The Pragmatics of Making Requests in the L2 Workplace: A Case Study of Language Socialization

Second language acquisition in the workplace creates challenges for those people adjusting not only to a new workplace environment but also to a new language. This case discusses the problems an immigrant woman, Ming, faced and how she overcame these problems in her new workplace. Ming’s cultural background created another obstacle for her. She immigrated from China in which people act indirect in making requests, unlike here in America where we act more direct in making requests. The Chinese American Association (CAA) provided an inner-city immigrant job-training program which Ming participated in and gave her the resources she needed to grasp the English language and find a job in America. She conquered her timid and agreeable personality through exposure and participation in social interactions, as well as through the assistance of experts and more competent peers. Thanks to both the program and Ming’s determination, she succeeded in her new job. Native speakers of English, who read this case, will have a better understanding of how people, who do not have English as their first language, feel in situations they face everyday in their workplace. Hopefully, by reading the study, you will know how to interact with and communicate better with second language (L2) speakers in the workplace. As noted in the article “Developing Cross-Cultural Communication Skills,” prospective student professionals “will have a leading edge when seeking work with multi-national corporations” if they focus on becoming “linguistically more competent and more cross-culturally sensitive and work at developing better communication skills” (187).