



**Book review: Schauer, Gila A., *Intercultural Competence and Pragmatics*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, 208 pages (ebook), ISBN: 9781350262850**

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**Intercultural Competence and Pragmatics**, divided into nine illuminating chapters, examines the critical link between intercultural competence (IC) and pragmatics through the lens of modern foreign language teachers in higher education. The author surveyed instructors teaching a diverse array of languages, from Dutch and English to French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Swedish, to understand how they conceptualize intercultural competence and which skills, competences, and knowledge they deem essential within their teaching contexts. This is a timely and important inquiry, as international organizations like UNESCO and the Council of Europe have emphasized the pivotal role of intercultural competence in education, yet the specifics of what IC entails can remain unclear in particular subject areas and classroom settings.

The introductory chapter introduces the research project explored in the book, which investigates the views of modern foreign language (MFL) teachers in higher education on the relationship between intercultural competence and pragmatics. The chapter outlines the rationale for the study, noting that while organizations like UNESCO and the Council of Europe emphasize the importance of IC in education, the link between IC and pragmatics is not always clear. The chapter reviews existing literature on this topic and highlights the need for more research examining the relationship between pragmatic competence and IC. The chapter then describes the methodology of the research project, which involved an online survey completed by 133 MFL teachers across 15 different languages. The survey asked questions about the teachers' views on the components of IC, the importance of teaching various linguistic and cultural aspects, the connection between IC and pragmatic competence, and the teachers' own experiences with IC during their university studies. The chapter provides an overview of the survey's research questions and the structure of the book, which presents the survey results across several chapters. It notes that readers may choose to focus on the chapters most relevant to their interests, but recommends reading the book sequentially for those unfamiliar with pragmatics and IC.

Chapter 2, "Background", provides a thorough overview of the concept of pragmatics and its various subdisciplines that are relevant for the study of intercultural competence. The definitions of pragmatics presented highlight its key aspects, including the central role of language users and their communicative intentions, the importance of context, and the focus on the appropriate and effective use of language. The chapter then introduces the specific pragmatic research areas of cross-cultural

pragmatics, interlanguage pragmatics, and variational pragmatics. The discussion of cross-cultural pragmatics outlines its aim to comparatively examine language use across different cultures and languages, exemplified by the influential Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project. Interlanguage pragmatics is described as focusing on second language learners' ability to produce appropriate and effective utterances, as well as comprehend target language utterances. The clear definitions and explanations provide a solid foundation for understanding the pragmatic underpinnings of intercultural communication.

Chapter 3, "Methodology", provides a comprehensive overview of the participant demographics in this study on MFL teachers' intercultural competence and pragmatics. The researchers surveyed 133 participants, representing a diverse sample in terms of gender identity, age, native language, educational background, teaching experience, target languages, and learner proficiency levels. The detailed participant information enhances the credibility and contextual understanding of the study's findings. By capturing the heterogeneity of the MFL teacher population, the researchers increase the generalizability of the results. The breakdown of participants' linguistic, cultural, and professional profiles offers valuable insights into the complex landscape of contemporary language education. Notably, the methodology highlights the varied routes MFL teachers take to enter the profession, with differing levels of target language proficiency. This heterogeneity raises important questions about the adequacy of teacher preparation and professional development to support the diverse needs of language learners. Overall, the thorough documentation of the participant characteristics in this methodology section sets a strong foundation for the subsequent analysis and discussion of the study's findings. The rich contextual information enables readers to better situate the results and draw meaningful connections to the realities of contemporary language teaching.

Chapter 4, "Results: Components of Intercultural Competence", provides an overview of the terms and components associated with intercultural competence, as perceived by a sample of 133 modern foreign language teachers. The author examines the teachers' conceptualizations of intercultural competence, drawing on established frameworks and models in the literature. The key findings include:

- All the suggested components of intercultural competence were selected by at least some teachers, indicating a broad understanding of the construct.
- The most frequently selected components were "awareness of different ways of thinking, orientations and values" (92%), "being understanding and sympathetic when encountering cultural differences" (87%), and "knowledge of politeness norms" (84%).
- Comparisons are made to a previous study conducted by the author with English as a Foreign Language teachers, highlighting some similarities and differences in the prioritized components.
- The analysis also examines differences in the selection of components across various language groups (English, German, Italian, Spanish, French, and Dutch).

In all, the chapter offers valuable insights into how modern foreign language teachers conceptualize intercultural competence, which has important implications for

language teaching and teacher education. The findings contribute to the ongoing discourse on the multifaceted nature of intercultural competence and its operationalization in educational settings.

Chapter 5, "Results: Aspects of Modern Foreign Language Teaching in Higher Education", examines the results of a survey exploring the importance that modern foreign language teachers in higher education place on teaching various academic, general, and intercultural skills and competences. The findings reveal some surprising insights. Contrary to the author's expectation, the skills considered "very important" by the highest number of teachers were general language skills, academic writing skills, and academic reading skills - rather than solely academic skills. This suggests modern language instructors place significant value on developing students' overall proficiency in the target language, not just their academic linguistic abilities. The data also indicates widespread recognition of the importance of teaching appropriate pragmatic expressions and strategies for intercultural communication. Over 85% of teachers rated these areas as important or very important, aligning with previous findings on the role of pragmatics and intercultural competence.

Chapter 6, titled "Results: The Relationship Between Intercultural and Pragmatic Competence", provides an overview of the results related to modern MFL teachers' familiarity with the concept of pragmatic competence. The key findings are: 68% of the 132 MFL teachers surveyed indicated they were familiar with pragmatic competence, while 18% were not familiar and 14% were unsure. This was a somewhat unexpected finding, as pragmatics is considered a relatively new area in the field of instructed second language acquisition. The results suggest that the majority of the teachers participating in the study were aware of pragmatic competence, which is an important aspect of intercultural communication. This chapter explores the relationship between pragmatic competence and intercultural competence, indicating that it is a key focus of the larger research study. In all, the chapter offers valuable insights into language teachers' familiarity with pragmatic competence, which is a crucial component of developing intercultural communicative abilities in language learners. The findings presented provide a helpful foundation for the subsequent analysis of the interconnections between pragmatic and intercultural competence.

Chapter 7, titled "Results: Intercultural Competence and Gender-Neutral Language", examines teachers' views on the existence of gender-neutral language options in the second languages they teach. The results show that there is no universal agreement among teachers regarding the availability of gender-neutral language options, even within the same language groups. The author found this surprising, given that the introduction of gender-neutral pronouns, like the Swedish "hen", has received significant international media attention in recent years. The chapter discusses potential reasons for the divergent responses, such as differences in exposure to language developments based on teaching location. Overall, the findings suggest there is still variability in the acceptance and use of gender-neutral language across languages and language varieties. The chapter undoubtedly contributes to the literature on gender-fair and inclusive language practices in educational contexts. The methodology, including the survey design and analysis of the free-text responses, provides a subtle look at this complex sociolinguistic issue from the perspectives of language teachers.

Chapter 8, titled "Results: Intercultural Competence in Modern Foreign Language Teacher Education", examines the coverage of intercultural competence in the educational background of MFL teachers. The author notes that since the 1997 publication of Byram's influential work on intercultural communicative competence (ICC), there has been increased emphasis on incorporating intercultural education into MFL teacher training programs, as evidenced by policies from international bodies. However, the author points out that not all MFL teachers may have been exposed to Byram's ICC framework soon after its initial publication. The chapter suggests that the extent to which ICC is covered in MFL teacher education likely varies, with some teachers learning about these concepts early on, while others may not have encountered them until later. In all, the chapter highlights the growing importance placed on equipping MFL teachers with intercultural competence, while acknowledging potential differences in when and how this content is integrated into teacher preparation programs.

The last chapter deals with the summary of findings. The key findings include that teachers viewed a wide range of abilities, knowledge, skills and attitudes as potential components of IC, highlighting its multifaceted nature. Awareness of different ways of thinking, orientations and values was seen as the most crucial component, while pragmatic abilities like politeness norms and situationally appropriate language use were also viewed as central to IC. Furthermore, pragmatic aspects like situationally appropriate language, conversational norms, and speech acts were rated as very important by the majority of teachers, supporting the integration of pragmatics as a key component within models of intercultural competence, as perceived by experienced MFL teachers in higher education. The analysis provides valuable empirical insights to inform both IC theory and L2 pedagogy.

In conclusion, *Intercultural Competence and Pragmatics* provides invaluable insights into how language professionals in higher education navigate and prioritize various pragmatic aspects in their instruction. These insights can shape the intercultural and pragmatic awareness, competence, and skills of modern foreign language learners. Certainly, this timely and thought-provoking volume will be of great interest and relevance to a wide range of stakeholders, including language teachers and teacher trainers, curriculum developers, and applied linguists specializing in the areas of pragmatics, intercultural communication, and language education policy.

### **Author's Biography**

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**Yunes Azizian** received his B.A. degree in English Language and literature from Lorstan university and his M.A., and Ph.D. degrees in General Linguistics, from Institute for Humanities and Cultural Sciences (IHCS) and Tarbiat Modares University, respectively. In 2022, he joined the Department of English Language and Literature, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, as a Lecturer on general linguistics and Linguistics in Literature and EFL. He has published some publications on cognitive syntax, phonetics, language and music and dialectology in domestic and international journals to date. He has advised 2 MA students Since 2023.

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