



## Book Review

**Gerrard Mugford.** 2023. *Towards a new pedagogy for teaching foreign language politeness: Halliday's model and approaches to politeness*, 1st edn., 176 pp. New York, NY & London: Routledge. Hardback ISBN 9781032351643. Price Hb €128.00; Pb €38.39.

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This volume provides a broad and in-depth overview of the developments in current politeness research in a comprehensible manner. It aims to show how communicative strategies, customarily used to promote or maintain social harmony in interaction, can be taught in a school context. In this pedagogically motivated study, Mugford aims to help foreign language (FL) learners use assets and resources to succeed in target language (TL) interaction. Mugford examines how FL users establish, develop, consolidate and maintain social and transactional relationships in their study. He explores “how pedagogical intervention can help FL users implement practices that will allow them to participate and react in both socially acceptable and individualistically empowering ways” (p. vii). Halliday's (1973, 1997) metafunctional language model is used to explore how FL users can approach politeness and cultural practices in terms of *prosocial*, *interpersonal*, and *contested* politeness. These are, in turn, examined in relation to Halliday's ideational function, interpersonal function, and textual function.

Chapter 1 introduces FL politeness, discusses its meaning and positioning, and provides a practical definition. The study adopts a critical perspective, and argues that “FL politeness should be studied in its own right and not as an appendage to general language studies” (p. 21). Contrary to the conventional idea that learners should imitate the politeness patterns and practices of the TL, Mugford holds that learners should hold on to their own understanding, history, and experience of politeness as acquired in the L1, and express their individuality, showing politeness in their own ways. The author aims to raise FL learners' consciousness and critical language awareness to implement active, judicious, and critical social action, rather than just indiscriminately performing TL practices.

In Chapter 2, the author argues that politeness is not an accessory that merely serves to soften communication, but is a productive social action plan that can help FL speakers interact more effectively, show their individuality, react to the needs and feelings of others, and build meaningful relationships with their interactants. Unlike addressee-focused politeness, Mugford sees FL speakers in a much stronger position

where they can follow established politeness practices, and adopt, modify or even reject TL politeness resources. He discusses the degrees of FL politeness, including false equivalent, normative politeness, risk politeness, and non-politeness. He then examines the concept of cultural capital and suggests that interactants bring their own cultural capital to TL interactions, emphasizing the role of declarative knowledge, automatization, and procedural knowledge (Taguchi and Roever 2017). Nonverbal dimensions of politeness are examined, expanding on the six functions of nonverbal behaviour (Gabbott and Hogg 2001). The author suggests that FL speakers should conduct an ethnographic study of politeness behavior in a particular community. He also discusses three approaches to politeness studies: *social-norm*, *addressee-focused* and *co-constructed (interactional)* politeness. He also outlines a programme for teaching/learning politeness, which includes the interlocutor's presentation of self, the level of politeness commitment they wish to display, and politeness resources and assets they can access and employ.

Chapter 3 addresses how FL speakers can use *prosocial politeness* resources to interact in socially expected and acceptable ways. In this chapter, the concept of *prosocial politeness* is understood through Halliday's (1973, 1997) ideational function of language, which embraces both social norms and addressee-focused politeness, and offers a way to examine the content of politeness utterances and encounters. Mugford examines "lay" constructs behind prosocial politeness that sheds light on how FL users engage in TL politeness. He recommends that FL users consider their personal understanding of politeness, their motivation to be polite, established behaviour norms, and their own experiences with politeness, when approaching TL politeness. He examines ways to support FL users in using conventional politeness and cultural behaviour while also giving them the freedom to choose how they interact with TL partners. This chapter ends with suggestions on how FL users can utilise relevant stories, experiences, and first-hand knowledge of social politeness from their L1.

Chapter 4 delves into the interpersonal dimension of politeness, characterised by its dynamism, vigor, and unpredictability. The author finds that Halliday's interpersonal function of language offers insights into understanding this active, negotiable, and reconstructive dimension. He argues that it can be described in terms of relationship, engagement and positioning, which can help speakers "adopt a more functional position in achieving satisfactory interpersonal relationships rather than just relying on predetermined conventional language" (p. 93). The discussion on practicing interpersonal politeness highlights three strategies: *investment*, *doing politeness*, and *relational maintenance*. Investment means that speakers build on their knowledge and experience in terms of cultural capital, allowing them to adhere to the prosocial politeness, actively engage in the interaction, and foster a sense of self-worth. Doing politeness means that speakers actively relate, engage, and

position themselves, described in terms of affiliation, support, and empathy. Relational maintenance is explained using three categories: rapport, enhancement and achievement. The chapter ends with a detailed introduction to the author's research on Mexican speakers of English as an FL in Mexico.

Chapter 5 centres on *contested politeness*, which "involves interactants inflecting on, questioning and challenging politeness practices" (p. 115). He first analyzes structured politeness using Halliday's textual function of language and the concept of genre. He then argues that FL users need to develop a critical language awareness to enable them to interact on a more equal basis with TL interactants. They can try to reflect on, challenge, and overcome potentially submissive politeness practices, and look for new and creative ways to express difference and uniqueness. Next, Mugford claims that a "third place" (Kramsch 1993: 234) may offer FL interactants with opportunities to resist foreign language politeness practices, and then explains three ways by which FL users can develop their individualised practices, and, if necessary, develop modes of resistance and opposition towards TL politeness practices and customs. Finally, the author presents his emic approach study on how Mexican FL users contest TL politeness practices, showing the extent to which users adhere to TL politeness norms, and how they develop their individualistic ways of acting linguistically and culturally.

Chapter 6 introduces a foreign language politeness pedagogy to enhance learners' pragmatic ability in politeness. Mugford argues that a student-centred rather than a teacher-led approach should develop FL users' language awareness, and help them achieve their social, interpersonal and personal objectives. For this reason, he introduces Carter and McCarthy's (1995) *Illustration – Interaction – Induction* mode, and explains these three concepts and their implications for FL interactants.

The author presents methods to support teachers in teaching politeness and guiding FL speakers in polite interactions. Regarding interpersonal politeness, the aspects of *relating*, *engagement*, and *positionality* are considered. Contested politeness can be expressed in terms of opposition, resistance, proactive appropriation, and individual agency. In addition, Mugford proposes four types of pedagogical activities for teachers, namely illustrative events, cultural capsules, cultural clusters, and critical incidents, which can be considered pedagogical resources to help FL users understand and prepare for TL relational work. Finally, the author argues that nonverbal behavior can send unintended messages and should be included in relational work studies.

To summarize, this monograph contributes to the teaching of FL politeness in terms of the following points. Firstly, it is praiseworthy that Mugford rejects the traditionally widely held view on politeness that FL learners should adhere to the TL cultural norm and conform to the social behavior of others. He draws on Halliday's metafunctional language model to develop a methodological framework for

politeness studies, which, together with a cluster of concepts, provides a framework for analysing politeness. He argues that politeness is a valuable asset for developing successful prosocial, interpersonal, and contested politeness, and learners should focus on their individual needs rather than adhering to prescribed politeness. Rather than merely adhering to the norms and practices of the TL community, interlocutors should be supported in seeking out opportunities to express their individuality.

Secondly, the research methodology of this book is another striking feature. Much of the research on politeness is conducted from a TL-centric perspective. Instead, Mugford takes an emic approach based on the participants' experiences, using data from face-to-face interviews, questionnaires, and narratives. He conducts a descriptive analysis of politeness phenomena, using material from Mexican studies. This innovative study tackles politeness research in a highly practical manner. It examines politeness in interactions in the vein of Spencer-Oatey and Kádár (2021).

Thirdly, an asset of this study is that it is pedagogically motivated. It sheds light on the unexplored interface between politeness and foreign language teaching/ pedagogy. The author analyses the consequences of his findings for assisting FL users in understanding politeness, and acquiring cultural capital to express themselves authentically in TL interactions. To this end, in Chapter 6, the author provides several suggestions for teachers.

The book also has some weaknesses. The profusion of quotations, for instance, sometimes complicates understanding. Unrelated quotations not integrated into the context disrupt the author's arguments (e.g., p. 75). Moreover, the intertitles do not contribute to a better understanding of the author's arguments, except for the chapter titles. In addition, the framework proposed by the author is only suitable for high-level FL users and not for first or intermediate levels.

To summarize, this monograph makes a valuable contribution to the academic study of (im)politeness. It takes a theoretical and practical approach to exploring how people establish and maintain good relationships, and aims to develop a new pedagogy for teaching politeness in foreign language teaching. It is targeted at language educators and offers a new perspective on politeness for scholars from the fields of pragmatics, sociolinguistics, TESOL, and cultural studies.

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