

BOOK REVIEW

Gila A. Schauer. *Intercultural competence and pragmatics*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2024. i-xxiii; 154 pp., ISBN 978-3-031-44471-5 (Hardcover) ISBN 978-3-031-44472-2 (eBook).

Reviewed by **João Bernardo Silva**, Universidade Aberta, Portugal.

Dedicated to Zoltán Dörnyei, the world-renowned Nottingham Professor of Psycholinguistics who passed away in June 2022, *Intercultural Competence and Pragmatics* is the third monograph authored by Gila A. Schauer, PhD. A fitting tribute to the memory of her former supervisor, Schauer's book represents a double achievement as it embodies the commendable advances made throughout the author's career, as well as effectively ensures that a venerable lineage of intellectual and scientific inquiry associated with Dörnyei and affiliates is carried on into the future.

In its essence, the monograph comprises a report of a recent extensive empirical study through which the author sought to address a significant gap in the research literature pertaining to the link between intercultural competence (IC) and Pragmatics, namely: how real modern foreign language (MFL) teachers in higher education (HE) conceive of, and teach, IC. The book consists of 9 chapters: an introductory chapter (Chapter 1), a theoretical chapter (Chapter 2), a methodology chapter (Chapter 3), five results chapters (Chapters 4 to 8) and a concluding chapter (Chapter 9), all structured similarly. The introductory, theoretical, methodological and concluding chapters efficiently allow the reader to situate the study as a whole in its disciplinary context, while each results chapter is designed to address and develop a specific aspect of IC that was intentionally targeted by the author in her empirical study. All chapters are efficiently organised, with the author opening always by stating her aims and proceeding to introduce the precise concept or aspect of IC to be focused on, before proceeding to analyse her data in an objective and methodical manner, and finally recapping whether, how, and to what extent her data analyses allowed her to meet her intended goals in a final chapter summary.

Received: 28 March
2025

Revised: 29 June 2025

Accepted: 15 July 2025

Published: 15 September
2025

Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Licensee JoLIE, "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia, Romania. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC BY\) license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

The cogent adherence to a coherent expositional order effected through a clear and concise prose makes for an overall pleasant reading experience and effectively ensures that no reader is excluded a priori, regardless of academic level or background.

In fact, the structure and style of the book allow the reader to peruse it from beginning to end or just as well to read chapters out of order or selectively according to their own individual needs and interests thanks to highly efficient writing and signposting.

Chapter 1 *Introduction* presents the monograph as a whole. The author opens by pointing out how the role of IC in specific teaching contexts and subject areas is not sufficiently well understood, in spite of the importance placed on it by organisations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the Council of Europe (CoE). The monograph thus seeks to address that gap by studying the links between IC and Pragmatics through an empirical study of the views held by HE MFL teachers. Usefully, this chapter summarises the methodology used in the empirical study, going so far as to reproduce the specific research questions the study sought to address. This enumeration of the questions is especially useful because it is followed by an exact identification of where in the book respondents' answers to each question will be explored, thus furthering empowering the reader to optimise their reading of the monograph according to individual needs and interests.

Chapter 2 *Background* provides a review of the scholarly literature divided into sections which expertly establish the state-of-the-art concerning the topics of the monograph: *pragmatics and pragmatic competence*; *culture*; *communicative competence*; and *intercultural (communicative) competence*. The author departs from a generally consensual contemporary view of pragmatics as the discipline which is concerned with how individuals use language in context to achieve specific goals and goes on to describe the development of Second Language or L2 Pragmatics and how researchers in the field now acknowledge the potential of changes in the culture to affect changes in pragmatic norms. However, in spite of this acknowledgment, as Schauer rightly points out, there is as yet no agreement amongst developers of frameworks for the study and teaching of Intercultural Competence (IC), or which can explain the relation of IC to L2 Pragmatics. Addressing this gap through the research of how non-academic professionals view this issue is declared to be the overall objective of the book.

Chapter 3 *Methodology* examines the design and implementation of the empirical study on which the monograph is based. The material in this chapter helps to justify the researcher's methodological choices while also making it possible for other scholars to replicate the study or design a new study based on it, going as far as to reproduce the questions of the empirical study in an appendix section. Summarily, the empirical study comprised an online survey conducted in 2021 and aimed at teachers of any MFL in a HE setting (e.g. language centres). Participants totalled 133 and are characterised in terms of *gender*; *age group*; *native languages*; *qualification countries*; *teaching level*; *taught languages*; *country where they teach*;

students' level; and *type of course being taught*. In terms of design procedure, the survey was based on a previous study directed exclusively at EFL teachers (Schauer 2022). The survey was advertised through social media websites, mailing lists, professional associations, research groups and institutions.

Chapter 4 *Results: Components of Intercultural Competence* examines the answers given to survey questions 2 and 3, which concerned the general and linguistic components of IC. Answers showed that all of the IC general components given for consideration were chosen by at least some teachers, supporting the inclusion of said components in future IC frameworks. The most frequently selected items were *awareness of different ways of thinking* (92%), *being understanding of cultural differences* (87%) and *knowledge of politeness norms* (84 %). Answers related to the linguistic components of IC revealed that MFL teachers considered five types of speech acts as indispensable, to wit: *conversational openings and closings* (98%), *apologies* (97%), *(dis)agreements* (92%), *requests* (89%), and *complaints* (86%). Additionally, impoliteness-related items like *impolite expressions* and *taboo language* were chosen by 70% of respondents, further emphasising the importance of pragmatic competence. These findings, including language-specific teacher responses, underscore the critical role of speech acts and politeness in IC frameworks.

Chapter 5 *Results: Aspects of Modern Foreign Language Teaching in Higher Education* explores answers to survey questions 1, 4, 5, and 6, which related to teaching practices. Answers to question 1 revealed that over half of the participants rated *general language skills* (58%), *academic writing* (55%), and *reading* (54%) as very important skills. Pragmatic competence, (e.g., *appropriate L2 expressions*) was also highlighted. Answers to question 4 revealed that *situationally appropriate language* (62%), *everyday vocabulary* (57%), and *speech acts such as conversational openings* (51%) were rated as highly important. Question 5 explored the importance of teaching cultural facts, with *different ways of thinking* (60%) rated as very important, significantly ahead of *literature, art, music* (27%), and *history* (20%), which underscores the relevance of intercultural competence in teaching. Question 6 addressed the inclusion of specific texts and materials, with the top rated items being *study abroad experiences* (37%), *views of individuals from different ethnic backgrounds* (31%), and *equal gender representation* (30%). Overall, pragmatic and cultural aspects are emphasised across teaching practices, with group results showing minimal variation based on language taught.

Chapter 6 *Results: The Relationship Between Intercultural and Pragmatic Competence* survey questions 7a and 7b, which explored the relationship between IC and pragmatic competence (PC). In question 7a, 68% of teachers reported being familiar with PC, 18% were unfamiliar, and 14% were unsure. Familiarity varied across language groups, with 86% of Spanish teachers and only 17% of French teachers familiar with the term, though the small size of some groups may limit the significance of these differences. Question 7b provided a definition of PC and asked how it relates to IC. A majority of teachers (86%) viewed PC as part of IC, while 4% believed the reverse, and 2% saw no connection. Most of the remaining respondents

also acknowledged a link between the two concepts. All teachers from four language groups (German, French, Dutch, Swedish) agreed that PC is part of IC, with the majority in other groups (English, Italian, Spanish) concurring. Overall, these findings indicate that most teachers see a strong link between IC and PC.

Chapter 7 *Results: Intercultural Competence and Gender-Neutral Language* analyses responses to questions 8a–8d, which focused on gender-neutral language in the languages teachers taught. Question 8a revealed that 64% of teachers believed their L2 offered gender-neutral options, 25% said it did not, and 6% were unsure. Views on the availability of these options varied across language groups. Of the teachers who acknowledged gender-neutral options, 73% taught them, while 18% did not. Teachers provided reasons for teaching gender-neutral language, including *promoting inclusion, equality, its presence in everyday language, avoiding negative transfer* from learners' first language, *academic conventions*, and *cultural relevance*. Many saw gender-neutral language as linked to IC and PC. Teachers who did not teach these options cited reasons such as *already discussing them without formal instruction*, their *inclusion in teaching materials*, *irrelevance in certain languages*, or the *potential for distraction*. A few teachers disagreed with using gender-neutral language or preferred explicit binary options. The findings highlight the importance of further discussion on gender-neutral language, particularly its IC and PC and point to the possibility and relevance of studying HE MFL teachers' perceptions of specific pragmatic phenomena as they may pertain to IC more broadly.

Chapter 8 *Results: Intercultural Competence in Modern Foreign Language Teacher Education* explored respondents' educational background in IC through questions 9a and 9b. Question 9a asked if teachers had encountered IC during their studies, revealing a near-even split: 44% had, 48% had not, and 8% were unsure. Teachers under 40 were more likely to have encountered IC (over 60%), while those over 40 were less likely, reflecting the timing of key IC publications like Michael Byram's 1997 monograph. The results showed no clear link between IC coverage and the language taught. Question 9b asked teachers to associate names with IC, with 65% identifying Byram as the most recognised scholar while also acknowledging the contributions of others.

Finally, Chapter 9 *Conclusion* closes the monograph by offering a final recap of the results of the online survey followed by a rich discussion of the limitations and implications of the study for future scholarship. It is this discussion which forms the bulk of the chapter and which finishes the book in a manner that makes it most valuable for scholars who work in this field. Where theory is concerned, the study suggests that most MFL teachers view Pragmatics as central to IC and places Pragmatics alongside other components such as skills and knowledge in a newly proposed model of IC. Methodologically, Schauer acknowledges that the use of an English-only survey may have limited participation and suggests that future studies opt to translate questionnaires into multiple languages to broaden accessibility. Additionally, a pool of respondents that is more balanced in terms of the representativity of different languages would also be preferable as Schauer suspects that the lack of such a balance in this study may have affected the validity

of some of the findings negatively. In regards to pedagogy, the study highlights the importance of PC in HE MFL teaching. Although most teachers recognize its significance, gaps exist in their own exposure to IC and aspects thereof, such as awareness of gender-neutral language. Schauer's study ultimately advocates for more comprehensive IC training in HE programs, to ensure that both teaching and administrative staff are equipped to communicate effectively across cultures.

Overall, Schauer's monograph succeeds in what it sets out to do, expertly offering a comprehensive and rigorous empirical study of a topic hitherto underexplored: HE MFL teachers' views of IC. Researchers interested in the field and topic of this monograph will undoubtedly benefit from engaging with its contents. The book makes a timely and robust contribution to our understanding of how MFL teachers regard IC while simultaneously offering a nuanced and valuable exploration of how best to approach this type of study thanks to constant, overt and honest reflections on its own limitations and how these may be overcome in future research. In so doing, Schauer's captivating and empowering monograph sets the gold standard for future empirical studies of overlaps between IC, Pragmatics and MFL Pedagogy and also honours the legacy of the great scholar to whose memory it is dedicated.

References

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Multilingual Matters.

Schauer, G. A. (2022). Intercultural competence and pragmatics in the L2 classroom: Views of in-service EFL teachers in primary, secondary and adult education. In T. McConachy & A. J. Liddicoat (Eds.), *Teaching and learning second language pragmatics for intercultural understanding* (pp. 173-191). Routledge.