

Pragmatic Investigation in Three Global English Textbooks

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Abstract

This study investigated four speech acts in three popular textbooks in the world. The researchers examined the speech acts in order to manifest whether these three textbooks - American file, American headway, and English result – are pragmatically appropriate or not. Three different levels, lower-intermediate, intermediate, and upper-intermediate, of each series have been scrutinized in search of four speech acts: refusal, request, apology, and complaint. The result of this study showed that the distribution level of the four speech acts is not equal both among textbooks and within each textbook considering the three levels. Among the four speech acts, 'complaint' was seen to have the highest frequency in all textbooks while 'refusal' was the least. According to the results obtained from this study, the three textbooks cannot be considered as appropriate or useful materials in order to teach or learn speech acts in an EFL context. However, the New Headway textbook enjoyed a higher and increasing mode of frequency of speech acts throughout its levels in comparison to other textbooks. The implication of this study is, therefore, for EFL/ESL teachers and material developers to consider pragmatics more in limelight to better the quality of both learning and instruction through rich materials.

Key words: *Textbook evaluation, speech acts, pragmatics, American headway, American file, English result*

Introduction

Learning languages in context that are related to the interest of learners is by far more efficient. The newer the materials, the more they attract the people and make them believe that they are the best sources of learning or teaching. According to Chadran (2001), the newly produced international materials are more preferred by the ESL/EFL instructors rather than those designed by the Ministry of Education. As the realm of the communicative language teaching has come to its highest point for the past years, it is expected that the newly published commercial textbooks enjoy a higher rate of communicative value.

Having been under focus in recent studies on the relationship between forms and functions, "communicative value" (Widdowson, 1987, p.11) has been the main base for the evaluation of the speech acts in EFL/ESL textbooks. Furthermore, speech acts have their roots in communicative competence proposed by Hymes (1972). ELT (English Language Teaching) has been widely influenced by the concept of communicative competence. Thus, material developers opted for pedagogically applying this notion in the field of ELT (Canale & Swain, 1980). In order for non-native speakers to understand unfamiliar culture-specific norms in productive skills, experts in ELT have put providing explicit rules for this issue as their leading goal.

This study aimed at evaluating the latest published textbooks- English Result (Hancock & McDonald, 2010), American File (Oxenden, 2008), and New American Head Way (John & Liz Soars, 2010) - in terms of four speech acts namely request, apology, complaint, and refusal. The researchers drew on the Austin (1962), Searle (1969), and Trosborg (1995) who presented a taxonomy of strategies for request realization; Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) for complaint strategies; Beebe et al. (1990) for refusal speech act; and Olshtain and Cohen (1983) for speech act of apology. The following research questions were the objectives of this study:

1. What is the frequency and distribution level of each of the four speech acts in each textbook?
2. Does the frequency of speech acts increase as the level of textbooks get more proficient or vice versa?
3. Are the conversations of these textbooks pragmatically appropriate regarding the four speech acts?

Literature review

In recent years many studies have been conducted on speech act theory. For instance, the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) clarified the cross-cultural discrepancies examining the two speech acts of request and apology (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). Besides providing a comprehensive source of data for speech acts, it also suggested applicable instruments for data collection and patterns for data codification.

As speech act study deals mostly with frequency and sequence of speech acts, Beebe et al. (1990) conducted a study to investigate refusal, request, invitation, and offer pragmatic transfer. They selected totally 60 participants from Japanese speaking people and American speaking pupils. Their study has been cited more in studies on refusal since the result of their study shows that it is refusal speech act which enjoys the sequence, frequency, and intrinsic content of the semantic formulas.

Rintell (1979) focused on the effect of age and gender of interlocutors on the production of the two speech acts- request and suggestion- by Spanish ESL learners. The results showed that there was a higher rate of difference in conveying request than suggestion.

In ESL context, Ellis (1992) examined the acquisition of requests by two young language learners. He gathered near 410 requests over 37 months for the two participants. Ellis recorded what the participants said and audiotaped all conversation. He concluded that the participants did not succeed in developing full repertoire for applying the speech act they had acquired, and the classes lack the appropriate condition for acquiring sociolinguistic needs. However, he confirmed that expressive and interpersonal needs can be fully developed in classrooms.

Another research was conducted by Cohen and Olshtain (1993) in search of describing ways in which non-native speakers use speech acts. They examined three speech acts of apology, complaint, and request, which measured through role-playing. After videotaping each speech act situation, they applied retrospective verbal report in order to analyse processing strategies in speech act formulation. The result show that most students do not use specific language strategies and think mostly in two languages or three (if trilingual). They do not pay attention to grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation and only conduct general assessment.

Matsumra (2001) conducted a valuable study on the utilization of advice and suggestion speech acts by Japanese ESL learners. He found that the participants, quite unlike their common habits in their own culture, used direct speech acts, e.g. you must, you should ... for advice and suggestions when answering teacher's question, "Please tell me what I could do in order to make this class more interesting to you all" (p. 637). This style, however, was considered inappropriate and rude.

Another valuable study was conducted by Vellenga (2004) who compared EFL and ESL textbooks. She argues that learners hardly acquire pragmatic competence due to the lack of information in textbooks. She concluded that EFL/ESL textbooks did not provide enough metalinguistic and explicit meta-pragmatics information. In spite of this shortage, the comparison shows that majority of EFL texts enjoy pragmatic information.

Marquez Reiter (2005) conducted a study investigating pragmatic strategies the Uruguayan customers used when complaining through phone calls about the services they received. He also studied the interactional behaviour between callers when complaining and call-takers when responding. The results showed that venting to a complete stranger seemed to be socially accepted. Moreover, the researcher specified that the strategies used actually neglected the customer's rights.

Bataineh and Bataineh (2008) conducted a cross-cultural study comparing American English and Jordanian Arabic in terms of apology strategies. They selected 50 undergraduate participants from American and Jordanian universities. The difference in apology strategy use was the result of this study. It showed that Jordanians tend to use apology expression more and corporate explicit apologies with various intensifiers more than their American counterparts do. This indicates that Jordanians exaggerate their apology expressions.

A different study in terms of methodology has been done by Lee (2009) who applied the traditional conversation analysis in order to elaborate requesting action in sequential terms. Requesting usually appears as a first part in adjacency pairs and the second part is a granting or rejection response. Lee has focused on the first part of these adjacency pairs. A corpus of telephone calls to an airline service in South Korea audiotaped from 2002 to 2003 is the material for this study. The result shows that requests are multi-components and their construction and completion is piece-by-piece that has been termed 'extended' type of request by the author. Another result of this study is indication twofold process of requesting: either customer-directed or agent-directed.

Methodology

Materials

This study purports to evaluate three textbooks naming *American Headway*, *American File*, and *English Result*. *American Headway* (John & Liz Soars, 2009) consists of six textbooks ranging from basic to advance level. *American File* (Oxenden, 2008) is composed of 4 textbooks of elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, and upper-intermediate. The other textbook, *English Result* (Hancock & McDonald, 2010) includes four levels of elementary to advanced.

Instrumentation

The researchers applied four different models in order to investigate the four speech acts by adopting the speech act list for refusals (Beebe, et al. 1990) together with Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) speech act sets for apologies. Furthermore, the researchers drew on the theories of Austin (1962), Searle (1967), and Trosborg (1995) on the request realization strategies, and Olshtain and Weinbach's (1987) taxonomy of complaint strategies. In the area of pragmatics, these four taxonomies enjoy a high level of acceptance regarding the investigation of speech acts.

Data collection procedure

One cannot deny the role of dialogues providing situations for interlocutors to make use of different speech acts in their speech. Thus, in order to gain a measure regarding speech acts, the conversation parts in the textbooks were examined. Though in qualitative research, analysing 10% of the whole population is considered enough, the researchers opted for scrutinizing all the conversation available in the textbooks. The conversations varied both in length and in number. For instance, *English result*, on average, has two conversations in each unit; however, sometimes one of the conversations is an interview that lacks distribution of speech acts. Likewise, *American Headway* consists of various conversations, some lengthy as an interview and some short dialogues. Nevertheless, all conversations, dialogues, or interviews were investigated in search of speech acts.

Data analysis procedure

Being a qualitative study, the main statistical analysis is frequency in order to indicate the distribution level of speech acts. A chi-square test, then, has been applied to manifest whether the distribution level of speech acts is equivalent or not. The frequency of each speech act in three levels of each textbook was calculated. The focus of the researchers was on the content analysis of the textbook through which they examined the contexts of using speech acts in these textbooks.

Results and discussion

The following tables distinctly illustrate the frequency of four speech acts in each three levels of textbooks. Table 1 depicts the distribution level of speech acts in three different levels of each textbook.

Table 1. *Frequency of speech acts*

Speech acts	A. F. lo-INTER	A. F. INTER	A. F. up-INTER	E. R. lo-INTER	E. R. INTER	E. R. up-INTER	HW lo-INTER	HW INTER	HW up-INTER
Refusal	2	11	4	5	4	10	8	13	28
Request	7	39	5	15	15	4	27	30	23
Apology	14	30	0	41	10	1	12	22	18
Complaint	9	23	7	11	6	12	13	35	39
Total	32	103	16	72	35	27	60	100	108

A. F. = American File
 E. R. = English Result
 HW= Headway

According to Table 1, American file has the least frequency of speech acts in upper-intermediate level with zero frequency of apology speech acts. American headway enjoys a growing trend in use of speech acts as the proficiency level of textbook increases. On the contrary, English result diminishes the presence of speech acts as learners become more competent in using language. The distribution level of the four speech acts is not proportionally equal through the three levels of American file. The magnitude of speech acts' frequency centred in intermediate level while two other levels lack even enough presentation of speech acts. Only American headway enjoys the increasing frequency of using speech acts as the level of proficiency increases throughout the series. American headway considers the need of learners for more communicative acts and exposes learners to more instances of using speech acts in conversations as they become more competent in using English. The following table shows the results of chi-square in each textbook.

Table 2. *Chi-square results in each textbook*

Textbook	CHI-SQUARE*	SIGNIFICANCE
American file lo-INTER	7.400	.060
American file INTER	16.202	.001
American file up-INTER	4.333	.228
English result lo-INTER	42.000	.000
English result INTER	8.080	.044
English result up-INTER	4.667	.009
Headway lo-INTER	13.733	.003
Headway INTER	11.120	.011
Headway up-INTER	8.963	.030

*df is three for all results.

As table 2 depicts, all results are significant except for two levels of American file. The very distinct results in American file upper-intermediate and lower intermediate are due to insufficient frequency which is 16 and 32 respectively. Because the distribution level of speech acts in these two levels is very heterogeneous, the results are not significant. The significant results, however, show that speech acts are not distributed equally and evenly throughout each textbook.

Table 3. *Chi-square result in each series*

Textbook series	Chi-square*	significance
American file series	15.491	.001
English result series	17.104	.001
American Headway series	16.687	.001

*df is 3 for all results.

The result of chi-square in each series is illustrated in Table 3. The significance of chi-square results shows that speech acts are not distributed evenly and equally in each series. According to Table 1, the frequency of four speech acts is very different between intermediate level (with 103 total frequency) and the other two levels (with 32 and 16 total frequency) of American file. The distinctly higher distribution of the four speech acts in intermediate level may be the reason of the significant result in American file series.

In order to answer the first question, we should look back on the three tables in the result and discussion section which show the frequency of the four speech acts and how they are distributed in each textbook and series. The results of chi-square test showed that the distribution level of speech acts is not equal in either each textbook or each series.

Regarding the second question, the researchers closely examined the frequency tables and found out that only American headway increased in the distribution level of speech acts as the proficiency level of the textbook increases. The speech acts fluctuate in number in the other series, i.e. they are highly frequent in intermediate level but decrease drastically in upper-intermediate level or lower-intermediate level. Among the three series, only American headway enjoys the advantage of adapting to learners' need regarding exposure to communicative acts.

Considering previous questions, to answer the third question, conversations in these series are not pragmatically appropriate. As the chi-square results showed, the distribution level of speech acts is not even throughout the series. In order to be pragmatically competent, conversations of these textbooks should include an even distribution of speech acts.

Conclusion and implications

Unlike the common belief and considering the problems in syllabus design, being newly published does not guarantee the appropriateness of textbooks for language teaching program. Similarly, this study proved that three newly published textbooks such as American file, American headway, and English result are not pragmatically competent and suitable for learners who now feel the need to gain communicative competence more than ever. Furthermore, the researchers thoroughly examined all conversations in the three series and it was revealed that the series fell short of supporting the communicative competence. Owing to inequality of speech acts' distribution, the learners exposed to these textbooks might be competent in using one speech acts but unable to produce another. Moreover, the learners might forget using communicative acts due to the fact that speech acts' distribution is not even as the proficiency level of textbooks increases.

The implications of this study are for the institutions and material developers, and EFL/ESL teachers in order to better consider textbooks from the pragmatics side and gather best options for their purposes or provide any more supplementary sources to empower the pragmatic dimension. The explicit teaching of language functions and speech acts could be a solution for teachers to the pitfalls of textbooks in this area.

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