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Language and Intercultural Information Ethics Concepts: A Preliminary Discussion of Privacy

Abstract: This paper introduces the perspective to understand privacy via language as an intercultural information ethics (IIE) concept. This research perspective carries two goals: to understand privacy as an IIE concept and to do so via natural language. The paper suggests that studying privacy through language answers the challenge faced by IIE work; in addition, studying privacy as an information ethics concept through language seems most appropriate considering that language both embodies and shapes meaning. Specifically, this paper briefly discusses privacy and some of its language expressions in the Chinese and English languages, through which it hopes to reveal the richness and possibilities of using natural language as a research instrument to understand privacy in intercultural settings, which is an area of researching privacy that has attracted little discussion so far.

Keywords: information ethics, intercultural information ethics, natural language, privacy

1 Introduction: Information Ethics and Intercultural Information Ethics

Information ethics (IE) is still a young area, although it has enjoyed development and growth in the past three or four decades. Froehlich (2004) discussed the history of IE in the United States and how it is a "multi-threaded phenomenon" in which multiple disciplines, including library and information science, computer science, and media and journalism, all contribute to the discussions. There are two ways of understanding the scope of IE.

The first way sees IE as the applied ethics of computers (Johnson, 1985; Heersmink et al, 2011). Currently, many IE courses at iSchools still introduce IE as applied ethical issues, which receives a topic-by-topic discussion; for instance, privacy and intellectual property are some of the most common themes of study (Mattern & Gunn, 2019).

However, it is important to note that even in its early days of development, researchers were suggesting a second and broader conceptualization of IE that is beyond just ethical considerations in the face of specific computer applications, as stated clearly by Moore (1984, p.267): "I am arguing for the special status of computer ethics as a field of study. Applied ethics is not simply ethics applied. However, I also wish to stress the underlying importance of general ethics and science to computer ethics. The ethical theory provides categories and procedures for determining what is ethically relevant." It is through this second and broader conceptualization that we aim to understand IE in this paper.

Similarly, Nishigaki (2006) differentiates between the search for ethical norms in the context of new information technologies on one hand, and the changes "on our views of human beings and society" becoming "necessary to accompany the emergence of the information society" on the other hand (p.237). The second way of considering IE jumps out of the specific application areas and focuses more on the overarching themes across all areas of application because of digitalization, which proposes a much broader scope, that is, which was summarized well in Hausmanninger & Capurro (2002) as "the reconstruction of all possible phenomena in the world as digital information and the problems caused by their exchange, combination and utilization" (p.10). This broader way of conceptualizing IE can also be found in Floridi (2006), where IE is conceived of as *macroethics*, "an ethics that concerns the whole realm of reality" (p.25).

Floridi's conceptualization of IE is situated in his conceptualization of the Philosophy of Information (PI), where PI is defined as "the philosophical field concerned

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with the critical investigation of the conceptual nature and basic principles of information, including its dynamics, utilization, and sciences, and the elaboration and application of information-theoretic and computational methodologies to philosophical problems" (2002, p.123). PI considers information as the "primary ontological category and constituent" (Ess, 2009, p.160), "to be is to be an informational entity" (Floridi, 2008, p.199). The perspective of PI broadened the reach of ethics, and it moves beyond the limits of anthropocentric ethical theories (Stahl, 2008). Therefore, IE, by Floridi's (2014) conceptualization is concerned with the "infosphere" (termed in reference to *biosphere*), which consists of "inforgs" (short for informational organisms) and which include human and nonhuman informational entities with equal moral standing.

This shift to consider nonhuman agents is considered as a major change from modern Western emphasis on the human as a moral agent; it recognizes that "moral actions are the result of complex interactions among distributed systems integrated on a scale larger than the single human being" (Floridi, 2008, p.198). This recognition of the larger social and ethical systems that individuals are situated in connects us with the issue of *Intercultural Information Ethics (IIE)*. In other words, it seems that until quite recently, intercultural consideration that has been underlying and remains quite implicit.

The history of IIE as a separate discipline of its own is only about a decade old (Jared, 2015). IIE was first introduced by Rafael Capurro (2006), and it was summarized as a "contemporary reflection on especially a computer ethics oriented towards global dimensions of Information and Computing Technologies (ICTs) and their use" by Ess (2008, p.89-90). The study of IIE finds its motivation in this concern of IE studies relying solely on Western philosophical and ethical traditions, where the non-Western is largely ignored. Hence, the aim of IIE "is to provide shared norms for different societies with different cultures and distinct moral systems; and, at the same time, maintain the cultural diversity and respect the distinctiveness of various moral systems" (Wong, 2009, p.52). Additionally, the aim of IIE, as Ess puts it, is to: "1) address both local and global issues evoked by ICTs, and 2) to do so in ways that both sustain local traditions/values/ preferences, etc. and 3) provide shared, (quasi-) universal responses to central ethical problems" (2007, p.102).

The research exploration of IIE spans across two stages/parts: one descriptive and the other more normative (Wong, 2009). The descriptive part of the IIE research will require substantive empirical work that can help with explicating the norms and values embedded in cultures.

The first part of the work will help "provide the basis for formulating the (quasi-) universal moral principles," which is the central concern in the second part of the work. The second stage is challenging for its normative nature (Brey, 2007); it needs to answer the question, *what should different cultures share*, as explicitly asked by Wong (2009): "Since IIE aims to investigate ICTs-related ethical problems from various cultural perspectives and attempts to settle them interculturally or cross-culturally; therefore, it must employ both empirical findings of different cultural perspectives as well as normative analysis to determine what can, and should, be agreed upon" (p.51).

Wong (2009) also discussed in more detail the challenges of pursuing this second stage of research and how two existing understandings are inadequate when it comes to the question of what *should be shared*. The two understandings critiqued by Wong are, first, cultures have shared norms but the *interpretations* of these norms could differ. Wong criticized this view as it relies on a "minimal denominator" as the "foundation" across cultures; this perspective was questioned as it risks "pushing IIE towards metaethical moral relativism" (p.53). Another understanding questioned by Wong was that cultures could have shared norms with different *justifications*. Again, Wong doubted this view as it downplays the scope and significance of IIE, because although IIE is concerned with many ICT applications and problems, its core consideration is about morality. This second understanding risks reducing IIE to a justification issue, which significantly downplays the study of IIE to pragmatics.

So the articulation of the research scope and actual research operations of IIE are intertwined, and sometimes it boils down to the consideration of what rightfully falls under the research scope of IIE. For example, Brey (2007) suggested that studies of the effects of information technology in non-Western cultures are more appropriately delegated to the social sciences (including communication studies, cultural studies, anthropology and science and technology studies), where IIE primarily focuses on the comparative study of moral systems (p.8). However, even when one scopes the study of IIE as comparative ethics, it still remains a question in terms of what might be considered as *an adequate instrument* through which the IIE issues and questions can be approached.

With these understandings, this current paper aims to argue that natural language can be considered as such an instrument through which the topic of IIE can be approached. We will not review the relation between language and philosophy, as it is a topic of too broad scope; instead this paper will use the concept of privacy

and its existence or expression in the Chinese and English languages as concrete demonstrations. Specifically, this paper is structured as follows: in the literature review section, we discuss the existing work of privacy as an IIE concept. Next, we move on to see how natural language can be used to understand privacy, and how natural language can offer valuable support to existing work of privacy research, which largely remains within theoretical discussion.

2 Related Work: Privacy as an IIE Subject

In contrast to the abundance and systematic production of privacy research in the Western and especially American academia, discussions of privacy in non-Western cultures are scattered and sometimes produce conflicting conclusions. More importantly, it is unclear yet where comparative illustrations of the concept of privacy in intercultural context are going. Research with a comparative mindset started with questions about how privacy might be conceptualized in non-Western cultures in comparison to the so-called Western conceptualizations. On closer look, existing intercultural discussions comparing the understanding of privacy of a non-Western culture with a generalized Western understanding of privacy touch upon two specific questions: (1) how to describe the differences and (2) what might be some of the contributing factors to the differences. More often, these two aspects are mixed in the actual discussion.

Privacy in recent Chinese society was considered to be hindered by the Chinese culture's collectivist nature (Lv, 2005); in other words, it could be quite difficult to have privacy in China, at least not the privacy known by its typical individualistic understanding. Lv (2005) did touch on this question of on what grounds privacy might be supported in Chinese society. In Western cultures, privacy was advocated for its association with individual autonomy, while it is likely that China, because of the mixture of its traditional culture and influx of Western ideas, will have to come up with a story of advocating privacy from "both individual and collective perspectives" (p.14). This question will soon lead to a more fundamental question, which is, whether any traditional Chinese school of thought (Confucianism, or Daoism, etc.) ever had a comparable idea of individual or individual autonomy. This question is definitely beyond the scope of IE or IIE, but a good understanding of this question should not be neglected by the IE and IIE research. This recognition is essential in that it prepares the working ground for the conceptualization of any IIE concepts, including privacy.

Lv's (2005) observation perhaps has captured some true aspects for understanding privacy in the Chinese culture; however, it risks oversimplifying not only the culture in which privacy exists, but also the concept itself. Perhaps an alternative and more cautious way to put it is that both the Chinese culture and the conceptualization of privacy itself is multidimensional, in that there can be a range of possibilities for understanding. Drawing together the collectivist aspect of the Chinese culture and the individualistic characteristic of the conception of privacy is putting two of the most apparent incompatibilities together, which is interesting and valuable to kickoff the discussion. However, by no means does this indicate the completion of discussion.

Attention needs to be directed to domains that are murky; moreover, rather than identifying what might make the conceptualization of privacy diverge in different cultures, an equally meaningful task is to map out if and what common grounds are shared across cultures in terms of the conceptualization of privacy. The discussion in Ma (2019) is an early attempt in this direction, where the discussion was directed toward compatibilities between the conception of "relational person" that can be found in both the Confucianism tradition and the feminist philosophy.

Similar to the discussion of privacy in China, privacy was argued as an imported concept for Japan (Nakada & Tamura, 2005), and as a Western conceptualization it is incompatible with the Japanese worldview trichotomy (which consists of *Ikai*, *Seken*, and *Shakai*). Specifically, in the Japanese trichotomy worldview, *Seken* refers to the aspect of the world that consists of traditional and indigenous worldviews or ways of thinking and feeling; *Shakai* includes modernized worldviews and ways of thinking influenced in many respects by the thoughts and systems imported from "Western" countries; and *Ikai* is the world of "the other(s), i.e., the hidden or forgotten meanings or values in Seken or Shakai," as well as where spiritual meanings originate (p.27). In addition, another challenge for understanding privacy in Japan is that Japanese society in general grapples with two systems of understanding: the traditional Japanese culture (influenced by Buddhism, Confucianism) and that of the West, which was imported to Japan more recently.

It was suggested that a typical Western understanding of privacy might be only applied within the realm of *Shakai*, while *Seken* is related to the social relationships and the social community that an individual finds him/herself. Based on the above illustrations, Nakada & Tamura (2005)

suggested that Japan might have imported privacy only partially. It was further suggested that not only is privacy a concept less valued by the Japanese people, but Japanese culture might be equipped with an alternative concept that is more dominant in terms of regularizing the social roles and expectations of individuals, for instance, the concept of *Bun* (，*Bun* in general refers to the different roles depending on one's relationship with other people) (p.31).

Considering *Seken's* social community perspective, what might be understood as an invasion of privacy in Western society is considered as not so problematic in the Japanese society. For instance, in the case of revealing a criminal's personal information, personal information is not just about an individual, but about his broader social duties: "people need information about the victims' personalities and relationships in order to understand the meanings of this homicide ..."; "What may seem like a violation of privacy to Westerners is thus justified from the perspective of Seken" (p.30).

In addition, the conceptualization of privacy is highly impacted by other concepts that may be foundational to the meaning of privacy, for instance, the concept of public and private. Nakada & Tamura (2005) discussed the concepts of public (*Ohyake*) and private (*Watakusi*) and how traditional meanings attached to these concepts may have an impact on privacy. The traditional Japanese understanding would say, "things related to Watakusi are less worthy than things related to Ohyake" (p.32). The downplay of *Watakusi* is perhaps one of the reasons that privacy is not as important in Japan as it is in the West. In short, a comparison of the concept of privacy seems inevitably to invoke a comparison of also the broader social and cultural contexts in which privacy and its related concepts come to have meaning.

An alternative framework of understanding the incompatibilities of the concept of privacy across cultures can be found in Mizutani, Dorsey, & Moor (2004); when trying to decipher privacy in the Japanese and American societies, they make this distinction between *descriptive* privacy and *normative* privacy. *Descriptive* privacy is understood as the presence or absence of privacy *as a matter of fact* (p.121); it describes the actual situation regarding privacy. For example, in fact, generations of Japanese families live together and do not have their own separate rooms. In contrast, *normative* privacy refers to the situation that, regardless of the actual situation of privacy, there can be expectations of privacy, or normative rules about privacy always exist. Mizutani et al. (2004) argue that the lack of the former does not indicate a lack of the latter, and the existence of the former may not be

a guarantee of the latter. Indeed, Mizutani et al. (2004) consider the lack of privacy in Japanese society as largely a result of practical constraints (e.g., close and limited physical living spaces), while privacy as a concept of inherent value still exists.

Based on the distinction of *descriptive* and *normative* privacy, it seems possible for Japanese and American cultures to share a "minimal conception" (p.124) of privacy, while a full equivalence of the richness of privacy in the two cultures is less likely. Mizutani et al. (2004) concern resonates with Ess (2005) in that it would be a rush to conclude on an absolute foreignness of the concept of privacy to Japanese culture. However, what seems less clear is how the minimal conception of privacy evolves over time.

Mizutani et al.'s (2004) discussion is insightful in that it recognizes the complexity of privacy, in that descriptive privacy is only one aspect of the concept, and how the concept can be impacted by real-world affordances. Mizutani et al.'s (2004) discussion, in particular, also cautions that language can both guide and mislead the understanding of privacy, in that the absence of a certain language object does not indicate the complete absence of meaning: "the absence of a single word to describe a concept does not mean the concept is totally lacking, it does suggest that the contours of that concept and its discursive role may be different" (p.121).

Apart from comparing China or Japan's conceptualization of privacy with that of the West, the comparison between Chinese and Japanese privacy conceptions is as interesting as the Western and non-Western comparison, starting with the word privacy in the Chinese and Japanese languages. Although the modern Chinese language has borrowed many Western concepts from Japanese vocabulary, for instance, *democracy* was translated in Japanese first as 民主, which was then imported to China so that in both languages, they use the same Chinese characters for representing democracy (Ruitenberg, Knowlton, & Li, 2016). However, when it comes to the vocabulary for privacy, the Japanese language only has *katakana* (プライバシー) for the concept, while the mandarin Chinese language equivalent for privacy seem to have evolved from *yin1si* (阴私) to *yin3si* (隐私) – both are compound words consisting of two characters. Hence, when the Chinese and Japanese languages are put in contrast, it seems that privacy in the Japanese language appears more like an *import*, because *katakana* is used for transcription of foreign-language words into Japanese.

To summarize, in intercultural discussions of the meaning of privacy, first, the concept of privacy and its understanding hinge upon other related concepts and

more foundational cultural preferences. Second, it is highly likely that intercultural understandings of privacy can reach at least partial correspondence, in other words, but it seems to be more interesting and important to specify the grounds on which common understandings were obtained. Third, in any correspondence, the lack of which shall not be considered as static, they need constant examination as individuals and the society continues to grapple with the multidimensionality of cultures and concepts. Overall, we have seen two different conclusions when comparing the concept of privacy across cultures: one suggests that privacy as a construct is more common in one culture and can be completely foreign to another culture; moreover, a different view suggests a more nuanced understanding, which suggests some common ground between cultures. Ultimately, the purpose of having such discussions lies not in reaching a clear-cut diagnosis of whether privacy is imported or not, but rather, through the explicating of relevant factors and how they matter, a better understanding of privacy might be reached.

3 Privacy in the Two Languages: Chinese and English

In this section, we start with the most relevant word, which is the word representing the concept of privacy in these two languages. We discuss the two characters that constitute the Chinese word *yinsi* (隐私), and we also see the negative connotation that was once associated with the word "private" in English. The examinations of the characters and words are revealing in that they could tell some of the underlying constructs/concepts that give rise to the concept of privacy, and how privacy as a concept has always been in constant change. Hopefully, these brief discussions can help make the point that language can be a promising tool for understanding a concept, as "language is most productively conceptualized as a semiotic tool, namely, a tool for meaning-making and meaning exchange in imagined or real social interaction" (Holtgraves & Kashima, 2008, p.73).

3.1 Privacy in the Chinese Language

A period after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 appeared to be when the notion of privacy was harshly attacked, and it was when "private property was banned, and personal desires, including the desire for a space of one's own, were strictly abhorred among Chinese citizens, old and young alike" (Ong & Zhang, 2008, p.6; Naftali, 2010, p.301). However, the several decades since the 1980s seem to have been witnessing a growing appreciation of privacy (Gao & O'Sullivan-Gavin, 2015), till the last decade of the 20th century was when *yinsi* (privacy) became "an independent concept that did not need to be contrasted with the ideal of public service" (McDougall, 2005, p.112).

The word "privacy" in the Chinese language as it is accepted nowadays is a compound word that consists of two Chinese characters, *yin* (隐) and *si* (私), each character with its meaning (*yin* could mean hidden or hide, while *si* could mean private, selfish, etc.). The choice of the two characters will inevitably reflect and reveal the meaning of the word as we will see shortly. Compound words began to appear during the Han dynasty (206 BC-220 AD), but did not increase substantially until modern times, from roughly 20% of the written lexicon before the Qin dynasty to more than 80% today (Shi, 2002).

Because Chinese is a tonal language, in this paper we use numbers to indicate different tones: 1 indicates the first tone and 3 indicates the third tone. Privacy as *yin3si* with *yin* in the third tone was an occurrence in recent decades (Gao & O'Sullivan-Gavin, 2015); before *yin3si*, it was *yin1si* that was used in the context of Chinese language. For example, "The Criminal Procedure Law (National People's Congress, NPC, 1979), which came into effect in 1980, used the term "dark secrets (yin1si阴私) when stipulating that trials involving personal secrets should not be open to the public"(Gao & O'Sullivan-Gavin, 2015, p.235). It was suggested that the first bilingual dictionary appearance of privacy in the Chinese language as *yin1si* has occurred in a Chinese-English Dictionary compiled by the English Department of Peking Foreign Languages College in 1979 (McDougall, 2005, p.113). Even earlier, *Yinsi* (regardless of the first or third tone) appeared nowhere to be found acknowledging that more search in this area is needed: it did not exist in the 1947 encyclopedic dictionary Ci hai (A sea of terms), or in the 1952 revised American edition of Mathew's Chinese-English Dictionary, or in Lin Yutang's 1972 Chinese-English Dictionary (McDougall, 2005).

The two tonal variations of the character *yin*, especially *yin1*, can bring in negative connotations for *yinsi*. In contrast to *yin3*, which literally means hidden and appears mostly neutral, *yin1* could have meanings that are neutral like shade or feminine, but it could also mean negative, or even sinister. Hence, in contrast to *yin3si*, *yin1si* appears to carry a more derogatory sense, and the shift from *yin1si* to *yin3si* also reflects a change in the understandings of privacy in the Chinese language. In other words, it is a change in shedding the negative connotations. The shift

from *yin1si* to *yin3si* also appeared to have occurred in parallel to an expansion and clarification of the meaning of privacy. In *Opinion on Several Issues Regarding the Implementation of the General Principle of Civil Law* (Trial), China's Supreme People's Court (1988) formally expanded the concept of privacy beyond cases of sexual crime and categorized it under the right to reputation (Gao & O'Sullivan-Gavin, 2015, p.235).

Despite the arguable lifting of negative connotation with the change from *yin1* to *yin3*, the second character in *yinsi*, or *si1* since it is in first tone, may be a defining character that contributes to the meaning of privacy (Farrall, 2008; Huang, 2000; McDougall, 2005; Naftali, 2010; Zarrow, 2002). *Si* is the character that refers to what is private, a realm of understanding that researchers seek to clarify when trying to understand privacy in China (Farrall, 2008; McDougall, 2005; Moore, 1984; Zarrow, 2002). The two parts in public–private (*gong–si*) help define each other; to understand gong well can reveal the meaning of *si*, and only when the meaning of *gong–si* is carefully delineated, can one grasp the meaning of privacy that relies on top of it.

The negative connotation of *si* (private) originates from its antonym to *gong* (public); another antonym of *si* in traditional Chinese language is *guan* (official); in either situation, the character *si* bears a negative connotation, with implications of "disreputable actions carried out in secret and/or from disreputable motives" (Farrall, 2008, p.2). McDougall (2004) also named several compound words common in Chinese that consist of the character *si* and their derogatory meanings, including *si xin* (private mind), which can be easily associated with selfishness, and *si tong*, which means adultery. McDougall (2004) tried to explain the possible cultural and philosophical sources of the negative sense of the character *si* by tracing it back to Confucianism: the ancient Chinese Confucian classics *Li Ji* (Book of Rites), in which one of the chapters (The Great Harmony) begins with, "Tian xia wei gong," which can be literally understood as "under heaven (everyone/everywhere) was (held in) common", notice the presence of gong here and how it is interpreted as "the common good," which might be interpreted to overshadow (Huang, 2000) whatever that is not *gong*, namely, *si* (p.2).

The discussions of the two characters that constitute *yinsi* are an initial demonstration of how the meaning of privacy is situated in a larger cultural and social context, and a closer look at the two characters could reveal shifts the concept had gone through. In addition, a closer look at language reveals hopefully how a simple equation of "privacy" with *yinsi* is difficult and less meaningful, if not impossible.

3.2 Privacy in the English language

Since Warren and Brandeis' (1890) seminal paper, privacy has been recognized and supported on multiple grounds, including, but not limited to, its moral value, its protection of personhood, and many more (Moore, 2017; Solove, 2002). Privacy is something of a positive value, it is to be preserved and defended, and the slightest cast of doubt toward privacy itself may appear odd and ridiculous today. Such a well-established appreciation of privacy is a result of years' evolution; unlike the shifts in the Chinese language that seem to have occurred within recent decades, privacy in the English language may have centuries to trace through.

The word privacy had its initial appearance in the English vocabulary, as discussed in Huebert (1997, p.28), in the mid-fifteenth-century in the Oxford English Dictionary. However, privacy as it is understood in today's English language has not always been considered this way, and by no means will its current interpretation remain unchanged. The etymology of the word *private* could, first of all, help reveal where a negative sense of privacy may have existed. The word *private* comes from the Latin word *privatus*, meaning "to be deprived" or "limited" (Baldwin Lind, 2015, p.51-52). Similar to the discussion of privacy in the Chinese language, the sense of negativity of *private* was also revealed by its opposing relation with the *public*. The sense of dispossession that the private space originally conveyed meant, "withdrawing from the public body or restricted to one person or a few persons as opposed to the wider community; largely in opposition to public" (Baldwin Lind, 2015, p.51–52).

It was argued that "before 1700, private was essentially a negative term..." (Longfellow, 2006, p.315), which suggests that the shift in the meaning of privacy from negative to positive was accompanied by a shift in the meaning of private; in addition, such a shift occurred during the past three centuries or so. As summarized by Huebert (1997), "... there is a progression from suspicion of or hostility to privacy in the earlier texts to acceptance of and even cherishing of privacy in the later ones. This would by no means be a smooth linear development, but the overall trend would hold nonetheless" (p.35).

It appears that the opposing relation between private and public/official as we have discussed earlier within the Chinese language context can also be found in English. "... the early modern public, often opposed to the private, was strongly linked to office-holding ... an official persona was almost always a public figure with public responsibilities in a specific sphere. Within this defining context in which the public was understood, the private became the sphere

of those who were subordinate or had to obey those exercising office" (Baldwin Lind, 2015, p.58). As far as we could tell today, the sense that private inevitably obeys or is subordinate to the public has largely alleviated, or perhaps even subverted.

A quick contrast of how privacy was understood a century ago in English to how it is constructed in language today could also reveal how the concept has dramatically changed. Warren and Brandeis' (1890) conception of the right to privacy was responding to a few socio-technical changes' intrusion on a person, in a time when portable photography became available to more people and when sensationalistic journalism was rising (Solove & Schwartz, 2015). Privacy as the *right to be let alone* emphasizes the status of a person not being disturbed, regardless of the specific content of information involved. This conception of privacy appears to be already different from how privacy is considered today, and such difference may be best revealed through the language of privacy. For example, privacy as the *right to be let alone* conveys this sense of the avoidance of disturbing external forces, as if it is preserving an original status each person already contains until being intruded upon. However, for today, privacy is preserved only as a result of certain action, as indicated by commonly used words like "control," "consent," and "opt-in/out."

4 Conclusion

This paper is an initial demonstration of the language used to represent the concept of privacy in the Chinese and English languages. These discussions of concrete characters and vocabularies, hopefully, have demonstrated how natural language is not only a container of ready meaning, but by itself can be a means to gain deeper understanding. Recognizably, the discussions in this paper are still quite limited, both in terms of understanding privacy as an IIE concept, and in terms of using natural language to conduct the IIE research.

In terms of understanding privacy as an IIE concept through language, a comprehensive understanding of related language corpora would add great value, which includes a review of existing discussions of privacy in various literatures (for example, like Longfellow (2006) and McDougall (2005)); moreover, a comprehensive understanding also requires a grasp of privacy as it exists in actual natural language on a daily basis today. When it comes to using language to study IIE, future work could proceed with reviews on linguistics and psycholinguistics

features of language and their effects on understanding and expression. In addition, because the use of language is capable of conveying meaning at two different levels (Tng & Lee, 2016), one at the semantics and vocabulary levels, and the other at the cultural and social levels, a review of the interaction of language and social/cultural understandings could help with clarifying where the study of privacy via natural language interfaces with other social research on privacy.

The negative connotations that have existed in the languages about privacy, as it turns out, is not really a differentiating factor for understanding privacy in these two languages; the underlying public–private (*gong–si*) division turns out to be more like a common theme on top of which privacy and its meanings were established. *yin1si*, *yin3si*, right to be let alone, consent, and so on are working vocabularies of privacy at different times and contexts; getting a handle on these vocabularies helps provide a better grasp of the meaning of the concept of privacy as it continues to evolve and change.

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