

**Ifantidou, Elly. 2011. *Genres and Pragmatic Understanding*. Athens: Patakis Publishers.**

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*Genres and Pragmatic Understanding* is an in-depth study of the question of the teachability of the pragmatic skills in the interpretation of several written genres. Ifantidou provides groundbreaking insights into the issue of how pragmatics can be taught and offers a series of practical ideas, manifested in a variety of activities, about the introduction of pragmatic issues in the classroom. Moreover, the author offers useful information with which to assess the level of the acquisition of said competences by the students.

The book explores the key issues in the field that are more directly relevant to teaching such as pragmatic competence, which includes pragmatic ability and pragmatic awareness. Ifantidou also takes on the task of redefining pragmatic competence, looks into the relationship between genres and pragmatic competence and finally explains the notions of pragmatic and metapragmatic awareness. Her theoretical descriptions are then complemented in later chapters by the practical applications of those skills in the English Language classroom. The main point of the book is that pragmatic skills can be taught and tested following the author's methodological approach.

The book is divided into four parts which are in turn divided into chapters. Part A – chapters one to five– introduces the theoretical underpinnings on which the book is based. Part B –chapters six and seven– covers the teaching and evaluation of pragmatic awareness while Part C –chapters eight and nine– delves into the teaching and assessment of metapragmatic awareness. Part D includes definitions and examples of key terms.

In the first chapter, Ifantidou discusses the feasibility of the teaching of pragmatics and outlines the main goal of the book which is to show students how to identify “plausible interpretations” in genre-specific texts and the “interpretation routes employed to retrieve them” (21). She considers that genres such as, for example, abstracts, news reports, book blurbs and academic reviews share linguistic markers. However, they lead to different interpretations due to, on the one hand, reader's assumptions about the attitude of the author and assumptions concerning, among other things, the sociocultural context in which the text has been created and, on the other, the reader's “expectations, needs or preferences” (21). In this way reader's involvement through the employment of metalinguistic and metapragmatic strategies enriches the relatively underdetermined meaning in the text itself to create fully-fledged “pragmatically inferred meaning” (21).

The second chapter in part A consists of a historical overview of the notion of pragmatic competence up to the present moment and serves as the introduction to Ifantidou's own alternative re-definition of the term. Chapter three is devoted to explaining the relationship between genres and pragmatic competence and showing the

processes which learners go through when interpreting texts from a pragmatic point of view. Chapter four establishes the theoretical assumptions informing parts B and C of the book; in particular, it explores the plausibility of using genre conventions as indexes of both linguistic and pragmatic competence. The closing chapter in Part A describes the academic settings in which the author has put her methodology into practice based on the theoretical foundations mentioned in the first part of the book. More specifically, it draws on material previously collected and used by the author in two genre-based language courses at the Faculty of English Studies in the University of Athens and offers a rich collection of activities that can be easily adapted and implemented in different teaching contexts.

The theories in Part A inform the practical discussion in Part B where the author describes the application of the teaching and assessment of pragmatic awareness. Ifantidou focuses on genre conversion and evaluation of pragmatic awareness as tools for instruction and she also shows how they can improve pragmatic competence. Genre conversion is according to the author:

a highly complex, and quite demanding task. It is the shift of genre perspective to serve new needs, preferences, expectations, background knowledge or reader/hearer abilities that make it so. In this sense, genre conversion incurs shifting the context (readership, time, place, contextual assumptions), and the linguistic encoding that can best convey the intended meaning (75).

In chapters 6 and 7 the author offers numerous examples of practical activities that she has designed and applied in the testing of pragmatic awareness as it is defined in earlier chapters. By means of various examples of pairs of related genres, such as book blurbs and abstracts, newspaper headlines and research article titles, abstracts and news reports, research articles and magazine articles, and so on, the main features and structures of different genres are defined and carefully contrasted. These are followed by practical activities and the ways in which they are assessed so as to illustrate the practical application of this methodology in the classroom. In order to provide proof of the applicability of her approach the author not only includes actual examples of the type of activity that she proposes, but also supplies the reader with authentic results and outcomes from the activities her students are involved in. As additional pedagogical material, the reader is provided with illustrative tables where the main traits that define each pair of genre types are shown.

Part C focuses on the practical application of the teaching and assessment of metapragmatic awareness according to Ifantidou's own definition in the theoretical section. One of the most important aspects of this section is given in chapter eight. The author puts forward a definition of metapragmatic awareness that includes a number of assumptions that are not considered by standard L2 frameworks. In chapter nine the author offers coursework material with the objective of showing how learners can become metapragmatically aware of differences between a series of genres. She also supplies assessment material in order to show how learners can carry out tasks related to metapragmatic awareness skills at different levels of performance. To this end she

employs the outline and table of contents genres in addition to the summary and the academic review. In this section we are again given working definitions of the different genres analysed and practical illustrations of authentic student production such as their answers to the activities they are asked to carry out. This is accompanied by comments by the teacher/author. The approach that the author employs helps the reader to grasp more fully the potential usefulness of the exercises provided in the book.

Finally, Part D consists of a list of key linguistic terms which are clearly defined and very skillfully exemplified so that readers (both teachers and students) can reach a perfect understanding of some of the basic notions related to Systemic Functional Grammar, Relevance Theory, Speech Act Pragmatics, etc., all of which are necessary in order to correctly apply the genre approach proposed in the book.

In my view, this book serves, above all else, as a tool to introduce the teaching of pragmatic skills in the English Language classroom and an assessment tool that can be used to test if students have correctly acquired those skills or not. Ifantidou's book is well worth reading as it offers up-to-date insights on the teaching of Pragmatics from a theoretical point of view and, at the same time, it provides a specific methodological approach that has already been thoroughly tested on the author's own students.

For anyone who is interested in Second Language Acquisition in general and in the teaching of Pragmatics in particular, this book is essential both as a guide to the fundamental aspects related to the teaching of pragmatic skills from a theoretical perspective and as a pedagogical model with practical applications. On a personal level I found it extremely insightful as the teachability of pragmatic skills is a question that is of interest to many teachers. Like Ifantidou, I also support the thesis that pragmatic skills need to be introduced in the English Language classroom and that students should be offered the right tools to be able to grasp the pragmatic and metapragmatic meanings conveyed by language.

Previous research has also captured the importance of pragmatic skills in the teaching of English (See Cohen and Ishihara, 2009; Rose and Kasper, 2001; Holmes and Brown, 1987; Myers-Scotton and Bernstein, 1988 and Rose, 1994 among others), but this book places special emphasis on the practical implementation of those skills and offers ways to evaluate them. Moreover, the wealth of resources and ideas presented in this volume is comprehensive and will benefit both teachers and students alike.

The author describes how she has used her approach in two university courses: Academic Discourse and Genres in English. This begs the question of whether the genre-driven approach is only appropriate at the tertiary level. Although Ifantidou does not bring up this issue in her book it would be interesting to consider whether teachers in general English classes and ESP courses at university level or general English classes in secondary education should try to start introducing these skills. One of the greatest problems in the English Language classroom at whatever level is that time is always in short supply. If a teacher decides to attempt to raise awareness of the pragmatic dimension of language, that would leave less time to teach grammar, vocabulary, etc. and so it would have to be proved that such a change of focus is worthwhile. In this

sense, it would have been interesting if Ifantidou had included information on whether her own students found the inclusion of pragmatic and metapragmatic skills useful. Of course, the materials the author teaches are for students whose main interest is reading and writing. It remains to be seen whether her approach could be applied to listening and speaking, and, more interestingly, to the teaching of spoken interaction as envisaged in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

In sum, Ifantidou offers convincing reasons to at least seriously take into consideration the introduction of an awareness of pragmatic/metapragmatic issues in the teaching/learning of English. However, we are still in need of more studies that look into the acquisition of pragmatic skills by students, and how these might be successfully integrated in the English classroom at various levels. The teaching of pragmatic skills has been dealt with previously but not with the attention it deserves. What is needed is more empirical evidence to gauge the appropriateness of its implementation in the classroom.

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