

***Intercultural pragmatics*, Istvan Kecskes. 2013.**
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Istvan Kecskes is “the internationally renowned forefather of intercultural pragmatics” (Laurence Horn). He is also the distinguished professor and researcher who has offered this ever more globalized world an invaluable approach to communication, which is in its turn becoming increasingly intercultural.

Intercultural Pragmatics is the first book on this fast-growing field. It stands out through “its multilingual, intercultural, socio-cognitive, and discourse-segment (rather than just utterance) perspective” (Kecskes 2013: 1), revisiting and enriching some of the major tenets of pragmatics.

The first chapter (“Current pragmatic theories”) presents the theoretical foundations of *intercultural pragmatics* and describes its relationship to other subfields of pragmatics. By virtue of its having stemmed from Gricean thought – which has always constituted its major source of development – this chapter also provides an overview of present-day research in pragmatics, shedding much light on the major tenets of the Gricean approaches. Mainstream pragmatics is dominated by the monolingual approach. Nevertheless, ever more people worldwide display multilingual competence and resort to multilingual language use. Their communicative encounters become more and more intercultural. Therefore, the new subfield of pragmatics, i.e. *intercultural pragmatics*, theoretically founded on the *socio-cognitive approach*, has emerged to focus on the use of the language system in “social encounters between human beings who have different first languages, communicate in a common language, and, usually, represent different cultures” (Kecskes 2010).

The theoretical frame for *intercultural pragmatics* is the *socio-cognitive approach* (SCA), which makes the subject of the second chapter, entitled “The socio-cognitive perspective”. This theory makes a “dialectical synthesis” (Kecskes 2013: 44) of the equally important *positivism* – in which procedural measures prevail on interpretive perspectives, the meaning being embedded in words and symbols, rather than in the perceiving mind, and *social constructivism* – in which knowledge and meaning are socially constructed. The socio-cognitive approach integrates these complementary views into a holistic epistemology. According to

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Kecskes, the interplay of the three types of knowledge in meaning construction and comprehension, i.e. *collective prior knowledge*, *individual prior knowledge*, and *actual situationally created knowledge*, is of the utmost importance for the socio-cognitive approach. Likewise, SCA harmoniously combines the “intention-based, *pragmatic view of cooperation* with the *cognitive view of egocentrism*” (Kecskes 2013: 47). In this chapter, the author identifies the driving force of intercultural pragmatics, to wit *blending*, in whose light the interlocutors’ prior experience is combined with the actual situational experience. The aforementioned aspects advocate for the holistic nature of this field of research. *Pragmatic competence*, which is primarily a developmental issue, holds an important role in second and foreign language use and intercultural communication. This subject is thoroughly discussed throughout the third chapter. Chomsky (1978) introduced the distinction between *grammatical competence*, related to form and meaning, and *pragmatic competence*, which refers to the “knowledge of conditions and manner of appropriate use, in conformity with various purposes”. Kecskes, keeping his signature balanced and comprehensive view, posits that pragmatic competence or communicative competence and intercultural communicative competence are inseparable. In this context, he emphasizes the “interplay of pragma-linguistic resources for conveying communicative acts and socio-pragmatic factors assuring social appropriateness of communicative behaviour is especially important in intercultural communication” (Kecskes 2013: 64).

More evidently in the fourth chapter (“Encyclopaedic knowledge, cultural models, and interculturality”), the book is logically constructed and deals systematically with most aspects afferent to Intercultural Pragmatics, providing a comprehensive guide to this crucial field in a “translingual” world, as well as building a genuine language-philosophy system. In the light of the socio-cognitive approach, *linguistic knowledge* (which covers the idiosyncrasies of particular words) and *encyclopaedic knowledge* (which refers to their underlying concepts), substantiated in the traditional division between lexicon and ontology, are two inseparable sides of the *conceptual system*. The concepts of cultural models and interculturality are gradually introduced in the larger context of culture. The author is also shedding light on the notions of crossing and merging cultures, according to the positivist (crossing) and constructivist (merging) approaches. From the viewpoint of Gumperz and Roberts (1991), culture is no longer considered a “transcendent identity”, but “cultural phenomena in speech are contingent, situational, and emergent in nature”. *Interculturality* is the concept at the heart of Intercultural Pragmatics, being defined as “a situationally emergent and co-constructed phenomenon, that relies both on relatively definable cultural norms and models as well as situationally evolving features” (Kecskes 2013: 96). Therefore, interculturalities are ad hoc creations, which are produced in the communicative process, being both synergetic and blended.

The content of the book is naturally constructed from simpler to more complex, yet interrelated notions, which are integrated into a harmonious whole. The fifth chapter (“Formulaic language use”) focuses on *formulaic language*, which plays a unique role in intercultural communication. In intercultural pragmatics, these prefabricated lexical units are considered “essential parts of pragmatic competence, reflections of native-like behaviour and often express cultural values, social expectations, and speaker attitude” (Kecskes 2013: 105). They are holistically stored and retrieved. More specifically, formulaic expressions cover multiword collocations, which function as a single semantic unit. *Situation-bound utterances* stand out within the *formulaic continuum* that contains grammatical units, fixed semantic units, pragmatic expressions and idioms. Creativity in communicative behaviour is conditioned by the appropriate use of formulaic language. As highlighted by Kecskes, this issue is important for intercultural pragmatics, because formulaic expressions develop psychological validity/ saliency as a consequence not only of “frequency and exposure to the language use”, but also of “immersion in the culture” and “preference of the non-native speaker” (Kecskes 2013: 109). Three intertwined factors, i.e. context, common ground and salience, generally referred to as the “big three”, are of the utmost importance for intercultural pragmatics, by virtue of their reuniting the individual and societal features of intercultural interaction.

Chapter 6 is committed to *context*, viewed in the larger context of linguistics, as well as from various perspectives. From the broader perspective of linguistics, context covers “any factor - linguistic, epistemic, physical, social, and so on - that affects the actual interpretation of signs and expressions” (Kecskes 2013: 128). In the light of the socio-cognitive approach, context is seen as a dynamic construct, which reflects two inseparable and interwoven facets of world knowledge, namely *prior experience*, substantiated in declarative knowledge, and *current, actual situational experience*, substantiated in procedural knowledge. A recurrent theme of the book is the interplay of *prior context* and *actual situational context*, which is resorted to throughout the dynamic communicative process, with a view to constructing meaning and common ground.

In this context, it is worth mentioning the *dynamic model of meaning* proposed by Kecskes (2008), which is a genuine theory of meaning, characterized by topicality, high relevance and usefulness, amid an increasingly intercultural communication. It postulates that meaning is the result of the interplay between the *speaker’s private context* – which is encoded in lexical units incorporating both core knowledge and individual-specific knowledge, and is formulated in utterances – and the *hearer’s private context*, in the *actual situational context* as understood by interlocutors.

The author commits the seventh chapter of his book to the second pivotal factor of the aforementioned “big three”, namely to *common ground*. Clark (2009) defines common ground as the “sum of all the information that people assume they share”, covering “world views, shared values, beliefs and situational context”. This notion relies on similar prior contexts, comparable prior experience and

complementary understanding of the actual situational context. Of our days, the dominant approaches to common ground are the *pragmatic view*, in whose light common ground is considered a “category of specialized mental representations that exists in the mind a priori to the actual communication process” (Kecskes 2013: 155) and which reckons communication an intention-directed practice, and the *cognitive view*, from whose perspective common ground is considered an “emergent property of ordinary memory processes” and which reckons communication a “trial-and-error, try-again process, co-constructed by the participants” (Kecskes 2013: 155).

In this context, intercultural pragmatics relies on the socio-cognitive view, in whose framework, “assumed common ground (both core and emergent common ground) works as a dynamically changing background on which the interplay of intention and attention occurs and communication takes place” (Kecskes 2013: 164). The above-mentioned sides of common ground, are in a dialectical relationship; *core common ground* basically covers the common knowledge and belief systems characteristic of a certain speech community, is relatively static, diachronically changing, whereas *emergent common ground* refers to the particularized knowledge created throughout the communicative process and triggered by the actual situational context, is contingent on the actual situation, synchronically changing. *Formulaic language*, a phenomenon at the core of this book, due to its representativeness for the ways of thinking of a speed community and to its function of group identifying means, is a significant indicator of common ground, as demonstrated by Kecskes (2013: 173).

In chapter 8 (“Salience”), the third element of the foregoing cohesive threesome is approached. In pragmatic terms, salient information refers to the information assumed by the speaker to hold the central place in the hearer’s consciousness, when producing the utterance. The distinction between *linguistic salience* and *perceptual salience* originates in motivation, which is external to language itself. In pragmatics, the former is basically “salience of lexical meanings that is defined according to its consolidation in the mental lexicon” (Kecskes 2013: 177) and the latter stems from the “perception of the relative prominence of some external features of an object” (Kecskes 2013: 177). Research results in intercultural pragmatics have highlighted the bidirectional influence between the two aspects of salience. The *socio-cognitive approach*, based on Giora’s *Graded Salience Hypothesis*, identifies three types of salience, to wit *inherent*, *collective* and *emergent situational salience*. The first is characterized as “natural preference built into the general conceptual and linguistic knowledge of the speaker” (Kecskes 2013: 184), the second is “shared with the other members of the speech community” (Kecskes 2013: 184) and the third refers to the “salience of specific objects and linguistic elements in the context of language production” (Kecskes 2013: 184). Likewise, it is worth detailing Giora’s *Graded Salience Hypothesis* (Giora 2003), which has required the revision of the *Gricean standard pragmatic model*, in that it postulates the priority of the salient meaning over the literal meaning, in the context of the discussion on literal meaning and non-literal meaning. Other two phenomena

emphasized by research in intercultural pragmatics are the crucial role of salience not only in comprehension, but also in production; as well as the specificity of salience to both language and culture.

The universal categories of *politeness* and *impoliteness* make the subject of the ninth chapter. The author invites his readership into this almost uncharted territory from the perspective of intercultural communication. He starts by revisiting politeness and impoliteness theories. He continues by emphasizing that this phenomenon is viewed in a different way in the light of intracultural and intercultural communication, respectively. The focus of attention is therewith turned towards intercultural pragmatics and its perspective on the issue under consideration. In this context, he discusses the influential factors for the speaker in making his utterance sound polite or impolite and, respectively, for the hearer in processing the utterance as polite or impolite. The author ends his incursion into this sensitive topic with the mention of paralinguistic means and of a unique occurrence of (im)politeness, i.e. “anti-normative politeness” (Mugford 2013). Attempts have been made to interweave two recent lines followed by politeness and impoliteness theories, to wit *first-order politeness and impoliteness*, based on the commonsense notion, derived from the discursive turn and relying on the notion of communities of practice; and *second-order politeness and impoliteness*, based on “Brown and Levinson’s individualistically and cognitively focused formulation of face” (Bargiela-Chiappini 2003), which views “politeness as face work, i.e., as mitigation of face-threatening acts” (Kecskes 2013: 202).

In *intercultural pragmatics*, the individual factors and the socio-cultural, contextual factors are equally important. As argued within the *socio-cognitive approach*, “intercultural (im)politeness research should integrate the micro level and macro level perspective on language, culture, and interaction by postulating that interlocutors, to some extent, rely and/ or are under the influence of their own cultural models, norms and conventions (macro) while co-constructing interculturalities in the communicative process” (Kecskes 2013: 206). In terms of the culture-specific nature of (im)politeness, the intercultural interactants should observe the cultural models, norms and expectations of their partners, as well as of the target language speech community.

The book ends with a chapter (“Methods of analysis”) on *research methodology*. This summary is meant to help researchers identify and select the most efficient method within the paradigm. Given that intercultural pragmatics is discourse-segment-centred, the author emphasizes that the main focus of whatever selected method for analyzing intercultural discourse ought to be on the discursive process. The research conducted in intercultural pragmatics primarily benefits from four forms of data collection and analysis, to wit conversational analysis, corpus methods, discourse segment analysis and computer-mediated communication. The common features shared by the various research tools, data collection methods and data analysis resorted to in intercultural pragmatics are threefold. First, we should consider that the focus of intercultural pragmatics is language use in oral, written

and computer-mediated communication. Second, considering that “the creativity of lingua franca is detectable on the discourse level rather than utterance level” (Kecskes 2007) we ought to analyze discourse segments. Third, the methodological approach should have a reconstructive nature and move “from the sequentially ordered utterances to discourse segment structures and back”, following a “hermeneutic interpretative strategy” (Kecskes 2013: 220).

The first book-length work on this field of research has succeeded in calling attention to the importance of linguistic pragmatics for the intercultural pragmatics and to the adequacy of the this new dimension in clarifying problematic, misrepresented or neglected issues in the field of pragmatics. The book successfully fulfils its goal of supplementing the Gricean approach from a multilingual and intercultural perspective, as well as providing novel and challenging insights into this consequential field.

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