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Review
of Gerrard Mugford. 2022.
Developing Cross-Cultural Relational Ability
in Foreign Language Learning
Asset-Based Pedagogy to Enhance Pragmatic Competence

Anna ILINA  

RUDN University, Moscow, Russia

ilyina_ayu@pfur.ru


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Рецензия на книгу
Gerrard Mugford.
Developing Cross-Cultural Relational Ability
in Foreign Language Learning Asset-Based Pedagogy
to Enhance Pragmatic Competence (2022)

А.Ю. ИЛЬИНА  

Российский университет дружбы народов, Москва, Россия

ilyina_ayu@pfur.ru

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This book examines how bilingual speakers establish, develop, consolidate and maintain relationships in the target language (TL) while trying to present and establish themselves as legitimate, established and full-fledged language users.

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Rather than providing bilingual interactants with a checklist of available structures and devices from which to select items as required, pragmatic choices should be based on what interactants want to achieve rather than on what is attainable with the resources that they have already been pre-taught and rehearsed.

Pragmatic competence has become, especially in the last few decades, one of the issues that attracted attention as an essential part of language competence. The realization that having a good command of linguistic knowledge in target language would not be enough to master the language has created the need to investigate the value and effect of pragmatic competence in language education. Pragmatics mainly deals with what is beyond the dictionary meanings of statements; in other words, it is about what is actually meant with an utterance based on the norms and conventions of a particular society, or context, in which conversation takes place (Takkaç 2016). Therefore, having a good command of the conventions enables the speaker to establish and maintain effective and appropriate communication as well as understanding each other clearly (Yule 1996) and this ability is generally referred to as pragmatic competence. Following the shift in which the emphasis in language pedagogy changed from the linguistic-based to communicative-based purposes, the impact and status of pragmatic competence has gradually increased in educational circles.

Sometimes English-language learners' pursuit of achieving fluency and accuracy in grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation discourages them from achieving interactional, transactional and interpersonal goals and undermines commitment and confidence. To tackle this problem, this book pursues a more productive approach that builds on the experiences and histories of bilingual speakers and highlights their progress in reaching communicative goals that they themselves have identified and pursued. The book has adopted a broad and far-reaching approach to understanding bilingual interactants perspectives and how they employ relational assets and resources to establish, develop, maintain target-language relationships. This emic approach focuses on the realities of the language users rather than referencing the opinions, views and pronouncements of 'outside' experts. As a result, bilingual speakers do not have to feel constrained by having to adhere to prescribed TL norms and practices. The bilingual speakers' insights themselves provide the basis for a pedagogy centered on language users' own communicative objectives and on the ways in which they have developed successful interactional relationships.

An asset-based pedagogy builds on the language knowledge students already have, it views culture, literacies, and language differences of students as an added benefit to the classroom. Students are encouraged to connect to their identities and will engage with learning on a deeper level.

A non-deficit pedagogy highlights language learners' successes and achievements rather than correcting their errors and mistakes and underscoring what FL users have difficulty communicating. Instead of focusing on possible errors and robotically reinforcing correct structures, an asset-based pedagogy builds

on successful communicative experiences and examines the characteristics and features of positive interaction (Goodall 2021).

The author attempts to develop an understanding of cross-cultural relational pragmatics by building on existing studies into relational work and examining how FL speakers establish, develop, consolidate and maintain interpersonal and transactional relations while employing their own resources, assets and knowledge. The author points to an asset-based pedagogy aimed at enhancing FL users' pragmatic competence. Guiding principles are outlined behind a cross-cultural relational pragmatics approach with the focus on the real-life communicative context of FL speakers and the challenges they face.

Throughout the book, the labels foreign-language and bilingual interactant/interlocutor/speaker are adopted in order to avoid using the more disparaging term 'non-native speaker' which can undermine and devalue FL users' proficiency and linguistic abilities (Braine 2010, Mugford & Rubio Michel 2018).

The book identifies specific pragmatic abilities that can help enhance and develop TL interaction in five key areas: successful interaction, relational achievement, legitimacy, positionality, relational competence.

In order to comprehend the nature and characteristics of establishing, developing and maintaining social and transactional relationships, key understandings in relational pragmatics can be categorized in terms of: positive relational work, relational knowledge and resources, existing relational understandings, acceptance and acknowledgement, individuality and conformity.

Data collection details of each study are explained in the relevant chapters, the participants in the study are Mexican bilingual interactants, aged between 18 and 25, who are studying or have studied for the B.A. at public and private universities in Guadalajara, Mexico. The cohort are middle-class and enjoy a B2-C1 level of English. By being asked to focus on their specific TL experiences, the bilingual respondents offer insights into specific incidents and experiences which help form the rationale for a critical pedagogy.

In the introductory chapter, the proposed approach, scope and objective of this book have been discussed. An argument has been made that a cross-cultural relational pragmatics approach should focus on the real-life communicative context of bilingual speaker and the challenges that they face.

Chapter 2 outlines a cross-cultural relational model which actively encourages bilingual speakers need to establish, consolidate, expand, enhance and maintain interpersonal relations. By building on Halliday's (1973/1997) understandings of ideational, interpersonal and textual language factors, this chapter argues that relational pragmatic assets, resources and knowledge should be seen as facilitative, supportive and adaptable since they allow interactants to respond to the developing, variable and sometimes unexpected nature of spoken interaction.

Chapter 3 examines how FL interlocutors develop interpersonal relations as they build rapport, solidarity and supportiveness, and show affect and concern for others. The ability to engage in everyday relational communicative situations such

as small talk, chatting, gossiping, storytelling, service encounters and business social talk can significantly contribute to successful TL relational talk.

Chapter 4 examines bilingual speakers' abilities to interact in their own ways whilst conforming to social patterns and practices. Bilingual interactants were focused on achieving intelligibility and comprehensibility as they aimed to attain legitimacy and status. FL interlocutors often face difficult communicative challenges in making themselves understood. To understand intelligibility and comprehensibility in FL use, the interactants were asked to reflect on the use of humor in TL in encouraging socialization and reducing tension.

Chapter 5 describes how FL interlocutors express their individuality in TL interaction. To avoid being labelled as 'reduced' language users, interactants often assert themselves by taking a stance or position through engaging in subjectivity, evaluation and interaction (Englebretson 2007). Individuality can also be expressed through creative language use, which is rarely available to FL interactants who, more often than not, are expected to strictly follow TL norms and practices. In order to explore real-life challenges of engaging in difficult relational work in international contexts, Mexican FL participants were asked to reflect on both positive and negative experiences when travelling abroad. Their reflections reveal how FL users find ways to express themselves intelligibly and cope with situations where they appear not to be understood and have to cope with the unknown.

Chapter 6 employs the concept of FL relational ability to examine how cross-cultural relational pedagogy can respond to FL participants' communicative needs so that they can interact in meaningful ways and use personal histories, significant experiences and practical insights to achieve successful relational work. Learners should establish what they want to be able to achieve in the target language, find their voice and be given the necessary support and guidance to reach their aims. Level of engagement, involvement and commitment depend on how each interactant understands and wants to participate in each given situation and communicative encounter.

To sum it all up, when engaging with TL speakers, communicative possibilities should not be limited by the bilingual users' language knowledge. The cross-cultural relational pragmatics values and respects FL speakers' beliefs, concerns, attitudes and practices given they are already successful language users in the first language (L1). The 'relational' aspect attempts to identify interpersonal understandings and increase bilingual speakers' awareness that can help them determine the desired type and quality of relationship they seek in any given interaction.

There is one issue that needs to be included in the conclusion of the book. Is there a direct correlation between the mastery of the TL and pragmatic competence. Sometimes poor and inefficient knowledge of the target language makes communication almost impossible and no pragmatic competence of the speaker can improve the situation.

Undoubtedly, this book stands out from other books on second/foreign-language pragmatics because it is based on histories, experiences, attitudes of

bilingual interactants themselves. It records and examines their successes along with their worries, concerns and fears both when interacting in TL situations. In conducting this research, a range of real-life contexts and events are analyzed as opposed to much less likely scenarios generated by EFL textbooks such as having to refuse to work overtime or declining an invitation to a formal dinner party.

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Bionote:

Anna ILINA – PhD, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Philology, RUDN University. She teaches English to the under-graduate and post-graduate students and reads a course of lectures on lexicology. Her research interests cover translation studies, varieties of English, semantics, onomastics and toponymy of North America.

e-mail: ilyina_ayu@pfur.ru

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4282-8095>

Сведения об авторе:

Анна Юрьевна ИЛИНА – кандидат филологических наук, доцент кафедры иностранных языков филологического факультета РУДН. Ведет практические занятия по английскому языку в бакалавриате и магистратуре, а также читает лекционный курс по лексикологии. Ее научные интересы включают переводоведение, варианты английского языка, семантику, ономастику, топонимию Северной Америки.

e-mail: ilyina_ayu@pfur.ru

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4282-8095>