

Shuai Li (ed.), *Pragmatics of Chinese as a Second Language*. Bristol, UK; Jackson, USA: Multilingual Matters, 2024. 356 pages, ISBN: 9781800410176 (hardback)

Pragmatics of Chinese as a Second Language comprises a collection of high-quality empirical studies on the pragmatics of Chinese as a second language (L2). This book introduces a fresh outlook on the acquisition, assessment, and instruction of L2 pragmatics. L2 pragmatics is a field that often touches upon cross-cultural differences of communication. Considering the variation in communication styles between Chinese- and English-speaking cultures, Kasper (1995: ix) presented an edited volume of empirical studies on the pragmatics of Chinese as a native and target language, offering critical provisions on the “intricate patterns of Chinese communication practices” for both learners and teachers of Chinese. Since Kasper’s (1995) call for research on L2 Chinese pragmatics, only a few empirical studies emerged to explore this underrepresented field in the 2000s (Ke, 2012). However, as Li points out in the opening chapter, the increasing number of international learners studying Chinese has led to a “strong and upward trajectory” in L2 Chinese research over the last decade. This trend points to a robust research interest among linguists and teaching professionals. Building on Kasper’s (1995) edited volume and Taguchi and Li’s (2017) edited issue of *Chinese as a Second Language Research*, this book stands as the first edited volume that comprehensively showcases some of the most innovative achievements in recent research on L2 Chinese pragmatics.

Chapter 1 (Research on L2 Chinese Pragmatics (1995–2022): A State-of-the-Art Review) begins with a review of 98 empirical studies on L2 Chinese pragmatics published between 1995 and 2022. Li, Wen, and Feng synthesize the significant contributions of these studies. The authors observe a limited number of studies adopting varied second language acquisition (SLA) theories. Similarly, although researchers have considered individual difference (ID) factors in influencing pragmatic competence, there has not been a well-developed research framework to understand how ID factors impact pragmatics gains. The authors then propose future research directions, including empirical studies grounded in more diverse theoretical frameworks, broadening the scope of pragmatics features, investigating the joint effects of factors on pragmatic development, and examining technology-assisted instruction and assessment of pragmatics in the post-COVID era. As the leading author of the first chapter, Li sets the agenda for the volume, guiding future research by presenting studies that address some of these frontier issues in the broader field of SLA.

The remaining chapters of the book consist of ten empirical studies, divided into four parts, effectively addressing the proposed directions for future research. Part 1 focuses on unexplored pragmatics features. Part 2 introduces

new methods for L2 pragmatics assessment, representing the editor's distinctive effort to bring methodological novelty to L2 assessment research. Part 3 explores the combined effects of ID factors in acquiring L2 pragmatics. Part 4 examines the effectiveness and perceptions of digital instruction and gaming on pragmatics learning. The organization of these sections enables readers to observe how these studies contribute to the diversification of theories for investigating L2 pragmatics. Additionally, the editor along with Wen and Feng provide an annotated bibliography, offering readers a quick overview and a helpful guide to the purpose, method, and findings of each of the 98 studies reviewed in Chapter 1.

The chapters in Part 1 consider previously understudied pragmatic features, including the Chinese utterance-final particle *ba*, online neologisms, and request strategies. In Chapter 2 ('Softening the Tone?': A Corpus-Based Study of the Utterance-Final Pragmatic Particle BA (吧) between L1 and L2 Chinese Speakers), Diao and Chen analyze the pragmatic use of *ba* using dorm conversations between American study abroad students and their Chinese roommates. The significance of this study is evident in its original exploration of *ba* as a Chinese language-specific feature and its less salient pragmatic functions for L2 learners in the challenging-to-investigate dormitory setting. Addressing another under-noticed pragmatic feature, in Chapter 4 (Effects of Proficiency and Situation Type on the Production of L2 Chinese Request Strategies by Japanese Learners), M. Chen, Zhang, Qiu and C. Li examine the impact of proficiency and situation type on the production of L2 Chinese micro request strategies by Japanese learners. Despite the lack of direct teaching or learning implications, the authors provide a detailed account of Japanese learners' patterns of request strategies, which may contribute to a nuanced understanding of cross-cultural communication in East Asian cultures. The most innovative of the chapters in this section for linguists interested in SLA, is likely to be Chapter 3 (L2 Chinese Internet Slang Learning: Chinese as a Foreign Language Learners' Knowledge and Motivation) by Jin, which delves into pragmatic awareness and production of L2 Chinese internet slang terms. Unlike formal language use, internet language remains a domain understudied with regard to pragmatic features, despite being linked to sociocultural learning as an indispensable component of L2 acquisition for college-age students, especially those belonging to Gen Z. The primary motivation for learning Chinese online buzzwords, as observed by Jin, arises from learners' eagerness to interact with native speakers of their age. This study emphasizes the importance of acquiring sociopragmatic knowledge such as sociolinguistic style as a learning need, particularly when tied to youth identity.

Previous research on L2 Chinese pragmatics assessment has primarily focused on developing tests and examining technical aspects of tests. The

development of tests has been limited to assessing pragmatics comprehension and recognition mostly using multiple-choice tests, while the investigation of technical matters mainly addresses the functioning of rating scales. The chapters in Part 2 offer cutting-edge methods to advance L2 pragmatics assessment, covering the development of a new test instrument as well as the incorporation of multidisciplinary methods for evaluating learner production and data quality. In Chapter 5 (*Using a Slide Ruler to Assess Accuracy and Certainty in L2 Chinese Implicature Comprehension*), for example, Qin developed an instrument using a slide ruler to assess implicature comprehension and learner confidence levels. Although perhaps not the most applicable for most readers of this book, the most exciting new assessment method is in Chapter 6 (*An Exploratory Study on a Natural Language Processing Approach to Evaluating L2 Pragmatic Performance*). Drawing from her expertise as a language engineer in the industry, Q. Li contributes a fresh perspective at the intersection of natural language processing (NLP) and SLA. She explores the use of the Word2Vec model, one of the most successful word-embedding methods in NLP, to assess the similarity of speech act productions between L2 learners and native speakers. This study features a novel approach to tackle the challenge of outcome variations in human rating processes. It also underscores the potential efficacy of employing NLP to evaluate pragmalinguistic forms in L2 pragmatics assessment research. Showcasing another novel approach, in Chapter 7 (*Using the Rasch Model to Evaluate Instrument and Data Quality in Assessing Requests in L2 Chinese*), S. Li demonstrates the application of a psychometric model called the Rasch model to assess the quality of data collection and analysis instruments in L2 pragmatics. Importantly, S. Li cautions researchers against assuming that their self-developed instruments inherently possess satisfactory psychometric properties. Indeed, this is often overlooked by empiricists. Using the example of assessing request production in L2 Chinese, S. Li shows that this model can be applied to evaluate the fitness and consistency of participant responses, items in pragmatics tasks, rater behaviors, and rating scales. This study is the first to provide valuable insights into utilizing the Rasch model for evaluating the quality of L2 pragmatics data collection beyond a testing focus. Like Chapter 6, Chapter 7 presents an original and interdisciplinary methodological contribution to the broader field of L2 pragmatics. It would be useful for Q. Li and S. Li to offer manuals on implementing such models to educate readers on conducting relevant assessment work. Nevertheless, this section stands out as the highlight of the book, reflecting the editor's commitment to delivering innovations in methodology to L2 pragmatics research.

To explain the complexity of L2 pragmatics learning, previous researchers have considered 1D factors such as proficiency, heritage status, linguistic and

cultural background, intensity of L2 social contact, and intercultural competence, among others. The chapters in Part 3 introduce motivation and learning strategies as two 1D factors that have not been extensively explored. For instance, Chapter 8 (Proficiency, Motivation and Production of Conventional Expressions in L2 Chinese) by Su and Hu centers on two 1D variables, proficiency and motivation, and their relationship with pragmatics production of conventional expressions in L2 Chinese. The study not only challenges the idea that the domestic/overseas learning environment constrains the development of L2 formulaic expressions but also demonstrates that multiple 1D factors, such as learner proficiency and cultural interest, can jointly influence L2 pragmatics gains. Focusing on another 1D factor, Yang in Chapter 9 (Learning Strategies for Pragmatic Routines by Learners of L2 Chinese) delves into whether learning strategies vary across different levels of pragmatics performance. She developed a questionnaire to examine five types of strategies for learning pragmatic routines. By incorporating under-investigated 1D factors, Part 3 illustrates the importance of exploring the collective impacts of these factors in affecting pragmatic development.

Previous research on L2 Chinese pragmatics instruction has mainly concentrated on instructional effects of explicit and implicit teaching as well as the instruction of pragmalinguistics. Shifting the focus to the medium of delivery, Part 4 is anchored in technology-mediated instruction, with the goal of exploring inventive methods to improve L2 Chinese pragmatic competence and enhance learning experience. Chapter 10 (Effects of Website-Delivered Instruction on Development of Pragmatic Awareness in L2 Chinese) by L. Yang, for instance, focuses on the impact of self-studying website-delivered instruction. She used metapragmatic assessment tasks and retrospective interviews to examine whether learners experienced pragmatic development in expressions of gratitude before and after receiving scenario-based online instructions. Through a comparison of pre- and post-test scores and interview responses, the author observed that learners significantly improved their metapragmatic judgment of the appropriateness of L2 Chinese expressions of gratitude over time, irrespective of the lengths of formal studies. This study demonstrates innovative efforts to increase both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge through virtual learning. Adopting another computer-assisted activity, digital games, Tang in Chapter 11 (Is a Game More Appealing than an Online Lesson for L2 Pragmatics Learning?) examines learner perception of two learning means. To determine the more appealing modality, Tang developed a scenario-based digital game and a picture-based online lesson for learning formulaic expressions in L2 Chinese. The results indicate that while learners perceive both learning activities positively, the game provided a more

useful and engaging learning experience compared to the picture-based online lesson. Overall, this section articulates a pioneering effort in harnessing virtual tools as pedagogical resources to improve pragmatic gains and learning engagement in the digital era.

As these chapter summaries indicate, the editor has aligned recent advancements in L2 Chinese pragmatics with the broader research context, leveraging new opportunities to incorporate cross-disciplinary methods and technologies into empirical studies. This volume not only enriches the existing literature but also serves as an invaluable resource for researchers interested in the dynamic intersection of pragmatics acquisition, assessment, and instruction. By studying less investigated realms in pragmatics acquisition, employing state-of-the-art methodologies in pragmatics assessment, addressing joint effects of ID factors in pragmatic development, and incorporating virtual learning in pragmatics instruction, the contributing authors have laid the groundwork for future research initiatives. Despite these commendable contributions, a research framework outlining the way various ID factors collectively influence L2 pragmatics in diverse learning environment has not yet been established. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 1, there has been limited L2 instructional research on “what to teach.” Future studies can shed light on this.

As a whole, this edited volume signifies a comprehensive and groundbreaking exploration of L2 Chinese pragmatics. Its appearance is particularly noteworthy amid the rapid developments in the larger field of SLA. The purpose of SLA research is to explain and understand the intricacies of L2 learning, thereby providing useful insights for foreign language teachers and learners to facilitate teaching and learning. While half of this volume (e.g., chapters 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 11) offers some teaching implications and may be more accessible for educators, editors of future volumes may consider the goal of bridging the gap between academic research and pedagogical practices. Nevertheless, this volume takes an important step in advancing the discourse and charting new directions for L2 pragmatics research.

Jun Lang | ORCID: 0000-0003-3572-4677

Pomona College, Claremont, CA, United States

jun.lang@pomona.edu

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