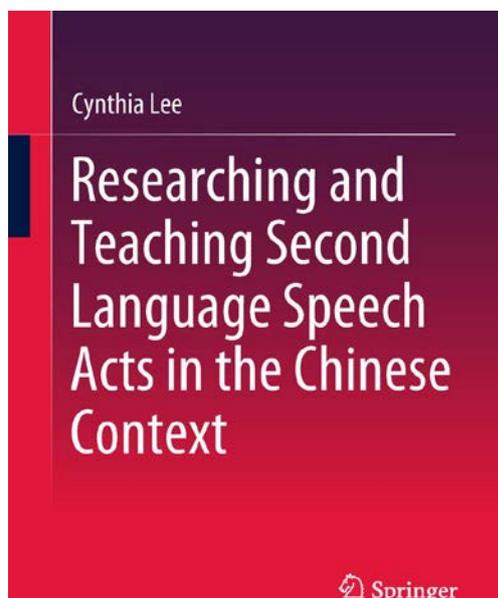


## Book Review



### **Researching and Teaching Second Language Speech Acts in the Chinese Context**

Cynthia Lee. Springer. 2018. 110 pp.

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Enhancing learners' pragmatic competence is a core component of communicative competence and a main goal of contemporary English language teaching. Against this backdrop, extensive research has been done on the teaching, learning, and use of speech acts in various EFL contexts. Cynthia Lee, one of the very few scholars in Hong Kong researching actively on Chinese EFL learners' speech act production and comprehension since the early 2000s, has harnessed prior interlanguage and cross-cultural speech act research findings in her latest book, which has two overarching aims: to illuminate Chinese EFL learners' L1 and L2 speech act realisation strategies, and to recommend theory- and research-informed instructional and assessment strategies for the teaching of speech acts in Chinese EFL classrooms.

Lee's six-chapter book has successfully achieved both aims. It begins with an introductory chapter revisiting key pragmatic concepts and issues, followed by the second chapter describing some important factors that facilitate L2 pragmatic development and common data collection tools for the investigation of L2 speech act production in authentic and experimental settings. The following two chapters, written in relation to the first aim of the book, survey in detail the relevant literature on Chinese

EFL learners' realisations of five common yet potentially face-threatening acts: requests, refusals, complaints, compliment responses, and apologies. Chapter 3 takes a cross-cultural perspective by discussing the influence of two important Chinese cultural concepts, namely, *lǐmào* (politeness) and *miànzi* (facework), on Chinese EFL learners' L1 and L2 speech act production. Chapter 4 focuses on Chinese EFL learners' interlanguage development of these five speech acts, revealing that the learners' strategy use seemed to have a correlation with their age. Turning the spotlight to teaching issues, Chapter 5 addresses the second aim of the book by offering a detailed description of the methods and activities for the teaching of speech acts to tertiary Chinese EFL learners, based on two previous pragmatics-focused courses Lee developed and taught in two Hong Kong universities. The concluding chapter draws research and pedagogical implications by underscoring the importance of examining the connection between personal factors and L2 speech act production, incorporating L2 pragmatics instruction in teacher education, and exploring L2 pragmatics through technology.

Lee's book is not lengthy, yet it is able to sketch succinctly key features of Chinese EFL learners' L2 speech act production and make valid generalisations by referring to representative interlanguage and cross-cultural speech act research. Specifically, the informative synthesis of the studies of Chinese EFL learners' L2 speech act realisations and descriptions of the potential individual, pedagogical, and socio-cultural factors influencing L2 speech act performance will be very useful to international readers who would like to understand Chinese EFL learners' communicative styles and the interplay between L1 cultural norms and L2 speech act acquisition. An increased awareness of these learners' communicative styles will facilitate the promotion of effective intercultural communication between Chinese students and international faculties and students at English-medium universities, as rightly acknowledged in the book's introduction. While there exist other face-threatening acts that Chinese EFL learners commonly perform (such as advice), the range of speech acts covered in the book have been carefully selected as they have been well-researched for decades.

Another highlight of the book is the fifth chapter on the theory and practice of pragmatics teaching. Lee demonstrates the ways learning activities and materials can be designed to teach the target speech act to tertiary Chinese EFL learners with reference to existing speech act research findings, major principles for pragmatics teaching, and well-known L2 acquisition theories including noticing, input, and output hypotheses. The teaching strategies she delineates reflect her firm belief that pragmatics is teachable and research informs teaching (see, for example, Sections 1.4, 2.2.1, and 5.2). Readers may have questions about, for instance, learners' views on the usefulness of the suggested instructional and assessment strategies, the criteria for gauging learners' speech act performance (although some assessment methods are mentioned), and the ways the outlined teaching steps could be varied to cater for learners' diverse proficiency levels. However, the pedagogical approaches shared in this chapter certainly enrich the currently sparse implications for teaching speech acts to Asian EFL learners, whose L2 exposure is believed to be limited.

As an accessible and enjoyable read, Lee's book is a valuable addition to the current literature on L2 speech acts. It not only offers readers an interesting discussion about the teaching, learning, and use of L2 speech acts in the Chinese context, but also demonstrates her familiarity with the research trends in interlanguage and cross-cultural speech acts and pragmatics teaching. This book will be particularly appealing to researchers interested in Chinese EFL learners' L2 pragmatic development, and also to

ELT practitioners including but not limited to tertiary English teachers who are keen to implement a pragmatics-focused pedagogy based on sound language learning theories.

**About the reviewer**

Chris Kwan is a PhD candidate in the Centre for Applied English Studies at the University of Hong Kong. He is researching in the areas of discourse analysis, pragmatics, and English language teaching at the tertiary level. He is particularly interested in exploring language use in everyday and professional settings, by drawing upon pragmatic theories such as speech acts and rapport management for the analysis.