibbs, 1986; Gibbs & O'Brien, 1991), which involved the systematic testing of pragmatic hypotheses, that scholars working in the fields of pragmatics and psycholinguistics started to explore their methodological synergies, thus giving birth to the promising field of experimental pragmatics (Gibbs, 2004: 68). This interaction breathed new life into pragmatic research which until then produced mainly hypothetical analyses of the interpretation of attested or artificial communicative exchanges (Sperber & Noveck, 2004). Nevertheless, as Sperber and Noveck caution,

[The use of pragmaticists' intuitive interpretive abilities] has been of great value in investigating a variety of pragmatic issues. Pragmatic research is *not* to be censured, let alone discarded, on the ground that it is mostly based on intuition and observational data [. . .] Experimental data can be used *together* with intuition and recordings to confirm or disconfirm hypotheses. [. . .] The three kinds of evidence – intuitions, observations and experiments – are each in their own way relevant to suggesting and testing pragmatic hypotheses, and they should be used singly or jointly whenever useful.

(2004: 8, emphasis added)

Reviewing linguistic phenomena that have been investigated so far within pragmatics, one cannot help but notice that experimental research on what Grice calls “conversational implicatures” or what Sperber and Wilson call “implicated premises” and “implicated conclusions” is very scarce. Moreover, there are very few studies that are specifically designed to test how implicatures are treated in translation and/or understood across cultures.¹ To the best of my knowledge, the only three scholars who have attempted to occupy this research niche are Leppihalme (1997), Hill (2006) and Desilla (2009/2014). Leppihalme is probably the first to shed light on the reception of allusions by Finnish readers in texts translated from British English. The second exception to the general scarcity of studies of implicature comprehension within translation studies is Hill who examined Bible translations and tested the recovery of implicated premises and implicated conclusions by target-readerships.

1 Probing the comprehension of pragmatic meaning by film audiences

The study by Desilla (2009/2014) represents a step towards enhancing our understanding of the way in which target audiences comprehend implicit film dialogue meaning, more specifically implicatures, in comparison to source audiences. She proposes the following definition of implicature where concepts from Relevance Theory are adapted accordingly in order to cater for the semiotic complexity of film communication (Desilla, 2012: 34):

Implicature in film can be defined as any assumption intended by the filmmakers which is implicitly and non-conventionally communicated in the film dialogue. Audiences can infer the intended implicatures via the selection and the joint processing of the most relevant elements from their cognitive environment. The cognitive environment potentially includes information entertained by the viewers themselves as well as information conveyed (perceived or inferred) by the various semiotic resources deployed in the film being viewed. The former may consist, *inter alia*, of encyclopedic and sociocultural knowledge, as well as personal experience. The latter may be retrieved via the components of the *mise en scène*, cinematography, editing and soundtrack. In the case of subtitled films, the cognitive environment of the target audience obviously includes the subtitles which are added onto the visual image. The appropriate selection and exploitation of some of the aforementioned elements comprising the cognitive environment actually forms the particular context for the recovery of implicated conclusions. The utterance(s) that trigger the implicature(s) are intended by the filmmakers to evoke a specific context: background knowledge will be triggered in the form of implicated premises while the information readily conveyed via the film’s image and sound will be selected as immediate contextual premises.

The proposed methodology for the investigation of implicatures in subtitled film consists of three stages: multimodal transcription, pragmatic analysis and experimental testing of implicature comprehension by actual source and target viewers (Desilla, 2009/2012). This methodology was specifically designed to shed light on the construal, translation and understanding of implicatures as carried out by filmmakers (*i.e.*, scriptwriters and directors), subtitlers and audiences, respectively. For a research project that aspired to explore implicature in subtitling, thus bringing together the field of pragmatics and that of audiovisual translation (AVT), the extremely limited number of pertinent studies was both stimulating and challenging. Nevertheless, in keeping with the then emerging, and now fast-growing, trend to test pragmatic hypotheses with experimental data, at least within the field

of pragmatics, the addition of an experimental component appears to be amply justified. Importantly, such an experimental component enables the researcher to test the validity of the intuitive pragmatic analysis of the observational data. However cautiously produced and presented, this analysis, based on the analyst's own intuitions, remains hypothetical. Indeed, the ensuing account of how a given audience manages to access certain assumptions and work out the implicated conclusions arising from the activation of the former is *per force* highly speculative; it effectively encapsulates a unique set of predictions that require some empirical corroboration. Hill (2006: 101) highlights the complexity of human cognition as the overriding factor which renders the prediction of any contextual assumptions that will be evoked by a text a risky endeavour.

Another factor that called for the empirical corroboration of any assumptions generated by an intuitive pragmatic analysis stems from the two most distinctive properties of implicature, namely *indeterminacy* and *openendedness* (Grice, 1975/1991; Sperber & Wilson, 1995). Implicatures are manifestations of language indirectness and, therefore, entail the risk of misunderstanding or non-understanding as meaning may be too opaque to be deciphered as intended or at all (Weizman, 1989: 73; cf. Dascal, 1983). At the same time, a single utterance may evoke a range of different implicatures. Nevertheless, according to Wilson and Sperber (2004: 613–614)

A speaker who wants her utterance to be as easy as possible to understand should formulate it (within the limits of her abilities and preferences) so that the first interpretation to satisfy the hearer's expectation of relevance is the one she intended to convey.

The above is plausible with respect to strong implicatures. Weak implicatures, however, are open to more interpretations and are, hence, less predictable. In films, both strong and weak implicatures are conveyed. In either case, filmic communication is propelled by intentionality insofar as verbal and non-verbal signs are carefully selected and strategically (co-)deployed in order to create a certain effect, even if this is the creation of ambiguity. However, as stressed by Wharton and Grant (2005: 40), “there is more likely to be room for individual response” despite the filmmakers’ “attempt to anchor specific readings”. The very possibility of idiosyncratic interpretations further necessitates the empirical testing of implicature comprehension.

To sum up, the experimental component in my research (Desilla, 2009/2012) was intended to put the assumptions underpinning the intuitive pragmatic analysis to the test, thereby verifying or falsifying hypotheses as appropriate. It should not be overlooked that utterance interpretation, including implicature comprehension, is a cognitive process and the “black box” of human cognition is never easy to penetrate. Yet, the complete absence of empirical evidence would inevitably weaken any claims concerning the comprehension of implicatures by source- and the target-audience. I thus echo Rogers’ (1961) remark that “[scientific research] is a way of preventing me from deceiving myself in regard to my creatively formed subjective hunches which have developed out of the relationship between me and my material” (1961; cited in Reason & Rowan, 1981: 240).

The aforementioned advantages of complementing intuitive pragmatic analysis with experimental data to confirm or disconfirm hypotheses do not come without a price, though. This price can be perceived in the form of certain challenges, which are mainly methodological in nature. Sections 2.2 and 2.3 discuss two challenges involved in perhaps the most crucial, and largely intertwined, stages of methodological design, namely (a) operationalising utterance comprehension, which is inextricably linked with the formulation of research questions, and

(b) measuring utterance comprehension, which encompasses decisions pertaining to the choice of data elicitation and analysis method(s).² At the same time, an attempt will be made to demonstrate how such key challenges have been addressed in my case-study (Desilla, 2009/2014) on the comprehension of implicatures in *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001) and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (2004) by British and Greek viewers.

1.1 Operationalising the variable: first steps

The overarching research questions driving the experimental study can be expressed as follows (Desilla, 2014: 3):

- 1 To what extent can the source-audience (SA) and target audience (TA) understand the implicatures that the filmmakers intended to communicate? Does the intuitive pragmatic analysis represent a realistic account of implicature comprehension by the SA and TA?
- 2 To what extent is the TA's comprehension of implicatures similar to that of the source language (SL) viewers?
- 3 What is the contribution of non-verbal semiotic resources to implicature comprehension by the two audiences?

Implicature recovery cannot be separated from utterance interpretation. In Relevance Theoretic terms, constructing appropriate hypotheses about the intended implicated premises and implicated conclusions are two of the sub-tasks that the addressee carries out as part of the overall comprehension process (Wilson & Sperber, 2004: 615). Thus, utterance comprehension is, in essence, the measured variable or "the unit of analysis" (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013: 24) in this study. At the same time, however, it is a psychological construct and, as such, cannot be readily probed. As Langbridge and Hagger-Johnson (2009: 40) observe "constructs are unobservable variables and therefore variables that have to be measured indirectly". In research, psychological constructs need to be "operationalised" first; put differently, it is necessary to carefully define the variable and specify exactly how it is going to be measured (Coolican, 2004: 31; Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013: 24–25). For the purposes of the present research agenda, utterance comprehension has been operationalised as follows (Desilla, 2014: 6):

Optimum utterance comprehension is defined as the inference of the intended explicature(s) and the accessing of all the intended implicatures, namely implicated premises as well as strong and weak implicated conclusions. In other words, the viewer has fully understood an utterance only when s/he has successfully grasped both explicit and implicit content. Utterance comprehension is treated here not as unidimensional/simple but as a multidimensional/composite variable. On this basis, inability to work out the implicated conclusion(s) of an utterance does not necessarily mean that the viewer has failed in all the tasks of the comprehension process. The degree of comprehension of a given utterance can be best conceptualised in terms of relative positioning along a continuum – with optimum and substantially flawed utterance comprehension at its poles.

From an experimental psychology perspective, utterance comprehension is treated here as a *continuous* rather than a *discreet* variable (Field & Hole, 2006: 9–10) and is measured accordingly with the aid of a purpose-built scale.³

Having thus operationalised utterance comprehension, the general research questions presented in the beginning of this section can now be fine-tuned and broken down into their sub-components. Accordingly, the experimental data should serve to gain comprehensive awareness of a number of parameters regarding the British and the Greek audience:

- a SA's and TA's degree of success in inferring the intended explicatures

The experiments seek to test whether the two audiences are able to infer the fully-fledged proposition of the utterances under investigation. Although the primary focus of the study is on implicature comprehension, it is often essential to check whether viewers have been able to access the explicature(s) of an utterance for two reasons: first, some explicatures are more explicit than others: the smaller the relative contribution of contextual features, the more explicit the explicature and vice versa (Sperber & Wilson, 1985: 182). Indeed, there are cases in the data set where viewers presumably need to go to extreme lengths of enrichment in order to reach the explicature of the utterance under investigation. Second, it has been observed that a single utterance in the film dialogue is sometimes intended by the filmmakers to simultaneously convey two different explicatures. In cases of misunderstanding between two characters, for example, implicature recovery heavily depends on the recognition and the processing of two different explicatures, namely the one intended by the speaker and the one recovered by the addressee. It is also examined whether the two audiences have recovered any explicatures unintended by the communicators, i.e., filmmakers/subtitlers.

- b SA's and TA's degree of success in accessing the intended implicated premises
- c SA's and TA's degree of success in accessing the intended implicated conclusions

Under b and c, it is ascertained whether the viewers can access the implicated premises as well as the strong and weak implicated conclusions that the communicators intended the film dialogue to evoke. It is anticipated that the experimental data will reveal cases of unintended implicature derivation, as well. A great divergence between the average comprehension scores of SA and TA is hypothesised to arise whenever the comprehension of a given utterance (including, of course, the recovery of any implicated conclusions) crucially depends on implicated premises that are highly specific to the British culture. The understanding of such utterances is assumed to present the Greek viewers with substantial difficulties. More specifically their average comprehension score is expected to indicate non-understanding or misunderstanding and to be considerably lower than that of the British viewers.

- d SA's and TA's processing of non-verbal semiotic resources as immediate contextual premises

We seek to establish the extent to which the salient information conveyed via image, kinesics and non-verbal semiotic resources is relied upon by the two audiences in the pursuit of implicature recovery. It is assumed that visual and/or acoustic stimuli, such as the *mise-en-scène* and songs respectively, can smooth the comprehension process especially in cases where the audience's cognitive environment lacks the background knowledge required for working out the intended implicatures.

The majority of the instances of implicature identified in the two Bridget Jones romantic comedies⁴ are preserved intact in the subtitles, while explicitation (partial or total)

is only occasionally opted for (Desilla, 2009). For obvious reasons, however, instances where all the implicatures of the original utterance have been spelt out in the subtitles or where the subtitler has greatly interfered with the meaning of the original were excluded from the experimental study. Consequently, the 44 instances of implicature used in the study are cases of either zero or partial implicature explicitation in the target text.

1.2 Measuring the variable

When designing the methodology for investigating utterance comprehension, the careful selection of the appropriate tools for measurement is of paramount importance. The very fact that this variable is a complex psychological construct which, as shown above, involves a remarkable array of cognitive processes considerably raises the bar for the analyst; arguably, choosing inappropriate tools can have detrimental consequences for validity and/or reliability, the chief determinants of research quality. Thus, it is worth taking the time to consider all the possible options weighing the pros and cons thereof. Decisions in this respect would revolve around both the data elicitation method and certain aspects of data analysis.

1.2.1 Questionnaire design

In my research (Desilla, 2009/2014) questionnaires were used as the basic data elicitation method. Participants were administered two pamphlets, one per film, which included the questionnaires⁵ for each instance of implicature used in the experimental study.⁶

Clarity and sensitivity towards the participants and their individual interpretation were the main priorities when designing the questionnaires. Open questions were selected precisely because they encourage respondents to offer unprompted input as much as possible (cf. Burgess, 2001: 8; Coolican, 2004: 171; Hill, 2006). Admittedly, open questionnaires take longer to complete and yield qualitative data that can be difficult to interpret; still, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages in the context of the present research. As Saldana and O'Brien (2013: 157) argue "closed questions lead to structured data that can be analysed quantitatively but they curtail the responses participants can give and do not allow for nuanced thoughts to be expressed". In a study which aims to ascertain whether participants can access the implicatures intended by the filmmakers and shed light on the premises on which they (fail to) do so, multiple choice questions which would present participants with a ready-made selection of possible interpretations would be rather inappropriate, not least because there is always the risk of participants choosing their answer randomly. It was necessary to minimise this risk as the analyst here

is not only interested in the end product, i.e., the implicature *per se*, but equally in the inferential steps that led to the recovery of that implicature, a cognitive process which may well differ from participant to participant even within the same audience group.

(Desilla, 2014: 8)

Indeed, this is highly possible if we consider the now widely held belief within film studies that watching a film is an experience as much shared as it is personal. As Phillips (2000: 53) explains:

Lots of private narratives are going on, each fascinating – and only partly controllable by the film text. Each of us enters the space provided by the narration as individuals.

We respond sometimes in predictable, fairly uniform and regulated ways to stimulus material in the film carefully calculated by the film's makers. We also respond to stimulus we find in the film that is quite outside the 'management' of the film text.

In this light, certain members of the audience may reach the implicit meaning intended by the filmmakers but through accessing a context more or less different to the one intended (Desilla, 2014). Thus, the data elicitation method needs to allow for any idiosyncratic interpretations which may be partly or, even, wholly unintended. Considerably delimiting the range of possible interpretations to the either only intended one (for instance, in the form of a statement for participants to agree or disagree with on a Likert scale) or, at best, to the intended one plus some additional unintended ones inferred/devised by the analyst him/herself and listed in a multiple choice format), a closed questionnaire would fall short in this respect. On the basis of all the above, open questionnaires were considered a *sine qua non* in the present case study.

Avoiding as much as possible any leading questions that could guide the participants' interpretation of fictional events towards a specific direction was another key consideration not least from a *validity* and *reliability* point of view. During the design stage, the researcher needs to ensure that the questionnaire is both a valid and a reliable instrument, namely that it measures what it is intended to measure and in a consistent fashion (Saldana and O'Brien, 2013: 159). Following Hill (2004: 195), an attempt was made to standardise by asking more "why" and "how" questions when investigating implicatures in addition to "who", "what", "when" questions which are typically used to check mainly for explicatures, as exemplified in Figure 5.1. This is a sample questionnaire purely used for illustrative purposes; the instance of implicature whose comprehension it is designed to test⁷ does not belong to the data set of 44 implicatures that was used in the experimental study.

In this scene,⁸ Bridget is queuing at a coffee bar. The voice-over and her facial expressions are indicative of her happiness. Apparently her parents' arrival at the same coffee bar is a rather unpleasant surprise for her. The utterance conveying the implicature around which this sample analysis revolves is produced by Pam, Bridget's mother: mortified to hear that marriage may not be in Bridget's plans, she cautions "Your motto must be 'don't let him pop it in, unless he's popped it on'", while making as if she puts a ring on her finger. In order to reach the fully-fledged explicature, the viewer is expected to rely partly on co-text. The sex theme underlying this scene was first hinted at by Pam a bit earlier when, after telling Bridget "You look uncharacteristically well . . . Glowing almost!", she proceeds to admonish her: "Hope you're not doing you know what with Mark. He won't marry you, you know". Pam's indirect reference to sex at this point can be inferred by processing her earlier comment on Bridget's radiance (immediate contextual premise) with the background knowledge that sex is said to produce a feeling of well-being and make female skin glow (implicated premise). Both of these contextual assumptions in tandem with Pam's salient hand gesture (immediate contextual premise) can lead viewers to enrich her utterance as "Bridget should not let Mark put his penis in her, until he has popped a ring on her finger" (explicature). Such a bawdy interpretation seems to be reinforced by Pam's tendency to interfere in Bridget's love life, which was evidenced in the prequel (implicated premise). When processed together with others, this premise may give rise to various weak implicated conclusions pertinent to Pam's character, for example that she is old-fashioned, vulgar, overprotective and so on (weak implicated conclusions). The fact that Pam utters all the above while queuing at a coffee bar in semi-hysterical manner yields sustained hilarity. Let us now turn to the sample questionnaire that could have been used to test the audience's comprehension of this scene fragment (see Figure 5.1).

BJ2_Ex

1. Pam says to Bridget: "Don't let him pop it in, until he's popped it on". What does she mean by that? Justify your answer.
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2. Why do you think Pam says the above to Bridget?
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3. What does this scene fragment show about Pam's character? Justify your answer.
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Figure 5.1 Sample questionnaire

Question 1 is obviously intended to first and foremost probe for the explicature of Pam's utterance. Also, the requested justification of the participants' answer to this question aims to elucidate how implicated premises and/or immediate contextual premises are recovered. The second question is intended to double check for the contextual assumptions that lead to the strong implicated conclusion, while the third question is designed to test for weak

implicated conclusions. To increase internal validity an attempt is made, wherever possible, to double-check whether the participants have indeed accessed the intended implicatures by including more than one question testing for the same set of assumptions/inferences. In the sample questionnaire, Questions 1 and 2 can perform such a role.

Another question-type, which is not illustrated in the sample questionnaire but is frequently used in the questionnaires administered to the participants, relates to the perception of songs as immediate contextual premises. In those cases, viewers are first asked whether they have heard any song playing in the scene at hand and if so, whether they can remember the title of the song. Then, they are asked to provide a possible rationale for the use of that particular song in the scene. The participants claiming to have heard no music at all or failing to recognise the song are asked to ignore the latter question.

As far as the more technical aspects of questionnaire design are concerned, care has been taken to standardise the wording of those questions belonging to each of the types outlined above. Some questions have been prefaced by adding excerpts of relevant dialogue or written overviews of the context, in an attempt to avoid suggestive questions and other potentially more leading framing strategies. Also, the layout of the questionnaires has been kept minimal and plain for the sake of legibility. On the bottom right side, there is a small box where the comprehension score of each participant is entered by the experimenter. This brings us to the second methodological challenge which pertains to the processing of participant responses.

1.2.2 Scale of measurement

The participants' responses to the open questionnaires are qualitative data shedding considerable light on the former's individual comprehension of the utterances under scrutiny. What is more, this data reveals similarities and differences in this respect both within the same culture group as well as across SA and TA (Desilla, 2014).

The overriding finding that emerged from the qualitative data analysis is that SA and TA participants often did not understand film dialogue in the way the filmmakers would like them to; interestingly, all three kinds of audience response proposed by Hall (1980), i.e., *preferred*, *negotiated* and *oppositional* have been observed (Desilla, 2014). More specifically, there was evidence of participants exhibiting the response that the filmmakers intended to elicit (preferred response), accepting certain elements of the preferred reading while rejecting others (negotiated response) and, occasionally, explicitly disagreeing with the intended message (oppositional response). Of course, there were also cases where they accessed unintended implicatures or failed to make any sense of implicit meaning whatsoever (Desilla 2014). The experiments were effectively able to capture the subjectivity and creativity of audience response precisely owing to the open-ended nature of the questionnaires.

Insightful as they may be, participants' responses cannot readily, in their raw form, address all the research questions set out in section 2.1. The experimental study largely aimed at testing the degree of success in understanding implicit film dialogue meaning, as intended by the filmmakers. Astruc (1948: 18) views cinema as "a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts [. . .] or translate his obsessions". Regardless of their personal agendas, all filmmakers are essentially storytellers. Narration, the way the story is told, is always the product of a complex process of selection and construction which operates both on a micro-level, e.g. choice of costumes, and a macro-level, e.g. choices regarding plot development (Phillips, 2000: 50). With these choices, filmmakers intend to convey certain meanings and messages. What is more, they wish to see their intentions recognised by audiences and film dialogue is no exception. Thus, as Desilla reports:

The decision to choose between no implicature (i.e. conveying meaning purely explicitly), strong implicature and weak implicature is largely governed by the intended effect. In romantic comedies, for instance, it seems that filmmakers use linguistic indirectness, in tandem with other cinematic signifiers to construe the intimacy between the protagonists and, also, to encourage the audience’s participation in the creation of meaning (Kozloff, 2000: 171–200; Mernit, 2001:198).

(Desilla, 2012: 34)

The filmmakers’ desire to communicate certain ideas to the audience is clearly evidenced in the “Director’s Commentary” included as part of the special features accompanying most DVDs nowadays. In the “Director’s Commentary” the director often clarifies the rationale underlying choices made during the shooting as well as the pre- and post-production phases; various aspects of the film can be analysed more or less technically, ranging from casting to editing and from special effects to screenplay. The commentaries provided by the directors of *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (Maguire, 2001) and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (Kidron, 2004) have been an indispensable resource in first deciphering the communicative intentions underlying the deployment of implicatures (Desilla, 2012) and ultimately measuring the SA’s and TA’S respective degrees or success in understanding film dialogue in these cases.

The participants’ responses to the open questionnaires were assessed on the basis of a scale similar to those used to evaluate students’ reading comprehension skills. The devised grid is designated in Figure 5.2.

As shown in Figure 5.2, the scale was designed to cater for the intricacies of utterance comprehension as a psychological construct and specifically as continuous variable. Accordingly, no or fundamentally erroneous responses received zero points; answers suggesting rudimentary/partial understanding were awarded 1 or 2 points; finally, a higher score (3 or 4 points)

Score	Description
0	No answer/completely inaccurate or irrelevant answer.
1	Obscure, inconclusive evidence of accessing the intended explicature and/or implicature(s).
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Either understanding the single intended explicature or understanding one out of the two intended explicatures; • Accessing only the intended implicated premise(s) associated with the explicature; • Either failing to access any other implicatures or accessing unintended implicatures
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding all the intended explicatures; • Either accessing some of the intended implicatures (premises and conclusions) or accessing all the intended implicatures (premises and conclusions) plus unintended ones
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding all the intended explicatures; • Accessing all the intended implicated premises and all the implicated conclusions (both strong and weak).

Figure 5.2 Scale for measuring utterance comprehension (Desilla, 2014: 9)

was reserved for responses indicating a successful understanding of both the explicature(s) and the implicature(s) of the film dialogue in question (Desilla, 2014; cf. Hill, 2006: 63).

The individual score assigned to each participant was ultimately determined by the clarity and the completeness of their responses. For instance, although sometimes there was evidence of a thorough understanding of the intended implicatures, participants failed to justify their inferences despite the questionnaire prompting them to do so.

Basic data management was performed using SPSS 16.0. The participants' individual scores per instance of implicature were entered in order to obtain descriptive statistics and in particular the arithmetic mean (\bar{x}), i.e., the average comprehension score of the SA and TA for each utterance. The descriptive statistics tables generated with this software application show, *inter alia*, the SA and TA's average comprehension score for instance of implicature. These figures are useful for two reasons: (a) they facilitate any comparison between SA and TA and (b) they reveal at a glance the most challenging instances of implicature for each audience (Desilla, 2014).

2 Understanding implicatures in action

Section 1 examined the way utterance comprehension as a psychological construct has been operationalised for the purposes of the present case study. The rationale underlying the selection of two main methodological tools, namely open-ended questionnaires and the 0–4 scale of measurement designed for quantifying participant responses, has been explained. The following sections will present the way these tools have been actually applied when testing two specific instances of implicature identified in BJ2. It will also be shown how the director herself, Beeban Kidron, elucidates some of her communicative intentions in the Director's Commentary and to what extent viewers have been able to recognise her agenda, hence working out the intended implicated premises and conclusions. At the same time, the comedic and narrative functions that implicatures serve in the two films (Desilla, 2012) will become evident. Section 2.1 focuses on the comprehension of implicated premises, while the emphasis in section 2.2 is on the inference of weak implicated conclusions. Nevertheless, in these film dialogue fragments, implicatures have been found to play a significant role in the construal of intimacy between the protagonists. It should be noted that in both instances, Bridget's utterances have been rendered verbatim in the Greek subtitles. The questionnaires administered to SA and TA, including all the participant responses, can be found in the Appendix.⁹ As can be seen, participants have been anonymised and given an individual code in the format "SAx" or "TAx" where "SA" stands for British audience, "TA" stands for Greek audience and "x" is the number assigned to each participant within her audience group.

2.1 Activating implicated premises

The following takes place after Bridget's unpleasant discovery that Rebecca, Mark's young and beautiful assistant, is also at the Swiss ski resort that she and Mark visit as part of their weekend break in Austria. Bridget's annoyance is palpable not least due to her facial expressions. Nonetheless, she encourages Mark to go skiing with the others assuring him that she will be fine. As soon as Mark skis away we can hear her saying in the voice over: "Bastard. I can't believe he's left me". Apparently, Bridget expected Mark to ignore the propositional content of her words and understand how she really feels from her disengaged gaze, her pressed lips and the tension in her voice. People who share an intimate relationship become attuned to making meaning primarily through facial expression, eye-contact and voice quality (Joos quoted in Kress & van Leeuwen, 1995: 134). Jealous Bridget is thus claiming intimacy from

Mark. The incongruity between her utterance and her body language, as well as the resulting humour, are reinforced by her trenchant, military-like wave to Mark and her patently forced smile. Unlike Mark who fails to understand Bridget's communicative intentions and happily skis away, viewers are given the opportunity to understand Bridget's concealed suffering since they are in a privileged position of having been granted access to Bridget's thoughts. What is more, the female audience, in particular, can sympathise with Bridget because this dialogue between her and Mark seems to be fairly recognisable among them. The film here touches upon specific gender differences/stereotypes that are presumably triggered in the audience's mind in the form of implicated premises. As Kidron (2004) comments:

Seems such a classic moment when you say "Oh go, go, go ahead of me" and then the minute that he goes she's absolutely fed up. And this is a conversation I've certainly had with boyfriends and I know that my girlfriends have had with boyfriends where the man doesn't know that what you're saying precisely is "please stay with me and help me down the side of the mountain".

The implicatures that are intentionally conveyed by the filmmakers in order to render the character of Bridget more identifiable clearly evidence the vertical level of filmic communication (Vanoye, 1985). Partly relying on their personal experience and partly on the information available from film semiotics, viewers are able to understand that Bridget wanted Mark to stay with her. This strong implicated conclusion can yield in turn additional implicatures relating to Bridget's character, for example that she is too proud to express her true feelings, but at the same time, so insecure as to yearn for Mark's love confirmation. Scott (2005) claims that this inner conflict in Bridget, namely the desire to be independent versus the desire to be looked after, represents a modern female dilemma.

The recovery of the gender-related implicated premise intended by the filmmakers proved to be problematic for both British and Greek viewers ($SA \bar{x} \approx 2.3$ and $TA \bar{x} \approx 2.2$). *Inter alia*, viewers were asked whether they consider Bridget's behaviour as typically female. Contrary to the director's (Kidron, 2004) and the analyst's expectations, overall less than half of the viewers successfully recognised the underlying gender stereotype, while only a small minority of this group said or strongly implied they can identify with Bridget's behaviour (e.g. SA8: "Yes – I've acted like that! I think men rely less on body language and more on speech so they don't notice"). It is noteworthy that SA4 challenged the stereotype, thus distancing herself from this type of behaviour: "A common perception (or misconception . . .) is that women do not say what they mean, especially in relationships. Bridget is conforming to this stereotype by telling him to go ahead whilst really wanting him to stay behind her". Similarly, TA8 describes Bridget's behaviour as "the classic stupid female thing". By perusing the responses of both audiences, it can be established that a great deal of viewers, solely comment upon Bridget's jealousy and/or refer to her general behaviour in the scene which seems to reveal that they have not accessed the stereotype that the filmmakers specifically intended to convey on this occasion. The three responses quoted above are notable exceptions, with SA4 and TA8 arguably exhibiting features of what Hall (1980) describes as *negotiated* and *oppositional* audience response.

2.2 Recovering weak implicatures

The theme of marriage, which was introduced in BJ1 with heavy doses of humour, is revisited in the sequel albeit more poignantly this time. In the opening of this scene, Bridget and Mark are having tea with their parents. Pam asks them when they are going to name the day. Bridget and

Mark are rather taken aback by this question and feel uneasy as suggested, *inter alia*, by their body language. Importantly, there is an awkward silence for about six seconds during which the characters merely exchange glances. It is Mark who breaks this silence saying that he and Bridget “are certainly not thinking about that yet”. Then he turns for confirmation to Bridget, who, quite surprised, chuckles nervously and finally agrees. Her disappointment and heartache are palpable in the subsequent close-ups. These shots pave the way for the conversation between Bridget and Mark in the car. Bridget asks Mark if he meant the thing that he said. Mark insists that he does not know what thing Bridget is talking about. Although Bridget starts to lose her patience, she strategically avoids being more explicit; she merely refers to “the thing, thing”. “Strategic avoidance of explicitness” (Verschueren, 1999: 31) is one of the most salient features of linguistic indirectness. Bridget’s utterance is an excellent case in point as she deliberately indulges in lack of transparency, which although entails a high-cost and risk factor (Thomas, 1995; cf. Dascal, 1983), affords her with a “communicative shield” in this situation.¹⁰ Bearing in mind Bridget’s reaction to what Mark said about their nonexistent marriage plans at her parents’ house, the audience can infer that what she actually wants to know is whether Mark wants to marry her (implicated conclusion). However, marriage is usually considered a rather risky subject at the first stages of a relationship (implicated premise). Bridget does not pursue the topic openly, presumably because she is afraid of rejection. Communicating obliquely seems to be safer in this case. As done previously in the film, Bridget here appeals for Mark’s empathy, demanding that he understands her intimations, only to be disappointed again as Mark repeatedly feigns ignorance. Bridget faint-heartedly enriches her own utterance a little in a feeble attempt to make him co-operate (“The thing where you said that you’re not . . . um . . . that you’re not even thinking about . . .”). Yet, Mark’s utter silence indicates that he does not wish to have this conversation now, and Bridget eventually gives up bitterly frustrated. The emotional music and the rainy weather intensify Bridget’s sadness.

In this instance, the comprehension of weak implicatures was not as smooth as that of strong implicatures. The two audiences ($SA \bar{x} \approx 2.9$, $TA \bar{x} \approx 2.6$) on the whole understood what Bridget is desperately trying to elicit from Mark by persistently asking “Did you mean the thing, thing”, i.e., whether he wants to marry her as much as she does. Moreover, when asked to explain why Bridget refrains from spelling out what she means, most viewers aptly touched upon Bridget’s pride and/or insecurities. Some sample explanations are the following: “because she doesn’t want him to think that she has thought a lot about the possibility of them getting married. By asking him indirectly she seeks to appear more casual” (SA4), “because she doesn’t want him to say he does not want to marry her (. . .) the fear of rejection and isolation is too great to be blunt about things” (SA6), “Bridget is afraid to spell things out because she’s afraid of Mark’s response” (TA5), “she asks him painlessly so as to get a painless answer” (TA8) and so on. However, the second subset of weak implicatures, mainly pertaining to the way Bridget views her relationship with Mark, has proven more open-ended than initially estimated. Based on the Director’s Commentary (Kidron, 2004), it was assumed that what the filmmakers intended to weakly communicate in this respect are Bridget’s impatience and her impression that her relationship with Mark is at a standstill. Yet, only SA7, TA8 and TA9 have provided evidence suggesting that they have worked out the afore-mentioned weak implicated conclusions. In fact, the audiences’ responses varied considerably in this respect: a large number of viewers, particularly among the British audience, stated that Bridget is unsure of Mark’s feelings and/or the future of their relationship. Several Greek participants thought that she views this relationship seriously, or more seriously than Mark. In addition, for SA9 and TA9 the dialogue between Mark and Bridget is indicative of her immaturity, while SA8 comments upon her lack of realism. It should be stressed that none of the aforementioned inferences is at odds with Bridget’s behaviour in this scene and

her character, in general, as portrayed in the two films. What these responses rather illustrate is implicature *open-endedness* and *indeterminacy* (Grice, 1975; Sperber & Wilson, 1995), which, as mentioned in section 1, seem to sustain, if not promote, the possibility of multiple, idiosyncratic film readings often celebrated by film studies scholars. It is precisely these properties that render implicature such an intriguing phenomenon within pragmatic enquiry and beyond.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to bring into sharp relief some of the challenges researchers are likely to encounter when conducting audience research from an experimental pragmatics perspective in the multimodal context of (subtitled) films. These challenges pertain to the issue of operationalising the complex, psychological construct of utterance comprehension and, thus, crucially involve decisions on how to measure this variable. Drawing on the methodology designed by Desilla (2012, 2014) for investigating the comprehension of film dialogue implicatures across cultures, the chapter presented and illustrated an open-ended questions approach to questionnaire design as well as a purpose-built scale of measurement which does justice to utterance comprehension as a continuous variable and helps the analyst turn qualitative data into quantitative data. Moreover, the analysis of specific instances has demonstrated the usefulness of the Director's Commentary as a means of shedding light on the filmmakers' communicative intentions.

By way of concluding, it would be worth stressing that the methodological tools proposed herewith are intended neither as panacea nor as the only valid way for tackling the challenges of this type of experimental research. They have rather been offered as suggested solutions, ultimately aiming at showing what Sperber and Noveck (2004) advocated in their own vision of pragmatic research, namely that the analyst's intuitions, observations (e.g. the Director's Commentary) and experimental evidence *can* be used jointly when necessary. It is hoped that this discussion will inspire researchers in the pragmatics of AVT to come up with possibly even better solutions and/or critically apply additional methods from experimental psychology that have not been explored here, such as conducting pilot studies as well as statistical significance tests for larger samples.

Notes

- 1 Two recent exceptions to the scarcity of experimental studies of pragmatic phenomena within AVT are Yuan's (2012) investigation of audience response to politeness representations in Chinese–English subtitling and Carlos de Pablos-Ortega's (Chapter 11, this volume) contrastive study of the treatment of direct and indirect speech acts in subtitling comedies from English into Spanish and vice-versa.
- 2 Strictly speaking, "operationalising" as a concept refers both to how to define and measure a variable. However, in this section, these two aspects will be examined separately for the sake of maximum clarity.
- 3 The data elicitation method as well as the scale of measurement that has been devised for assessing the level of comprehension of each of the utterances triggering implicatures in the films under analysis are analysed in detail in section 2.2.
- 4 *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001) and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (2004) will be henceforth referred to as BJ1 and BJ2, respectively.
- 5 The questionnaires administered to the target-audience participants differ from those given to the source audience on a very limited number of occasions, only when the text had to be reformulated to accommodate the specific wording of the Greek subtitles; in most cases they are verbatim translations of the English questionnaires as the Greek subtitles represented a faithful translation of the original with no attempt to tamper with the intended implicatures (Desilla, 2014: 8).

- 6 This section focuses on questionnaire design and the purpose-built scale of measurement used in data analysis. For information on participants and the experimental procedure *per se*, see Desilla (2014).
- 7 This instance of implicature has been identified in one the deleted scenes of *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* which is included in a separate, bonus DVD entitled *The Missing Bits* (2005).
- 8 A multimodal transcription can be found in Desilla (2012: 37) and Pérez González (2014: 296).
- 9 The TA questionnaires and responses are back-translated into English.
- 10 Lee and Pinker (2010) offer an in-depth analysis the various advantages and rich payoffs of using indirect language.

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