


BOOK REVIEW

Rong Chen. (2022) *Toward a Motivation Model of Pragmatics*.
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Rong Chen's *Toward a Motivation Model of Pragmatics* (2022) is part of the Mouton Series in Pragmatics. Of the two orientations in pragmatic theorizing – universalism and particularism – this book is the author's attempt at arguing for the former. In this book, the author puts forward a new model for pragmatics, a theory that is meant to account for various types of language use. As noted by the author himself in the foreword, “the gist of the model is that language use can be adequately and elegantly studied by looking at the motivation behind it” (Chen 2022: vii).

This monograph comprises eight chapters. Chapter 1 sketches the history and expansion of pragmatics. After an overview of theories and practices in the field, the author stresses the need to “unify the field” (Chen 2022: 21), as the present diversity might lead to unexpected incoherence or, even worse, confusion.

Chapter 2 presents the Motivation Model of Pragmatics (MMP). The basic tenet of the model is motivation, or human needs, which could explain language use in context. In the MMP model, motivations have two levels. For the first level, motivations could be either transactional or interactional. For the second level, transactional motivations are divided into clarity and effectiveness, while interactional ones are categorized into creating, maintaining, and enhancing the public image of either other or self. The relationship between each set (e.g., transactional and interactional, clarity and effectiveness) is a continuum from the conflictive to the assistive. For example, transactional motivation could be in conflict with interactional motivation, or they could also be assistive.

By putting forward this model, the author provides a framework to assist other theories in their search for explanations for various linguistic behavior. The remaining six chapters are applications of the model in different fields of research.

Chapter 3 is the application of MMP in (im)politeness research. By reviewing current studies on politeness research, the author concludes that face-enhancing acts lead to politeness, while face-threatening acts lead to impoliteness. Considering the participants, he further categorizes (im)politeness into other-politeness, self-politeness, other-impoliteness, and self-impoliteness. According to the model, the motivation behind these acts is the interlocutors' effort to create, maintain, or

enhance the public image (or face) of self or other. In the last section of this chapter, the author presents his comments on the present politeness evaluation studies.

Chapter 4 concentrates on the application of MMP in cross-/intercultural variations. Building on the previous research on compliments and compliments responses of different countries, the author addresses the “messiness” and conflicting results of various studies. MMP could account for the complexity of variant compliment and compliment-responding acts, as both compliment and its response are motivated by interactional motivations. In the second section of this chapter, the author presents his view on the East-West Divide debate. On the one hand, some scholars argue that Eastern cultures (e.g. Chinese and Japanese) are fundamentally different from Western cultures (represented by English) in pragmatics, which the author calls *the Different Position*. On the other hand, there is the view – held by a much smaller number of scholars – that East and West are fundamentally similar, which is dubbed as *the Similar Position*. Chen argues for the latter. Using MMP, he demonstrates that the two large linguacultures share similar principles that undergird the use of language. The differences identified in the literature are differences in degree, not in kind.

Chapter 5 applies MMP to diachronic pragmatics. After a brief sketch of historical/diachronic pragmatics and cross-generational pragmatics, the author presents several case studies on compliment responses and end-of-dinner food offerings. After identifying the diachronic changes of the two acts in different cultures, the author attributes those changes to the linguacultural differences. By adopting the theory of MMP, he attempts to explain these linguacultural differences in terms of the content in the public image in a given culture. Therefore, from the angle of MMP, basically all the diachronic changes are concerned with the changes of public images. In the last section of this chapter, the author makes a complementary discussion of the previously discussed case studies. As diachronic pragmatic studies are primarily influenced (or maybe limited) by access to the authenticity of data, such a disadvantage could be solved by taking the cross-generational method or longitudinal method.

Chapter 6 is devoted to MMP in relation to discourse studies. In this chapter, the author considers two aspects of discourse studies: structural properties of discourse and interactional properties of discourse. It is argued that the former are motivated by transactional motivations, while the latter are motivated by interactional motivations. As for the structural properties, three topics are covered: information structure, genre structure, and conversation structure. According to the author, these structures are motivated by transactional needs. As for the interactional properties of discourse, the author discusses four areas: identity construction, writer stance expression, critical discourse analysis, and conversation analysis. He holds that they are motivated by the need to manage public image of

self or other. § 6.4 is “discourse markers”, in which the author presents a case study about the English discourse marker *so*. Building on his previous study, the author argues that *so* serves a unitary function of topic management, which is further motivated by “clarity” of MMP.

Chapter 7 and 8 are about the utility of MMP in accounting for metaphor and other non-literal use of language (NLUs), respectively. The use of metaphor helps the speaker achieve effectiveness through domain mapping, domain elaboration, and contextual correlation. Metaphors, too, could satisfy interactional needs when they are used to manage the public image of either self or other, or sometimes both. NLUs, discussed in Chapter 8, include sarcasm, irony, parody, humor, lies, and so forth. In this chapter, they are argued to benefit the public image of both self and other, through creating camaraderie, among others.

In *Toward a Motivation Model of Pragmatics* (2022), Rong Chen maintains his commitment to seeking deeper explanations in language use and puts forward an explanatory model for pragmatics. In this book, he presents his concerns and critique against the current status-quo of the field. For example, in Chapter 3, he criticizes politeness evaluation studies for their purported overemphasis on variability at the expense of underlying principles. Later in Chapter 6, he offers a strong critique of “the discursive turn” for its over-insistence on empiricism, its distrust in abstraction and generalization, its preconceived (theoretical) assumptions in research, and its overreliance on the fluidity and dynamism of social interaction. By doing so, he calls on pragmaticists to look beneath surface phenomena in language use. This is one of the major contributions of Chen’s book.

Another contribution is that Chen’s MMP offers a new understanding of the notion *public image*. *Public image* is regarded as *face* by Brown & Levinson (1978; 1987), Mao (1994), et al. In this book, Chen expands it to include three other aspects: (a) sociocultural values (e.g., “ethics” or “morality”; “social rights” and “obligations”); (b) interactionality (e.g. belongingness and camaraderie); (c) self-interest. In this sense, *public image* has become an umbrella term and may be the ultimate consideration of all interpersonal factors in language use. Despite these innovative discussions of *public image*, there is a concern about this notion. *Public image* is originally defined as “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself” by Brown & Levinson (1978; 1987) but is defined as “what a person is perceived by others” (Chen 2022: 33). The distinction is one between intention and perception. Perception is similar to the notion of *impression*, which is defined as “the presumed effect of stimulation on the brain” or “a vague or unanalyzed judgment or reaction” (VandenBos 2015: 528) in *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (2015). However, considering the active constructive effort of public image mentioned in the second-level motivations of MMP, it is not clear how Chen would reconcile the difference.

In this book, Chen puts forward four categories of “im/politeness” to further elaborate on the term, which are respectively *self-politeness*, *other-politeness*, *self-impoliteness*, and *other-impoliteness*. The notion of *self-politeness* first appears in Chen (2001:88), which is defined as the “cases in communication where the need to protect and enhance one’s own face influences what one says and the way she says it”. *Other-politeness* is the type that most politeness theories (e.g. Brown & Levinson 1978, 1987; Leech 1983; Spencer-Oatey 2007) are concerned with, indicating the politeness oriented to other’s benefits. He further categorizes impoliteness into *other-impoliteness* and *self-impoliteness*. *Other-impoliteness* includes the act of “creating, maintaining and enhancing public image of self”, while *self-impoliteness* consists of the acts of “creating, maintaining and enhancing public image of other” (Chen 2022:51). He admits that the latter notion (self-impoliteness) is only a tentative assumption. As for the notion of *other-impoliteness*, there are few speculative concerns.

According to the definition, it seems that *self public image* and *other public image* are two correlating concepts in regard to *impoliteness*, i.e., the enhancement of the one will definitely trigger the challenge of the other. Is it always so? First, self-image enhancement could be a spontaneous self-oriented act. People could choose to “leave information implicit that is inconsistent with their positive self-image [...] and] information [explicit] that tells the recipient about the bad things of our enemies or about those we consider our outgroup” (van Dijk 2012:36). Thus, we could tentatively speculate that interlocutors are consciously or sub-consciously avoiding self-loss in interaction. It is possible that “creating, maintaining and enhancing public image of self”, on some occasions, is simply a spontaneously self-beneficial act, instead of the motivation to be impolite to others. Cases like *humble bragging* also indicate the playfulness (Lin & Chen 2022) and intentionality (Ren & Guo 2021) of enhancing public image of self. Even though it is identified by many scholars (e.g., Gu 1990; Leech 1983) that politeness involves minimizing the benefit and maximizing the cost of self, a direct connection between self-image enhancement and other-impoliteness might still seem quite absolute, and require further empirical investigation, especially from the etic perspective.

Second, other-impoliteness could be motivated by transactional needs. According to the definition, Chen shows a relatively clear tendency to regard other-impoliteness as a notion driven by interactional motivations. However, in terms of other-oriented impoliteness, Culpeper (2011) categorizes three aspects, affective impoliteness (to release emotions, like cursing), coercive impoliteness (to seek realignment between the speaker and the hearer), and entertaining impoliteness (to entertain). Chen comments that Culpeper’s categorization requires the addressees to be aware that the impoliteness involved is not intended (Chen






2023). The criteria for regarding those as “unintended” ones remain unclear, so a further definition of *intention* might be needed here as this constitutes an essential part of impoliteness in this book. However, people could be intentionally impolite to others to realize some transactional motivations, such as to decrease the credibility of others in argument (Walton 1998). Thus, it seems that the attribution of other-impoliteness to the interactional motivations might be too absolute.






Lastly, Chen’s *Toward a Motivation Model of Pragmatics* (2022) is highly readable. Each chapter presents a research background, followed by discussions of the chapter’s theme with ample examples for illustrative purposes. As the themes he chooses for each chapter (from Chapter 3 to Chapter 8) are hot topics of pragmatics at the moment, it is also a good choice for beginners who want to have a general knowledge about the discipline. However, the arrangement and naming of some chapters could have been more effectively done. For example, in Chapter 6, §6.2 is about transactional motivations, §6.3 presents interactional motivations, while the title of §6.4 is “discourse markers”, the content of which is a case study about the application of MMP to discourse marker research, which does not parallel previous sections thematically.

List of abbreviations

MMP Motivation Model of Pragmatics
 NLU non-literal use of language

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