Review

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语用身份论:如何用身份话语做事
**Pragmatic Identity: How to Do Things with Words of Identity**
**Xinren Chen (2018)**

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*Reviewed by Puyu Ning*

## Overview

The concept of identity frequently appears in the research literature of such disciplines as linguistics, communication, sociology, social psychology, and other interdisciplinary areas. Drawing upon a wide variety of literature and authentic data, Chen presents a systematic theorisation of *pragmatic identity*. This book focuses on the identity presented in naturally occurring verbal communication and how this identity is closely connected with the construction and interpretation of the discourse, be it the identities that are adopted by the interactants or the identity of a third party which is alluded to by the interactants in the discourse (Chen 2018: 2). This timely pragmatic theorisation of identity provides an important analytical tool for the examination of verbal communication and offers new opportunities in existing pragmatic studies. The theorisation in this book has

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been presented from the viewpoint of social constructionism and, hence, the focus on the concept of identity has shifted away from a social correlation and exploration (Bauman, 2000) towards a more dynamic discursive construction (Chen, 2013).

This book is divided into two main parts: Part 1 focuses on general theorisation, while Part 2 presents different research dimensions of the theorisation. Following the introduction, the author delimits the concept of pragmatic identity and demonstrates its attributes and functions in Chapter 2. The discursive construction and operation of the dynamic process of identification are then presented in Chapters 3 and 4. In Part 2 of the book, Chapters 5 to 9 detail a number of research areas that employ the pragmatic identity theory to examine a wide range of corpora. Finally, Chapter 10 summarises the book and proposes potential areas for further research.

## Summary of the content

Chapter 1 presents an introduction to the book, in which the author highlights the necessity of a systematic, pragmatic approach to identity. In general, interactants select their identities from a socially constituted repertoire, and the "acts of identity" (Mey, 2001) are primarily achieved through the use of language. Thus, in particular contexts, interactants discursively enact their selected identities for specific communicative purposes. Accordingly, selecting a pragmatic identity is both a discursive identity practice and a pragmatic process, and therefore has a significant impact on the outcome of the interaction. Finally, this chapter provides a brief summary of the structure of the book and details five ways in which pragmatic identity is employed: (1) identity as an interpretive resource, (2) identity as an illocutionary resource, (3) identity as an interpersonal relations resource, (4) identity as an explanatory resource, and (5) identity as an evaluative resource. These are discussed in detail in Chapters 5 to 9, respectively.

In Chapter 2, a theoretical survey of the existing research is provided, which has been undertaken into identity across a number of related academic disciplines. The author then defines pragmatic identity as the contextualised identities which are selected by the interactants intentionally or unintentionally, either for themselves or for their interactional partners, and includes the identities of any third parties that have been referred to in the discourse (p 24). Such a contextualised pragmatic identity works in verbal communication, is dynamic, is discursively constructed, and is a form of resource used for communication. In addition to these four attributes, indicators which recognise pragmatic identity are mentioned, such as explicit markers like address terms, appositions, adverbial modifiers, terminologies or jargons, and also identity-sensitive speech acts, speech events, and the sequence of utterances.

Pragmatic identity is selected and constructed through discourse, and therefore Chapter 3 concentrates on the mechanism behind this discursive construction. By considering Tracy's (2002) work on discursive practices and the levels of linguistic choices in discourse (Verschueren, 1999), the author connects pragmatic identity construction with a wide range of discursive practices. A summary of the macro- and micro-level linguistic forms from which pragmatic identities can be constructed is described, with examples such as codes, styles, and speech acts, as well as grammatical, lexical, and paralinguistic features, being provided. It is worth mentioning that a case study of identities in operation is also presented in this chapter. The form of identity construction in a performance is usually marked out and foregrounded from its discursive surroundings through the use of verbal displays (Hymes, 1975). The assumption that identity accountability is effective leads to the exposition on *Identity Maxim* in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 explores the mechanism by which interactants choose to construct and interpret pragmatic identities, the underlying factors that influence their selection, and how these have an impact on verbal communication. The contextualised selection of identity is a dynamic pragmatic process and has both synchronic and diachronic features. As the selection of pragmatic identity in any explicit context is usually by default, the author proposes an "Identity Maxim – talk with the identity that is generally appropriate in the current communicative context". The *Identity Maxim* presupposes that default assumptions exist with regard to the particular identity that interactants should select. However, it does not necessarily mean that if interactants choose to construct a non-default, deviational identity, then communication would break down, as a non-default identity could be employed as a discursive strategy for particular communicative purposes.

Chapter 5 marks the beginning of the second part of the book and demonstrates how pragmatic identity, as an interpretive resource, influences lexical and illocutionary force interpretation. Based on the linguistic adaptation theory (Verschueren, 1999), the author regards pragmatic identity to be a form of interactional context and presents two in-depth case studies on teasing and self-denigration/other-elevation. These case studies illustrate how deviational identity influences discourse and demands an interpretation beyond the literal meaning, which is indicative of distinctive and complicated relational effects.

Interactants often have a strong awareness of the function and communicative value of a particular pragmatic identity, which they can deliberately exploit as an illocutionary resource to meet a specific need (or needs). Chapter 6 discusses this illocutionary resource at the level of single utterances and speech events. On the basis of a case study, the author proposes five main strategies for applying pragmatic identity as an illocutionary resource, namely foregrounding, shadowing, identifying, deviating, and switching strategies. The appropriate employment of

these strategies in real-life interactions also demands knowledge of a dynamic *pragmatic equilibrium*, which is, according to the author, a dynamic balance between communicative needs and pragmatic force. To reach a pragmatic equilibrium requires the selection of an appropriate identity during communication. The author also highlights that pragmatic cognitive ability plays an important role in the successful implementation of a pragmatic equilibrium.

Chapter 7 exposes how pragmatic identity is adopted when conducting relational work and conveying interpersonal meaning, so that the interpersonal distance which exists between interactants can be successfully shortened or otherwise adapted. The author presents pragmatic empathy by using a series of mediation discourse examples, which demonstrate how different pragmatic identities can assist interactants with the identification of either in-group or out-group members. In addition to interpersonal examples, a range of public discourses are also provided, including government news releases, public announcements, etc.

In contrast to the participant's perspective that has been examined in previous chapters, Chapter 8 considers the researcher's perspective and explains how pragmatic identity is used as an explanatory resource in pragmatic research. The intrinsic connection between pragmatic identity and discourse (including lexical and syntactic choices, structural and sequential arrangement, etc.) enables pragmatic researchers to discover the underlying momentum and orientation in discourse analysis. In addition, the examples that are provided of the latest language trends in Chinese illustrate how different discourse styles have powerful implications for identity.

Chapter 9 focuses on how pragmatic identity can serve as an evaluative resource for researchers, as this theory enables interactants' utterances to be assessed from a number of different aspects, such as the felicity conditions and the appropriateness, fairness, authenticity, and legitimacy of the pragmatic identities that are selected by interactants. In general, these evaluations involve the construction of deviational identities. Researchers produce evaluations which are either positive or negative in nature, and therefore any deviation in pragmatic identity can be categorised as either a positive or negative deviation. A positive deviation takes place when the interactant employs positive pragmatic strategies to facilitate the interaction in realising a certain communicative purpose and/or to improve interpersonal relations. A negative deviation usually occurs when the interactants are insensitive about their choice of pragmatic identity in particular contexts. Two case studies are supplied in this chapter which elaborate on how such positive and negative deviational identities give rise to positive and negative evaluations.

Chapter 10 provides a brief summary of the pragmatic identity theory, reiterates its significance, and describes the wide variety of research possibilities which exist within this new theoretical framework.

By and large, this book fulfils the pragmatic theorisation of identity and provides a powerful analytical tool for the investigation of how people, in certain contexts, select and construct specific identities to achieve particular interactional outcomes via speech communication. Pragmatic identity is not only analysed as an asset for the interactant, but also as a resource that can be used by the researcher in theoretical analysis. The author stresses that those aspects which have been detailed in Chapters 5 to 9 are not mutually exclusive but represent different perspectives of analysis (p 2).

## Final remarks

In addition to the large number of extensive and thorough case studies that are provided in this book, the Identity Maxim proposed by the author is highly significant. This is an important theoretical breakthrough which confirms the central role of pragmatic identity in analysing any verbal communication. Furthermore, the *Pragmatic Equilibrium Hypothesis* is also noteworthy because it demonstrates the dynamic features of pragmatic identity construction and offers systematic analytical tools for the interpretation and evaluation of discourse in pragmatics. Most importantly, this hypothesis shifts the concept of identity away from a relatively static and constant social or psychological research dimension, towards a more dynamic, selective, and discursively constructive dimension.

Finally, this new theoretical tool gives rise to a number of interesting areas for further research, for example the comparison and contrast of (1) the synchronic identity constructed by interactants in everyday life, public spheres such as TV talk shows, and virtual worlds, because public and Internet pragmatic research display different discourse styles and features (Li & Ran, 2016; Kádár & Fukushima, 2018) and (2) the identity constructed by interlanguage and native language users, or by bilingual language users in their different languages (Ren, 2019; Reményi, 2017), etc. As the author mentions in Chapter 9, some inappropriate applications of pragmatic identity could result from a lack of knowledge of cultural variations (Spencer-Oatey, 2007), and therefore default pragmatic identities might differ from one culture to another. Despite the dynamic feature of identity construction, the default identities which are adopted in particular contexts should remain relatively stable within a culture. Drawing upon existing cultural studies of value (e.g. Schwartz, 1992), an identity construction and presupposition repertoire could be a key reference for any intercultural discourse study which is based on this Identity Maxim framework. Finally, interpretations of identity construction generally give rise to (im)politeness evaluations. If assumptions of (im)politeness are meant to be based on various sources of dynamic context (Chen, 2014), the current theoretical establishment of identity will also have a significant impact on (im)politeness research.

In conclusion, this book is a comprehensive, theoretical study of identity construction in verbal communication and offers a diverse range of identity- and (im)politeness-related research possibilities. It has been written specifically for researchers and students in the fields of pragmatics, communication, and discourse studies. Readers will enjoy this book and acquire an insight into the wide range of research endeavours that have been undertaken to date.

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