

Book Review



Juliane House and Dániel Z. Kádár, *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics and Foreign Language Learning*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2024. xiv–240 pages, ISBN: 978-1-3995-2322-6

Pragmatic competence—the ability to use language appropriately in social and cultural contexts—has long been recognized as essential for successful second and foreign language learning (Blum-Kulka, 1982). Yet decades of research show that pragmatic failure remains common and often unnoticed (Thomas, 1983). Studies from Jaworski (1994) to Shleykina (2021) demonstrate how even advanced learners may misinterpret routine interactions or struggle in real-world communication, particularly in today’s lingua-franca English environments. These challenges underscore the complexity of pragmatic competence and the difficulty of teaching it effectively. To understand why these problems persist, it is important to consider how cross-cultural pragmatics (CCP) and L2 pragmatics have developed. CCP, shaped by influential work such as the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), maps how speech acts, politeness, and sociocultural expectations vary across languages. L2 pragmatics, by contrast, examines how learners acquire appropriate language use. Although the two fields share core concerns, they evolved largely independently, resulting in extensive research but relatively little pedagogical guidance – an issue that has become increasingly pressing in multilingual, ELF contexts. In recent years, scholars have sought to bridge this divide. Frameworks such as House and Kádár’s (2021) comparative model, along with pedagogically oriented work by Ishihara and Cohen (2010) and Taguchi (2019), point toward approaches that are both theoretically grounded and classroom-ready. It is within this emerging convergence that House and Kádár’s *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics and Foreign Language Learning* (2024) positions itself. By proposing a context-based model that links descriptive cross-cultural insights with practical language-teaching needs, the book offers

a timely and significant contribution to current efforts to make pragmatics more teachable and relevant in diverse learning environments.

The book is structured into eleven chapters that methodically examine the intersection of cross-cultural pragmatics and second language (L2) learning. Chapter 1 opens by introducing foundational concepts, including *linguaculture* – the idea that cultural norms are embedded in the ways communities use language – and a bottom-up framework for analyzing cross-cultural interactions. Chapter 2, *The Foundations of Cross-Cultural Pragmatics*, traces the historical development of cross-cultural pragmatics, emphasizing the role of conventionalization in shaping language use. This chapter also highlights the significance of the *Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP)* as a landmark study in the systematic investigation of speech acts across cultures. In Chapter 3, *Our Contrastive Pragmatic Framework and Its Use in L2 Pragmatic*, the authors introduce a corpus-based, contrastive framework that positions speech acts as the central unit of analysis throughout the book. Using minimalist and replicable typologies, they examine key features such as illocutionary force and interactional values, providing tools to identify and interpret intercultural communication patterns. By combining theoretical rigor with practical analytical strategies, these chapters establish a solid foundation for understanding how learners navigate culturally grounded pragmatic norms in L2 contexts. The subsequent chapters apply the book's theoretical framework to a series of empirical investigations, illustrating its relevance across multiple dimensions of cross-cultural pragmatics in L2 learning. Chapters 4 through 7 examine pragmatic expressions in certain languages (e.g., Chinese vs. English) at the smallest units, including routine formulaic interrogative expressions (RFIES), requests, apologies, as well as more complex interactional acts such as criticizing and ritualized congratulating. Each study is carefully designed, often combining corpus analyses with learner production data, to uncover nuances in intercultural communication that earlier models may overlook. These analyses further underscore the challenges L2 learners encounter when negotiating cross-cultural norms, particularly between Chinese and British speakers, whose linguacultural backgrounds diverge significantly. Chapters 8 to 10 extend the analysis to larger interactional structures, encompassing greeting patterns, conversational closings, and transitions between types of talk, such as shifts from informal to formal discourse. Detailed investigations of communicative sequences – ranging from phatic openings to information-extracting moves and the transition into business-oriented talk – demonstrate the framework's capacity to address both micro- and macro-level pragmatic phenomena. The volume concludes with Chapter 11, which synthesizes the principal findings. The authors highlight the value of contrastive analysis and emphasize

the need for contextually grounded, practice-based simulations to support the development of L2 learners' pragmatic competence. Across these empirical studies, the book consistently illustrates how a systematic, corpus-informed approach can elucidate the strategies and challenges inherent in navigating cross-cultural communication.

The greatest strength of the volume lies in its rare ability to integrate theoretical rigor with practical relevance. House and Kádár do not merely critique the limitations of past models; they offer a viable and detailed alternative. Their proposed interactional typology constitutes a genuine conceptual advance, equipping researchers with a far more refined analytical apparatus than the traditional speech-act paradigm allows. By demonstrating that "criticizing" is not a single, monolithic act but a constellation of interactional moves, such as "alerting" and "stating a problem", they enable an unprecedented level of diagnostic precision in identifying where learner performance breaks down. This alone marks a substantial contribution to both cross-cultural and L2 pragmatic inquiry.

More broadly, the book's principal theoretical strength is its ambitious and systematic redefinition of the analytical scope of cross-cultural pragmatics (e.g., Chinese and British speakers). The tripartite distinction between Speech Acts, Interactional Acts, and Types of Talk is not a mere taxonomic refinement; it represents a direct challenge to the speech-act-as-unit assumption that has dominated the field for decades. The authors persuasively argue that pragmatic analysis must move beyond isolated speech acts toward a more dynamic, interactionally grounded understanding of language in use. This argument is realized most convincingly in the empirical chapters-especially Chapter 6 on criticizing-where the analytical model demonstrates its superior explanatory power.

Methodologically, the book stands out as a masterclass in triangulation. House and Kádár weave together corpus linguistics, Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs), and role-plays in a way that highlights the strengths of each method while mitigating their individual limitations. For instance, Chapter 4's use of corpus data to establish baseline norms for "Routine Formulaic Interrogative Expressions" (RFIES) provides an empirical grounding often missing from studies that rely exclusively on elicited data. This multi-method design significantly enhances the credibility of their findings and sets a new standard for methodological rigor in pragmatics research.

Nevertheless, the book's ambition also introduces its main limitations. The most notable is the limited empirical demonstration of the framework's full breadth. Although the case studies on criticizing, congratulating, and greetings are rich and insightful, they draw primarily on a narrow set of language pairs

(e.g., English, German, Chinese). As a result, the universality of the proposed typology, particularly the category of “Types of Talk” (Chapter 10), remains more asserted than thoroughly validated. Chapter 10’s treatment of “Phatic Opening vs. Business Talk”, while intriguing, is relatively brief, leaving readers uncertain about how the framework might handle more conflictual, hierarchical, or culturally sensitive types of talk across a broader range of linguistic communities. Therefore, the book provides a compelling proof-of-concept rather than a comprehensive empirical test.

Methodological self-reflexivity is another area where the volume could have gone further. Although the authors rightly critique DCTs for their limitations, their own empirical chapters, particularly Chapters 7 and 8, rely heavily on them. While they clearly use DCTs as part of a broader methodological toolkit, a more explicit discussion of how their interactional typology compensates for the well-known shortcomings of DCTs (e.g., lack of real-time processing, restricted contextualization, idealized responses) would have strengthened the persuasiveness of their critique and preempted potential objections. Although the authors incorporated interviews in certain instances (e.g., Chapter 3), more extensive use of naturally occurring data, ethnographic observations, or multimodal analysis would have enriched the empirical base and offered a fuller picture of pragmatic performance in authentic interaction.

A further limitation concerns the book’s pedagogical implications. Although the authors position the volume as a bridge between theory and practice, the practical “so what?” for classroom teachers remains somewhat implicit. As the authors themselves acknowledge (p. 175), comparatively little attention is devoted to the practical challenges of teaching pragmatics in the foreign language classroom. This constitutes a significant lacuna in the volume. Future research and pedagogical initiatives could usefully explore how the contrastive L2 pragmatic framework advanced in this work might be implemented in authentic instructional contexts, ideally across a diverse array of languages, thereby evaluating its practical utility and potential for informing evidence-based teaching practices.

The “Prospect” section in Chapter 11 offers valuable insights, yet the complex analytical framework is not translated into concrete lesson plans, instructional sequences, or training protocols. For instance, although their analysis of “ritual congratulating” vividly illustrates cultural specificity, the book provides little guidance on how instructors might systematically teach the set of Interactional Acts that constitute such rituals. As a result, much of the pedagogical extrapolation is left to readers, especially those without a strong background in pragmatics. Despite these limitations, they should not overshadow the book’s substantial contributions. Its methodological eclecticism

(e.g., blending corpus linguistics, controlled elicitation tasks, and learner data) serves as a model for future research. The analyses of “ritual congratulating” and “phatic talk” effectively demonstrate the cultural depth of seemingly simple interactions, highlighting areas where learners need explicit instruction and where teachers need clearer pedagogical guidance.

The contributions of House and Kádár’s work open several promising avenues for future research and pedagogical application. First, the interactional typology would benefit from broader cross-linguistic validation, testing its applicability across a wider array of language pairs and cultural contexts, particularly in non-Western and multilingual environments. Further empirical investigation into more complex, hierarchical, or conflictual types of talk would also strengthen the framework, especially in professional, intercultural, or English-as-a-Lingua-Franca settings.

Integrating naturally occurring interactional data, including longitudinal classroom observations, corpus-based analyses, or multimodal recordings, could provide richer insight into how learners navigate interactional acts in real-time, complementing the controlled data gathered through DCTs and role-plays. In addition, research is needed to translate the interactional typology into concrete instructional designs, teaching materials, and assessment tools that make the framework actionable for language educators. The growing prevalence of online and digital communication presents another opportunity to examine how the typology applies to synchronous and asynchronous interactions in virtual environments, including video-mediated and text-based exchanges.

Investigating learner perceptions and interpretations of different interactional acts could inform more targeted and learner-sensitive pedagogical approaches, bridging the gap between descriptive analysis and practical classroom strategies. Finally, the development of validated assessment instruments capable of evaluating learner performance at the level of interactional acts and types of talk, rather than relying solely on binary judgments of appropriateness, would provide a critical tool for both research and instructional evaluation. Pursuing these directions would extend the conceptual and methodological innovations of House and Kádár’s work and consolidate its impact on both the study of cross-cultural pragmatics and the practice of foreign language teaching.

In sum, while the volume is constrained by its focus on a handful of language pairs, its reliance on DCTs, and the technical complexity of its framework, *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics and Foreign Language Learning* remains a pivotal and timely contribution. It advances the theoretical landscape of pragmatics, offers a sophisticated analytic model, and lays essential groundwork for

bridging descriptive research and L2 pedagogy. For researchers and advanced practitioners, it is an invaluable resource that opens new directions for inquiry and instructional innovation.

Muhammed Parviz | ORCID: 0000-0002-1449-1651

Imam Ali University, Tehran, Iran

mohammad.parviz60@gmail.com

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