

Iwona Dronia

Communicating with Generation Z

The Development of Pragmatic Competence of Advanced Polish Users of English



UNIWERSYTET ŚLĄSKI
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REFEREE

Hanna Komorowska

None of this would have been possible without my dear family.

*Most of all, I want to thank my truly supporting husband, Irek.
I sincerely appreciate all that you did for me at the time of writing this book.
Thank you.*

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Introduction

The character of global communication is changing due to multifarious reasons of social, technological or even political nature. The taxonomy created by Howe and Strauss (2000) and by Chester (2002) differentiates between various age generations – baby boomers, Generation X, Millennials (Generation Y), and Generation Z, and each of them seems to constitute a unique group thinking, working, living, and communicating in its specific and age-appropriate way.

Generation Z has gained the reputation of being the most IT-literate group and the one that enjoys the privilege of easily accessible second language education. This kind of education is commonly introduced even at the kindergarten level (e.g., in Poland, it is a norm to introduce second language classes even to three-year-olds). As a result, this is probably the second generation after Millennials (at least in the post-communist countries) that derive pleasure from the unlimited and free choice of second language education, that is getting more and more accessible through web-based courses, programmes, learners and teachers resources, etc. (Dronia, 2020). Thus the average command of foreign language usage (and English specifically) among this particular age group is much higher than it used to be before. However, the importance of the context and hidden meaning for the correct interpretation of a communicative act is crucial in successful L2 communication. Pragmatic competence is undeniably one of the most fundamental yet commonly overlooked competences in the second/foreign language classroom. The status and the dominance of grammatically and lexically-oriented activities are always taken for granted, and their role in developing one's language accuracy is barely questioned. For some reason, though, even relatively advanced non-native speakers of English still find it difficult to produce native-like pragmatically appropriate utterances. Pragmatic competence encompassing such abilities as using the language for different purposes, understanding various intentions, and last but not least, choosing and connecting appropriate utterances in order to create a discourse (Bialystok, 1993) is rarely placed in the limelight of classroom attention.

Thus, such negligence commonly contributes to students' inability to behave appropriately and conform to different social situations requiring both verbal and non-verbal behaviour adaptations strategies (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Dronia & Garczyńska, 2017).

This book intends to shed some light on the problem of second language communication from sociolinguistic, pragmalinguistic, and cross-generational angles. The prime objective, however, is to look closely at the generation that is youngest, and which therefore has not yet been well researched. Generation Z is the generation now entering universities. Theoretically, being young and fully exposed to the second language (English) from early in life, they stand a great chance of becoming successful users of this language. Nevertheless, recent studies (cf. Aleksandrowicz-Pędich, 2019) on advanced users of English indicate that at least in internationalised higher education, the students would probably rely on English as the *lingua franca* (with its grammatical, lexical, and phonological limitations) rather than using its more advanced form, far more appropriate in the context of academic learning.

The primary objective of this study is to describe Generation Z Polish students of English as second language users – not only to assess their language proficiency level, but also their problems in communication. One's communication efficacy, however, rests on the development of pragmatic competence. Therefore, particular emphasis is placed here on describing this process, as it seems that this ability is not sufficiently developed and may even be increasingly neglected. To understand the phases of pragmatic progress among Polish Generation Z advanced users of English, one should have a closer look at many other interconnected factors, such as linguistic mastery and sociocultural variables significantly affecting L2 learning, but also understand the learning context as well as other propensities pertaining to this particular age group.

The studies on cognitive processes employed while performing speech acts are very limited, and to the best of my knowledge, there has been not even one of them conducted on Polish users of English. Thus the longitudinal study described in the empirical part of this book (from Chapter 4 onwards) intends to examine students' pragmatic development by analysing their thoughts while performing requests, reacting to compliments, and apologising. The choice of those speech acts is deliberate, as all of them may evoke face threats. Requests and apologies place themselves in the context of "socially vulnerable situations," where one either has to ask someone for a favour or express regret for causing

some harm. This in itself may be already demanding (even for advanced users of a second language) not only in terms of the choice of appropriate linguistic resources, strategies used, etc., but also in terms of stress and various emotions it conveys. Additionally, the acts of requesting and apologising may be determined by differing cultural norms, constraints, and expectations (cf. Chapter 3). Different cultural attitudes towards a particular speech act are also clearly visible in case of compliments, as not every culture finds it easy to accept them. This idea, together with other cross-cultural pragmatic differences, is discussed in the Chapter 3 and later juxtaposed with the findings gathered from the research project (Chapters 5 and 6). The corpus collected through the implementation of WDCTs and WRVPs enabled us to conduct content and statistical analysis. The former focuses on identifying the most common themes and patterns, and the latter examines the corpus based on some software – LIWC 20 and SAILEE (receptiviti.com) and Grammarly application – and Flesch-Kincaid readability test. The findings gathered allow us to draw further conclusions concerning the development of the pragmatic and linguistic competence of the respondents.

The book is divided into theoretical (Chapters 1–3) and empirical part (Chapters 4–6). The first chapter, which focuses on the nature of communication acts, discusses particular variables that affect the process of information exchange. It also highlights some factors (such as anxiety and inhibition) that pertain only to L2 communication and can, in turn, significantly contribute to overall communication efficiency. Cross-cultural differences affecting communication quality are also discussed therein. English philology students should represent a very high level of achievement (C1 or even C2); that is, they should possess the ability to use the second language for various intents and purposes with both fluency and correctness. Such L2 users should exercise communicative competence and interactional and pragmatic awareness to be able to partake in various cross-cultural encounters. Thus this part intends to describe different proficiency stages that L2 students may represent; however, particular attention is paid to the characteristics of C1 and C2 levels and the description of pragmatic competence. The second chapter characterises age generations in terms of their prevalent features, the values and norms they hold, and their communication preferences. Special attention is paid to Generation Z as this is the cohort whose members took part in the research described in the empirical part of the book. The chapter additionally attempts to provide some educational perspective and describe this age group specifically as second language learners.

The intention of Chapter 3 is to briefly discuss sociopragmatic variables that may significantly contribute to effective second language communication. The chapter starts with some suggestions concerning the future of communication preferences when English has already become a lingua franca, attempting to determine “global” or universal features of politeness that a second language user may rely on in communication. It then moves on to intercultural communication and various barriers that may impact its effectiveness. The chapter primarily focuses on the concept of pragmatic competence and then on cross-cultural differences (Polish and English) visible in some speech acts – requesting, responding to a compliment, and apologising. The aim of this comparison is to juxtapose the ways Polish and English native speakers produce those speech acts and illustrate some potential areas of pragmatic divergence.

Chapter 4 introduces the empirical part of the book. Along with specifying the research objectives and tools used (three questionnaires distributed among Polish students of English belonging to Generation Z, a set of three WDCT scenarios, Written Retrospective Verbal Protocol, and a test in pragmatics), it also provides some biographical information concerning the subjects as well as the process of research implementation.

Chapter 5 presents the data gathered from the respondents and analyses it to assess their general second language level and the development of pragmatic competence specifically. The data obtained from three questionnaires (pre- and post-study questionnaire and a pragmatic comprehension questionnaire) and the results of WDCT scenarios and WRVPs enable us to finally characterise Polish Generation Zers as second language learners. The last part of the book presents general conclusions stemming from the research and verifies the development of the generation’s linguistic and pragmatic competences. Last but not least, it also provides the limitations of this study and some areas for future research.

At the time of writing, the world is in the grips of a pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. This has led to massive disruption in all forms of education, including L2 teaching. Traditional classroom lessons have been replaced by alternative, mainly online forms of teaching such as those taking place via Skype, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom, or simply text-based channels like email. This change of contact form will have significant and far-reaching consequences.

The youngest of generational groups partaking in the research study has already demonstrated a clear preference for online communication channels

(the data gathered before the coronavirus outbreak are displayed in the empirical part of the study). Now, when the whole world is forced to live in a cyber reality, and most forms of teaching have been transferred there, too, one may assume that this preference will only get stronger. Hence it is equally impossible to predict how this situation will affect Generation Z's soft skills and the ability to maintain real-life communication. Unfortunately, sad and ominous as this prospect may seem, we can only hope that the consequences of the lockdowns for face-to-face communication will not be as long-lasting.

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Communicating with Generation Z The Development of Pragmatic Competence of Advanced Polish Users of English

Summary

The intention of this book is to shed some light on the problem of second language communication from both cross-cultural and cross-generational angles and to diagnose communication patterns, opinions, and beliefs on the nature of L2 learning visible among the Generation Z group that is youngest, and which therefore has not yet been well researched. Generation Z is the generation now entering universities and therefore the author's intention is to describe them as second language users of English. Particular emphasis is placed on the development of pragmatic competence (pragmatic production and pragmatic comprehension), as it seems that this ability is not sufficiently developed, and may even be increasingly neglected. In order to assess the ILP development, which, undeniably, contributes to general communication efficacy, it has been decided not only to assess the respondents language level (that is primarily done on the basis of WDCT and WRVPs results and the way they responded to three situations requiring from them a diversified style of discourse), but also their problems in communication. The author of this book is therefore primarily focused on assessing Generation Z's pragmatic awareness, discovering what exactly shapes this perception and drives their learning and communicating mechanisms.

To do so, a three-year research project (longitudinal study) was carried out among the students of the English department of the University of Silesia. The study was divided into stages, each of which served different objectives. The number of tools used at particular phases of the research project was deliberate and aimed at enhancing its reliability by collecting data by means of different research instruments, that is, two self-designed questionnaires, three Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT) scenarios, written retrospective verbal protocol (WRVP), and a test in pragmatics. The study was carried out from June 2018 to March 2021 and included eight stages. The general objectives of this project are twofold:

1. To assess the development of pragmatic competence of Polish students belonging to the age cohort Generation Z ("Generation Zers").

2. To describe this group of students as L2 learners of English.

The book is divided into theoretical (the first three chapters) and empirical (chapter four to six) part. The intention of the first chapter is to briefly characterise the specifics pertaining to second language communication as well as to describe some factors that have a substantial impact on the development of communication efficacy. Secondly, this part also discusses various components of communicative competence together with the features and skills that an advanced second language user will display. The second chapter provides most salient characteristics typically ascribed to given generational cohort. Special attention is paid to the description of Generation Z as this group has been chosen to take part in the longitudinal study presented in

the empirical part of this book. Additionally, the chapter discusses most typical communication channels that particular age group favours most.

The objective of the third chapter is to briefly discuss sociopragmatic variables that may significantly contribute to effective second language communication. The chapter starts with some suggestions concerning the future of communication preferences in the time when English has already become a lingua franca. It then moves on to intercultural communication and various barriers that may impact its effectiveness. It primarily focuses on the concept of pragmatic competence and lastly on cross-cultural differences (Polish and English) visible in some speech acts. It introduces a review of the literature, that is, presents some of the most significant findings pertaining to the speech acts of requesting, complimenting (and especially reacting to compliments) and apologies, and analyses them in terms of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences (primarily Polish-English areas of divergence).

The fourth chapter initiates the empirical part of this book. It starts off with specifying research objectives and then moves on to describing research tools used in this longitudinal study, that is, pre- and post-study questionnaires, WDCT scenarios, WRVP, a test in pragmatics and a pragmatic comprehension questionnaire. It describes the participants of this research project – a group of Generation Z advanced users of English choosing this language as their major and studying at the University of Silesia, Poland. The next section of this book provides the data computed for the needs of both content and statistical analysis. The findings come from five research tools implemented in this research project, that is, pre- and post-study questionnaire, WDCT scenarios, WRVPs, a questionnaire measuring one's pragmatic comprehension and a test in pragmatics. The last chapter is of conclusive character as it summarises this research project with the intention of providing answers to the most salient questions and objectives of this longitudinal study: it characterises Polish Gen Zers as second language learners, tracks the level of the development of pragmatic competence and provides some insights on the condition of their general linguistic skills.

Keywords: pragmatic competence, Generation Z, cross-cultural communication, speech act of requesting, complimenting and apologising

Komunikacja z pokoleniem Z Rozwój kompetencji pragmatycznej polskich zaawansowanych użytkowników języka angielskiego

Streszczenie

Niniejsza publikacja ma na celu przybliżenie aspektów związanych z komunikacją międzykulturową i międzypokoleniową. Szczególna uwaga poświęcona jest jednak generacji Z i to ona została uwzględniona w przeprowadzonym badaniu, opisanym w części praktycznej.

Celem rozdziału pierwszego jest przybliżenie wiadomości na temat procesu komunikacji i czynników mających bezpośredni wpływ na przesyłanie i odbiór wiadomości. Komunikacja omówiona jest tutaj również z punktu widzenia interakcji w języku obcym, często w zróżnicowanych kontekstach socjokulturowych i pojawiających się dodatkowych utrudnień istotnie ograniczających efektywny dialog. Kolejno omówione są kwestie dotyczące różnic poziomów w opanowaniu języka obcego oceniane w odniesieniu do Europejskiego Systemu Kształcenia Językowego, w szczególności dwa ostatnie poziomy (C1 i C2) i kompetencje, które użytkownik języka obcego powinien opanować, reprezentując ten właśnie stopień zaawansowania językowego.

Rozdział drugi przybliży charakterystykę różnych grup pokoleniowych, szczegółowo omawiając pokolenie *baby boomers*, generację X i pokolenie Y (tzw. *millenialsów*). Szczególna uwaga poświęcona jest jednak najmłodszemu z pokoleń, jeszcze studiującemu, ale również już obecnemu na rynku pracy – pokoleniu Z. Autorka omawia nie tylko atrybuty, zalety i wady poszczególnych grup wiekowych, lecz przede wszystkim skupia się na sposobie, w jaki dane pokolenie komunikuje się ze światem. Komunikacja omówiona jest tutaj zarówno pod kątem ulubionych i często wybieranych przez daną grupę kanałów komunikacyjnych, jak również pewnych ograniczeń z tym związanych; narastających, szczególnie w najmłodszych grupach problemów z komunikacją interpersonalną itp.

Rozdział trzeci skupia się na czynnikach socjokulturowych determinujących efektywną komunikację. Rozdział rozpoczyna się krótkim omówieniem obecnych opinii dotyczących przyszłości komunikacji w języku angielskim, pełniącego obecnie rolę *lingua franca*. Następnie omówione zostaje zagadnienie kompetencji komunikacyjnej i pragmatycznej, oraz etapów rozwoju i możliwości oceny tej ostatniej u osób posługujących się językiem angielskim jako językiem drugim. Podsumowaniem tej części jest krótkie zestawienie różnic pragmatycznych pomiędzy językiem polskim i angielskim, przedstawiające się w realizacji trzech aktów mowy – prośzenia, komplementowania i przeproszenia.

Część praktyczna niniejszej publikacji rozpoczyna się od rozdziału czwartego. Rozdział definiuje cele badawcze, a także charakteryzuje zastosowane narzędzia, jak również sposób organizacji badania, jego przebieg oraz sposób zbierania i analizowania danych. Głównym celem badania było zebranie informacji umożliwiających ocenę sposobu komunikowania się pokolenia Z w języku angielskim i czynników na to wpływających. Ocena efektywności komunikacyjnej

oparta jest tu przede wszystkim na stopniu rozwoju kompetencji pragmatycznej i językowej respondentów – 100 osób studiujących filologię angielską na Uniwersytecie Śląskim należących do pokolenia Z. Grupa ta wzięła udział w badaniu podłużnym (*longitudinal study*) trwającym od 2018 do 2021 roku i mającym na celu weryfikację stopnia opanowania kompetencji pragmatycznej studentów – zarówno kompetencji związanej z rozumieniem (*pragmatic comprehension*), jak również produkcją (*pragmatic production*). Materiał zgromadzony podczas badania pozwolił na ocenę rozwoju tej kompetencji i wyciągnięcie wniosków dotyczących omawianej grupy i ich charakterystykę jako użytkowników języka angielskiego.

W badaniu zastosowano pięć narzędzi badawczych – dwa kwestionariusze przeprowadzone wśród uczestników przed rozpoczęciem i po jego zamknięciu (*pre- i post-study questionnaire*), kwestionariusz mierzący poziom rozumienia pragmatycznego, trzy scenariusze scenek sytuacyjnych (WDCT), protokół retrospekcyjny (WRVP) i test z wprowadzenia do pragmatyki. Dodatkowo korpus uzyskany z WDCT i WRVP posłużył do oceny poziomu zaawansowania językowego badanej grupy, przy jednoczesnym wykorzystaniu go w analizie statystycznej z zastosowaniem oprogramowania LIWC 20, Receptiviti i aplikacji Grammarly.

Analiza odpowiedzi uzyskanych z kwestionariusza rozpoczynającego i kończącego badanie miała na celu ustalenie najczęściej wybieranych kanałów komunikacyjnych, problemów związanych z nauką języka angielskiego, a także opinii studentów na temat procesu uczenia się tego języka. Dodatkowo Autorka chciała również ocenić poziom rozwoju kompetencji pragmatycznej uczestników badania (stan wiedzy deklarowanej), ich podejście do poprawności językowej, a także sprawdzić, czy w okresie trzech lat studiów ich podejście i świadomość językowo-pragmatyczna się zmieniła.

Kolejnym istotnym narzędziem badawczym był WDCT (*discourse completion task*) wymagający od respondentów reakcji na trzy sytuacje, z którymi byli konfrontowani: poproszenia o pożyczenie długopisu, reakcji na komplement i przeproszenia za spóźnienie. Analiza uzyskanych odpowiedzi miała na celu oszacowanie faktycznego poziomu rozwinięcia kompetencji pragmatycznej (w szczególności pragmalingwistycznej) studentów deklarujących nie niższy niż C1 poziom biegłości językowej. Protokół retrospekcyjny pozwolił zaś nie tylko na zebranie korpusu umożliwiającego kolejną analizę oceny poziomu językowego badanych, lecz przede wszystkim procesów myślowych, strategii i problemów, na które napotykali respondenci, formułując opisane już wcześniej trzy akty mowy. Kwestionariusz rozumienia sytuacji pragmatycznych pozwolił na ocenę umiejętności socjopragmatycznych studentów, a test z wprowadzenia do pragmatyki stanowił swoiste podsumowanie całego badania i kolejną możliwość weryfikacji ich wiedzy z zakresu pragmatyki. Ostatni rozdział niniejszej publikacji to wnioski płynące z badań.

Słowa kluczowe: kompetencja pragmatyczna, pokolenie Z, komunikacja międzykulturowa, akty mowy – proszenie, reakcja na komplement i przeproszanie

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