

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

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Competence of Advanced  
Polish Users of English**

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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.  
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# Table of Contents

11 \_\_\_\_\_ Introduction

## CHAPTER 1

### **Communicating in the Second Language**

17 \_\_\_\_\_ 1.1 The Nature of L2 Communication

19 \_\_\_\_\_ 1.1.1 *Communication Act*

23 \_\_\_\_\_ Channel

25 \_\_\_\_\_ Noise

27 \_\_\_\_\_ Language Functions

29 \_\_\_\_\_ 1.1.2 *Acquisition vs Learning Distinction*

33 \_\_\_\_\_ 1.1.3 *First Language Development*

34 \_\_\_\_\_ 1.1.4 *Second Language Development*

37 \_\_\_\_\_ 1.1.5 *Anxiety and Inhibition*

41 \_\_\_\_\_ 1.1.6 *Willingness to Communicate and Motivation*

44 \_\_\_\_\_ 1.2 Communicative Competence

47 \_\_\_\_\_ 1.3 Characteristics of an Advanced L2 User of English

55 \_\_\_\_\_ 1.4 Recapitulation

## CHAPTER 2

### **Communicating across Generations**

57 \_\_\_\_\_ 2.1 Identifying Generations

62 \_\_\_\_\_ 2.2 Communicating across Age Generations

66 \_\_\_\_\_ 2.2.1 *Telephone Communication and Texting*

69 \_\_\_\_\_ 2.2.2 *Email Communication*

71 \_\_\_\_\_ 2.2.3 *Face-to-Face Communication*

73 \_\_\_\_\_ 2.3 Describing Generation Z

77 \_\_\_\_ 2.4 Generation Z and Their Learning Preferences

80 \_\_\_\_ 2.5 Recapitulation

### CHAPTER 3

## Communicating Effectively in Various Sociopragmatic Contexts

81 \_\_\_\_ 3.1 The Future of Communication Preferences: English as a Global  
Language

86 \_\_\_\_ 3.2 “Global” Politeness

89 \_\_\_\_ 3.3 Barriers in Intercultural Communication

91 \_\_\_\_\_ 3.3.1 *Nonverbal Cross-cultural Differences*

96 \_\_\_\_\_ 3.3.2 *Paraverbal Aspects and Conversational Rules*

99 \_\_\_\_\_ 3.3.3 *Attitude and Stereotypes*

101 \_\_\_\_\_ 3.3.4 *Communication Style Differences*

104 \_\_\_\_ 3.4 Pragmatic Competence

111 \_\_\_\_\_ 3.4.1 *Cross-cultural Pragmatic Variations*

115 \_\_\_\_\_ 3.4.2 *Cross-cultural (Polish-English) Speech Acts Differences:  
Literature Overview*

115 \_\_\_\_\_ Requests

123 \_\_\_\_\_ *Polish vs English Requesting Strategies – Syntactic Downgraders*

125 \_\_\_\_\_ *Polish vs English Requesting Strategies – Lexical Downgraders*

127 \_\_\_\_\_ Compliment Responses

127 \_\_\_\_\_ *Responding to Compliments*

129 \_\_\_\_\_ *Polish vs English Reaction to Compliments*

131 \_\_\_\_\_ Apologies

134 \_\_\_\_\_ *Polish vs English Apologies*

136 \_\_\_\_ 3.4.3 *Development of Pragmatic Competence*

143 \_\_\_\_ 3.4.4 *Measuring Pragmatic Competence: The Case of Speech Acts*

147 \_\_\_\_ 3.5 Interactional Competence

149 \_\_\_\_ 3.6 Recapitulation

## CHAPTER 4

**The Scheme of the Research Study**

151	_____	4.1	Research Objectives
154	_____	4.2	Research Tools and Procedures
156	_____	4.2.1	<i>Questionnaire</i>
160	_____	4.2.2	<i>Discourse Completion Task</i>
164	_____	4.2.3	<i>Retrospective Verbal Protocol</i>
165	_____	4.2.4	<i>Test</i>
166	_____	4.3	Sample Selection
168	_____	4.4	Research Implementation: Stages of the Research Project
169	_____	4.5	Content Analysis
169	_____	4.6	Statistical Analysis
173	_____	4.7	Recapitulation

## CHAPTER 5

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

175	_____	5.1	Pre-study Questionnaire
175	_____	5.1.1	<i>Presentation of the Results</i>
192	_____	5.1.2	<i>Recapitulation</i>
194	_____	5.2	Discourse Completion Task – Analysis
194	_____	5.2.1	<i>Requests</i>
200	_____	5.2.2	<i>Compliments</i>
203	_____	5.2.3	<i>Apologies</i>
206	_____	5.3	Written Retrospective Verbal Protocol (WRVP)
207	_____	5.3.1	<i>Statistical Analysis</i>
207	_____		Requests
210	_____		Compliments
215	_____		Apologies
221	_____	5.3.2	<i>Content Analysis</i>
221	_____		Requests
229	_____		Compliments
231	_____		Apologies
235	_____	5.3.3	<i>Students' Perceptions on the Difficulty of Speech Acts</i>
239	_____	5.4	Pragmatic Comprehension Questionnaire

253	—	5.5	A Test in Pragmatics
255	—	5.6	Post-study Questionnaire
269	—	5.7	Recapitulation

## CHAPTER 6

**Concluding Remarks**

271	—	6.1	Polish Generation Zers as Second Language Users
276	—	6.2	Polish Gen Zers: Self-reported vs Manifested Development of Pragmatic Competence
288	—	6.3	Polish Gen Zers: Self-reported vs Manifested Development of Linguistic Competence
291	—	6.4	Limitations of the Study
293	—	6.5	Recapitulation
295	—		Appendix
295	—		Questionnaire 1 (Pre- and Post-study Questionnaire)
302	—		Questionnaire 2: Assessing Pragmatic Comprehension
305	—		Discourse Completion Task
307	—		Written Retrospective Verbal Report
308	—		Test: Introduction to Pragmatics
312	—		LIWC 20 Report
312	—		<i>Pragmatic Comprehension Test: Open Question Data</i>
316	—		<i>WRVP. Requests</i>
320	—		<i>WRVP. Compliments</i>
323	—		<i>WRVP. Apologies</i>
326	—		<i>WRVP. Difficult and Easy Speech Act</i>
329	—		References
329	—		<i>Bibliography</i>
356	—		<i>Webgraphy</i>
363	—		Author Index
371	—		Summary
373	—		Streszczenie



## 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.

# Author Index

## A

Adams Marilyn 144  
Adorno Theodore 100  
Agraval AJ 71, 72  
Ahuvia Aaron 169  
Ai Haiyang 55  
Akarika Daniel 20  
Alanen Riikka 100  
Aleksandrowicz-Pędich Lucyna 12, 90,  
272, 275  
Allen Louis 21  
Almaney Adnan 92  
Al Saraj Taghreed 32, 39  
Alton Larry 66, 70, 71  
Alwan AJ 92  
Appadurai Arjun 81  
Arabski Janusz 31, 32  
Ariel Mira 104, 281  
Arora Drlokeshi 74  
Austin John 115  
Axtell Roger 95  
Azarnoosh Maryam 19

## B

Bachman Lyle 46  
Baker Susan 41  
Bamford Julian 43  
Bardovi-Harlig Kathleen 105, 137, 138,  
161, 162, 274  
Barron Anne 160  
Bartłomiejczyk Magdalena 115  
Beaven Mark 58  
Beaver David 171  
Beebe Leslie 139, 162, 199  
Bejtkovský Jiri 72, 73, 77  
Beltrán-Palanques Vincent 164, 206  
Bencsik Andrea 58, 76, 77  
Bendas-Jacob Orit 37  
Benson Phil 100  
Berge Zane 73  
Bernat Eva 100  
Bialystok Ellen 11, 19, 105, 165, 275  
Bizumić Boris 100  
Blackburn Kate 171  
Bloom-Kulka Shoshana 141, 200  
Blum-Kulka Shoshana 114, 116, 118, 119,  
121, 123, 124, 133, 152, 160, 196, 198, 279  
Blum Shoshana 160  
Bodman Jean 137, 160  
Boyd Ryan 171  
Brown Horace 27, 30, 33, 37, 38, 40, 44,  
46, 93, 94, 99, 100, 102, 103, 106, 165  
Brown James 156, 160  
Brown Penelope 110, 114, 117, 120, 121, 127,  
149  
Burluson Brant 19  
Burnard Pamela 169  
Burt Marina 34

- Bygate Martin 18  
Byram Michael 50
- C**
- Cameron Lynne 142  
Campbell Robin 45, 104  
Canagarajah Suresh 81, 82, 83, 84, 85  
Canale Michael 19, 21, 26, 45, 46, 47, 104, 106, 137, 199  
Carroll Bernard 47  
Chang Yuh-Fang 105  
Charos Catherine 42  
Chen Bryan Gin-ge 151, 281  
Chen Bryan Gin-Ge 281, 288  
Chen Guo-Ming 90  
Chester Eric 11, 63, 64, 69, 71, 72  
Chomsky Noam 31, 45  
Choraih Mohamed 105, 151  
Cilliers Elizelle 78  
Clifford Ray 55  
Cohen Andrew 12, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 111, 128, 135, 144, 145, 146, 163, 173, 239, 240, 241, 250, 251, 287, 293  
Cohen Louis 157  
Cohn Michael 211, 243  
Collier Virginia 37  
Collins Allan 144  
Collins Laura 82  
Conrod Sarah 41  
Cook Vickie 72, 77  
Cook Vivian 81  
Corder Stephen 45, 107  
Crystal David 82, 84, 105, 152  
Csobanka Zsuzsa 75  
Cummings Martha 162  
Cyluk Agnieszka 161
- D**
- Daft Richard 23  
Daley Christine 39  
Daukseviuite Irene 78  
Day Richard 43  
Dąbrowska Anna 135  
de Bot Kees 142  
DeFleur Melvin 92  
DeKeyser Robert 18  
Dewaele Jean-Marc 32, 39, 82  
Dickson David 65  
Dolot Anna 73, 75, 80  
Dörnei Zoltan 19  
Dörneyi Zoltan 182  
Dörnyei Zoltan 156, 166, 168  
Dronia Iwona 11, 12, 25, 41, 64, 71, 105, 198  
Dulay Heidi 34
- E**
- Eckert Penelope 137  
Economidou-Kogetsidis Maria 121  
Eisenstein Mirriam 137, 160  
Ekman Paul 93  
Ellis Rod 17, 18, 27, 29, 38, 107, 109, 111, 112, 139, 141, 276, 277, 287, 293  
Ericsson Anders 164  
Eslami Zohreh 143
- F**
- Faerch Claus 124  
Færch Claus 107  
Feiertag Jeff 73  
Félix-Brasdefer César 146, 164  
Fienemann Jutta 86, 87, 88  
Firth Alan 85

- Fordyce Kenneth 123  
 Franklin Peter 278  
 Friedman Issac 37  
 Friesen Wallace 93  
 Fromkin Victoria 33  
 Fujimura-Wilson Kayo 127, 130  
 Fukazawa Seiji 123  
 Fukushima Saeko 115, 117, 119
- G**
- Gabillon Zehra 100  
 Gaidhani Shilpa 74, 75  
 Galaczi Lynda 148, 149  
 Garcia Paula 151  
 Garczyńska Beata 12, 105  
 Gardner Robert 38, 43  
 Gass Susan 40  
 Gibson Robert 27, 89, 96, 97, 99, 100,  
 104  
 Giddens Anthony 92  
 Goh Christine 17  
 Gouws Rufus 77  
 Graddol David 84  
 Graesser Arthur 243  
 Green John 19  
 Grove Tim 92  
 Guiora Aleksander 40  
 Gvozdenko Inna 100
- H**
- Hakuta Kenji 32  
 Hall Edward 94, 95, 104  
 Halliday Michael 27, 28  
 Hall Mildred 95  
 Hammill Greg 58, 59, 60, 72, 73  
 Hampden-Turner Charles 96, 97  
 Hanzl Małgorzata 78  
 Harber Jeffrey 77  
 Hargie Owen 65  
 Hassall Tim 108, 146  
 Hassal Tim 130, 164, 166, 173  
 Heng Choong Yong 65  
 Herbert Robert 129, 130, 201, 279  
 Heskett James 58  
 Heskett James 59, 73  
 Hietanen Jari 93  
 Higgs Theodore 55  
 Hildebrandt Herbert 20  
 Hill Jane 28, 29, 36, 37  
 Hoffman-Hicks Sheila 151  
 Hoffman Sheila 40  
 Hofstede Geert 95  
 Holmes Daniele 245  
 Holmes Janet 128  
 Horowitz Elaine 27  
 Horwitz Elaine 38  
 Horwitz Michael 38  
 Hosseini Fatemi 100  
 House Julian 279  
 House Juliane 84, 87, 124, 133, 198  
 Howe Neil 11, 57, 58, 60, 73  
 Huang Yan 29, 89, 112, 114, 117, 118, 119,  
 129, 200, 252  
 Hymes Dell 21, 44, 45, 151  
 Hysa Beata 80
- I**
- Iberi-Shea Gina 168  
 Ikeda Naoki 149  
 Ishihara Noriko 12, 105, 106, 107, 109,  
 111, 128, 144, 145, 154, 173, 198, 199, 287,  
 293



**J**

- Jakobovits Leon 100  
 Jakubowska Ewa 115, 129, 130, 131, 135,  
 136, 200  
 Jaleniauskiene Evelina 75  
 Jautz Sabine 160, 161, 162  
 Jefferson Gail 98  
 Jenkins Jennifer 89  
 Jones Stephen 162  
 Jordan Kayla 171  
 Jourdenais Renée 146  
 Juceviciene Palmira 75

**K**

- Kacewicz Ewa 243  
 Kachru Braj 83  
 Kasper Gabriele 17, 107, 108, 110, 114, 124,  
 133, 137, 138, 139, 152, 160, 161, 163, 198,  
 199, 274, 276, 277, 279  
 Kasper Gabrielle 105  
 Kecskés Istvan 108, 111, 138, 140, 142, 143,  
 280  
 Kehl Daniel 60  
 Kellerman Eric 19  
 Kellerman Erik 17  
 Kiely Michael 24  
 Kiliańska-Przybyło Grażyna 32, 90, 91,  
 105, 171  
 Kim Ji-Young 55, 289  
 King Laura 244  
 Kirchhoff Johanna 133, 134, 204,  
 293  
 Kita Małgorzata 71  
 Kitao Kathleen 131, 132, 160, 205  
 Kitao Kenji 131, 132, 160, 205  
 Knapp Karlfried 87

- Komorowska Hanna 43, 47, 50, 52, 85,  
 89, 165  
 Kozicka-Borysowska Żaneta 134, 136  
 Kozrmos Judit 55  
 Kramsch Stephen 147  
 Krashen Stephen 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35,  
 36  
 Krippendorff Klaus 169  
 Kusevska Marija 110

**L**

- Labben Afef 162, 163  
 Lahuerta Ana 55  
 Lakoff Robin 134, 141  
 Lambert Wallace 43  
 Larsen-Freeman Diane 142  
 Laver James 162  
 Leathers Dale 90, 93, 94, 95  
 Leech Geoffrey 110, 114, 121, 131, 132, 140,  
 141, 195  
 Lenge Robert 23  
 Lengyel Zsolt 32  
 Lenneberg Eric 32  
 Leśniewska Justyna 52, 53, 55, 289  
 Levelt Willem 18  
 Levenston Eddie 160  
 Levinson Stephen 110, 114, 117, 119, 120,  
 121, 127, 149  
 Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk Barbara 130  
 Lewis Richard 90, 101, 102  
 Lightbown Patsy 36, 54  
 Linnes Cathrine 75  
 Liu Dilin 151  
 LoCastro Virginia 144  
 Long Robert 162  
 Lor Winnie 100

Lubecka Anna 124

Lu Xiaofei 55

## M

Machova Renata 76, 77

MacIntyre 42

MacIntyre Peter 17, 26, 33, 38, 41, 42,  
43

Macnamara John 46

Mahmoodia Mohammad 42

Maibodi Ashraf Haji 146, 147

Malyuga Elena 17, 104

Mansoor Abdullah 151

Marcjanik Małgorzata 71, 124

Martines-Flor Alicia 104

Matsumura Shoichi 139

Mauranen Anna 84

May Lyn 149

Mazgutova Diana 55

McArthur Tom 82

McCrinkle Mark 58, 61

McCroskey James 41

McLean Sally 157

McNamara Tim 143

Meierchord Christiane 87

Meierkord Christiane 85

Metcalf Brian 75

Miller Kirsten 28, 29, 36, 37

Mirzaei Azizullah 143

Mitchell Candace 161

Moazam Ismail 42

Morkus Nader 105

Morris Desmond 94

Muñoz Carmen 82

Murdock George 99

Murphy Herta 20

## N

Nagy Tünde 45, 83, 84

Nakane Ikuko 97

Nakatani Yasuo 17

Naumovska Ljupka 63

Nelson Gayle 114

Neuner Gerhard 50

Newman Mathew 217

Newmark Leonard 35

Newport Frank 67, 68

## O

Oblinger Diana 58

Oblinger James 58

Obrecht Dean 46

Ochs Elinor 199

Odlin Terence 107

Ogbeide Godwin-Charles 64

Ogiermann Eva 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 132,  
134, 136, 160, 161, 195, 197

Ohbuchi Ken-ichi 204

Oller John 46

Olshtain Elite 114, 116, 132, 135, 146, 163,  
198, 203, 279, 293

Onwuegbuzie Anthony 39

Oppenheim Alan 157

Orlova Svetlana 17, 104

Ortega Lourdes 168

O'Shaughnessy Marie 94

Oxford Rebecca 38

## P

Painter Clare 28

Palmer Adrian 46

Paltridge Brian 37, 89, 149

Pawlak Mirosław 18

Penfield Wilder 32  
 Pennebaker James 169, 170, 171, 172, 208,  
 211, 216, 217, 243, 244, 285  
 Piechurska-Kuciel Ewa 37, 38, 40, 153,  
 168, 272  
 Pilat Ewa 71  
 Pomerantz Anita 127, 149  
 Prensky Mark 58, 63, 73  
 Putnam Whitney 100

## Q

Qu Yan 98

## R

Rehbein Jochen 86, 87, 88  
 Renfro Adam 73  
 Ren Wei 146  
 Richards Jack 53, 54, 55  
 Riley Philip 111  
 Rintell Ellen 161  
 Roach Carol 92  
 Roberts Lamar 32  
 Robinson M.A. 163, 164  
 Rodriques Miguel 21  
 Roever Carsten 143  
 Ronowicz Eddie 131, 135  
 Rose Kenneth 138, 160, 163, 199,  
 274  
 Rothman Darla 78  
 Rover Carsten 151  
 Ruben Robert 32  
 Rude Stephanie 244  
 Rueda Yined Tello 105, 137, 138, 139,  
 274  
 Rusieshvili Manana 272

## S

Sacks Harvey 98  
 Salgado Elizabeth 108, 116, 121, 130, 132,  
 173, 195, 203, 279, 280  
 Salleh Mohd Sharil Mat 75, 77, 279  
 Salsbury Tom 137, 274  
 Sandeen Cathy 73  
 Savignon Sandra 46  
 Scarcella Robin 29, 123  
 Schauer Gila 139  
 Schmidt Richard 53, 54, 123, 137, 142, 274,  
 276, 277, 287, 293  
 Schneider Klaus 162  
 Schumann John 99, 102, 103  
 Scollon Ron 98  
 Scollon Suzanne 98  
 Scovel Thomas 38  
 Searle John 115  
 Seidlhofer Barbara 83, 85, 89, 275  
 Selinker Larry 40  
 Shakeebae Golshan 100, 101  
 Sharma Bhuvanesh 74, 75  
 Sharwood-Smith Mike 110  
 Sifianou Maria 97, 118, 119  
 Simon Herbert 164  
 Singh Anjali 77  
 Singleton David 32  
 Skinder Marcin 25  
 Soler Eva 104  
 Solska Agnieszka 114, 115  
 Spada Nina 36, 54  
 Spencer-Oatey Helen 87, 278  
 Spielberg Charles 38  
 Stadler Stefanie 112  
 Starfield Sue 37, 89  
 Steinerowska-Streb Izabella 80

- Stephan Cookie 41  
 Stephan Walter 41  
 Stern Roni 78  
 Stewart John 26  
 Strauss William 11, 57, 58, 60, 73  
 Sulaiman Baharudin Nik 74, 77  
 Sumner William 100  
 Suszczyńska Małgorzata 135, 204  
 Suszyńska Małgorzata 134  
 Swain Merrill 19, 21, 26, 45, 46, 47, 104,  
 106, 137, 199
- T**
- Taguchi Naoko 142, 151  
 Takahashi Satomi 274  
 Takahashi Tomoko 139  
 Tari Annamaria 75  
 Tarone Elaine 18, 19  
 Tarp Sven 77  
 Tausczik Yla 169, 170, 171, 172, 216, 217,  
 285  
 Taylor Evelina 148, 149  
 Termińska Kamila 135  
 Terrell Tracy 35, 36  
 Tetlock Philip 217  
 Thomas Jenny 53, 105, 110, 111, 134, 140,  
 144, 287  
 Thomas Wayne 37  
 Thwaite Anne 28  
 Tímea Juhász 58, 76, 77  
 Timpe-Laughlin Veronika 104, 141, 142,  
 143, 275  
 Töröcsik Maria 60  
 Torr Jane 28  
 Trask Robert 104  
 Trompenaars Fons 96, 97, 104
- Trosborg Anna 116, 122, 123, 131, 146  
 Tucker Richard 46  
 Turner Anthony 74, 75
- U**
- Uono Shota 93  
 Upshur Jane 46  
 Ur Penny 24  
 Ushioda Ema 43
- V**
- Vanrell Maria 163  
 Venter Elza 65
- W**
- Wales Roger 45, 104  
 Waller Gary 52  
 Walsh Stephen 149  
 Walters Joel 137  
 Wang Vincent 120, 123, 197  
 Waring Hansun 199  
 Wasserman Ilene 72  
 Watts Richard 162  
 Webster Jonathan 28  
 Weizman Elda 119  
 White Shelley 73  
 Widjaja Christina 165  
 Wierzbicka Anna 115, 124, 127, 129, 134  
 Wildner-Bassett Mary 138  
 Wiley Edward 32  
 Wilson Robert 157  
 Wipprecht Claudia 132  
 Wojtaszek Adam 160, 161  
 Wolfson Nessa 130, 162  
 Woodfield Helen 146, 164  
 Wrycza-Bekier Joanna 71

Wyatt Nancy 92  
Wziątek-Staśko Anna 80

**X**

Xiao Feng 139  
Xing Jianyu 87  
Xu Lan 151

**Y**

Yamanaka Janice 151

Yashima Tomoko 43

Yazdanifard Rashad 65

Young Richard 147

Yule George 31, 32, 33, 34, 108, 117, 118,  
120

**Z**

Zajac Jolanta 91

Zarate Geneviève 50

Zufferey Sandrine 121

## 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 – prośnienia, 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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