



Research Paper

Investigating The Distribution Of Speech Acts In Primary School Textbooks In Telangana State, India: A Case Study

ABSTRACT: English language textbooks are the route maps of any ELT programme (Sheldon, 1998). Yet several studies have shown that they do not provide adequate opportunities for the learners to develop their pragmatic competence. Pragmatics as a field of study aims to understand how learners **comprehend** and produce linguistic utterances in a second language. Speech acts manifest performances. Hence it is important to teach, through the textbooks, young learners to master speech acts. In order to understand the distribution of speech acts in the five prescribed textbooks used in government schools in Telangana, this study adopted Searle's (1976) speech act typology and analyzed conversations in all the five textbooks. Findings of the study show that the distribution of the speech acts is highly uneven making it difficult to develop the pragmatic competence of young learners through these prescribed textbooks.

KEY WORDS: pragmatic competence, speech acts, textbooks, frequency, young learners

Received 03 October, 2018; Accepted 15 October, 2018 © The author(s) 2018. Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. INTRODUCTION

Coursebooks are perceived by many to be the route map of any ELT programme, laying bare its shape, structure, and destination, with progress, programme, and even teacher quality being assessed by learners in terms of sequential, unit-by-unit coverage (Sheldon, 1998). Young learners need to be provided models of socially and culturally appropriate forms of language. Pragmatic competence, which is one of the most important uses that one can put language to, can be developed through samples provided in the textbooks in the form of conversations or what **are** called speech acts. Thus, textbooks become the chief sources of such samples.

Bates (1976, a) defines pragmatics as “rules governing the use of language in context” (p.420). According to Kasper (1998) and Kasper and Rose (2002), pragmatics helps us understand how learners of other languages understand and produce linguistic utterances in a second language. Pragmatics studies language from the point of view of the users in terms of the linguistic choices they make in an interactional context. Young learners acquire the pragmatic norms of the second language in order to successfully engage in speech acts, participate in different types of discourse is an indication of competent use of the target language.

According to Bachman and Palmer (2000), Eslami-Rasekh (2005) (cited in Vakilifard et al., 2015), pragmatic competence is one of the crucial aspects of communicative competence. Out of the several aspects of pragmatics, speech acts are the most researched ones (Kasper, 2006). John Searle (1975) (cited in http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/95417/8/08_chapter2.pdf) defines a speech act as “Speaking a language is performing speech acts, acts such as making statements, giving commands, asking questions or making promises. Searle states that all linguistic communication involves linguistic (speech) acts” (p.16). In other words, all utterances in a language serve a purpose and this purpose is expressed through an action which is conveyed through speech acts. A few speech acts that we perform are apologizing, offering, inviting, commiserating, asking, declaring, refusing, or accepting and so on. Such speech acts facilitate pragmatic ability and help learners develop communicative competency.

English language textbooks are the chief sources in speech acts for young learners who **acquire** English as a second language. Textbooks, according to Vellenga (2004), are the most important materials for language acquisition. Keeping in mind the value and importance of pragmatic competency, materials developers are expected to pay attention to the role and place of speech acts in the language textbooks to help learners develop their pragmatic competence in a classroom setting. As textbooks are the chief sources of exposure to language—pragmatic content—it is imperative that textbooks be analysed to explore how speech acts have been

distributed across the books. Hence, the study, based on Searle’s speech act taxonomy (1976), aims to analyse conversations to understand the distribution of various speech acts and the frequency of their distribution.

Many researchers are of the opinion that pragmatic competence of L2 learners can be improved through instructional materials such as textbooks (e.g., Crandall & Basturkmen, 2004; Rose, 2005). Bouton (1994), for example, asserts that many pragmatic aspects of L2 such as conversational implicature can be learnt through instructional textbooks, and without them, the process of learning will be slow or even impossible. Koike and Pearson (2005) attribute another advantage in using instructional textbooks in pragmatic instruction. They believe that by using textbooks for instructing pragmatic content, language learners will have a higher chance of receiving feedback on linguistic features at a pragmatic level. According to Koike and Pearson (2005), pragmatic acquisition is facilitated to the extent L2 learners have the chance to receive feedback on pragmatic issues. Given the importance of pragmatic competence in the process of L2 learning and considering the significant role that textbooks can play in improving learners’ pragmatic competence, it is of a great importance to review the literature for the studies which focused on the comparison among different ELT textbooks. In an analysis of pragmatic content of ELT textbooks, Vellenga (2004) indicated that generally “a phrase or two” is concerned with pragmatic content in each page of common ELT textbooks. She also showed that “the distribution of speech act types across ESL and EFL textbooks did not appear to be patterned, nor based on frequency of speech act occurrence in natural language, and often seems counterintuitive” (p. 9).

The purpose of this study is to analyse conversations from a pragmatic perspective. **It tries** to understand how pragmatically rich the prescribed textbooks are. The study used Searle’s (1976) Speech Act Taxonomy to ascertain the different types of speech acts and their frequency distribution in five textbooks for young learners. This was to obtain an overall pragmatic evaluation of the textbooks. The following research questions were answered through the study:

1. What are the types of speech acts presented in the five textbooks?
2. How frequently is each of the speech act presented in the books?
3. Are the samples of conversations presented in these books pragmatically appropriate with regard to the existence and distribution of speech acts?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Searle (1976), the basic unit of human linguistic communication is the illocutionary act. The study adopted Searle’s (1976) classification of illocutionary acts:

- a. **Representatives/Assertives:** the point or purpose of the members of the representative class is to commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to something being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition. All of the members of the representative class are assessable on the dimension of assessment which includes true and false.
- b. **Directives:** the illocutionary point of these consists in the fact that they are attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something. According to Searle, these acts may be very modest attempts as when somebody invites the other to do something or they may be fierce attempts where one insists that someone else do it.
- c. **Commissives:** These speech acts commit the speaker to do something (in varying degrees) to do something in the future.
- d. **Expressives:** They express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content. Some of them are the acts of thanking, apologizing, welcoming, deploring, and so on.
- e. **Declarations:** According to Searle, it is the defining characteristic of this class that the successful performance of one of its members brings about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality, successful performance guarantees that the propositional content corresponds to the word.

(Source: Vaklifard et al, 2015; Moradi et al, 2013)

The above explanation can be summarized in a tabular form given below:

Searle’s (1976) Classification of Speech Acts

Categories	Sub-categories
Representatives (Assertives)	stating, boasting, complaining, claiming, reporting, asserting, describing, announcing, insisting, guessing, forecasting, predicting, introducing, calling, complimenting concluding, reasoning, hypothesizing, telling, insisting, or swearing
Directives	requesting, warning, inviting, questioning, ordering, commanding, advising, reassuring, summoning, entreating, asking, directing, bidding, forbidding, instructing, begging, recommending, suggesting, daring, defying, and challenging

Commissives	Promising, vowing, offering, threatening, refusing, pledging, intending, and vowing to do or to refrain from doing something
Expressives	Greeting, thanking, apologizing, regretting, commiserating, congratulating, condoling, deploring, welcoming, surprising, blaming, praising
Declarations	Declaring, christening, firing from employment, resigning, dismissing, naming, excommunicating, appointing, sentencing, blessing, firing, baptizing, and bidding

(Sources: Vakilifard et al, 2015)

III. METHODOLOGY

Context: The study was conducted in the context of Telangana State in south India where English is taught as a second language (and a compulsory subject) from Class I in government run schools. English is supposed to be the medium of instruction across subjects for all classes. Children who enroll in government run schools are admitted to Class I at the age of five.

Materials

The government of Telangana distributes textbook free of cost to all students. For this study five textbooks (for classes I-V), produced by the Government of Telangana, Department of School Education, were analysed. According to the State Council of Educational Research and Training, ‘The primary Textbooks titled **MY ENGLISH WORLD** are (sic) prepared on holistic approach of language learning. The language skills namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing are integrated in the larger context of the themes suggested in NCF-2005. The activities are designed as per children’s knowledge and experiences which ensure their active participation in Teaching Learning Process. The main aim of teaching English is to help learners evolve themselves as independent users of English’ (Preface, iii). **MY ENGLISH WORLD**, Class I consists of seven units while those of Classes II, III, IV and V consist of eight units each. All speech acts in these five books were analysed.

Data analysis 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 (Alemi et al., 2013).

The study is chiefly descriptive research with quantitative and qualitative investigations of speech acts mentioned above. The speech acts investigated in this study are chiefly conversations that appear in the textbooks. The main statistical analysis in the study is the frequency to indicate the distribution of speech acts. The frequency of each of the speech acts in the five textbooks was calculated by one researcher first. Then it was cross-checked by another researcher. Where there were discrepancies, the data was **reanalyzed** and results were checked again. This was to ensure inter-rater reliability.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following tables indicate the distribution of speech acts in the five books that were analysed.

Speech Acts	Book I		Book II		Book III		Book IV		Book V		Total No	Total percentage
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%		
Representatives	37	41.1	26	40.50	65	46.42	78	36.97	109	45.99	315	41.33
Directives	38	42.2	25	39.06	34	24.28	73	34.60	66	27.85	236	30.97
Commissives	07	07.1	01	1.60	15	10.71	20	09.48	18	07.59	61	08.01
Expressives	07	07.1	11	17.19	26	18.57	37	17.54	37	5.61	118	15.49
Declarations	01	1.1	01	1.64	0	0	03	1.42	07	2.95	32	04.20
Total	90	98.6	64	9.89	140	99.98	211	99.93	237	99.99	762	100

As the table indicates, representatives, followed by directives and expressives were found to be abundantly used by the materials producers. It is interesting to note that samples of the speech acts increase in textbooks from Class II onwards while there is a decrease in the number of speech acts from those in class I to the ones in class II.

Analysing the rows, it is evident that there is steep rise in the sample of speech acts viz. representatives, directives, and expressives from Class II onwards. However, samples of commissives and declarations find a minimal presence in the textbooks.

V. DISCUSSION

As the table indicates, the distribution of the five speech acts is uneven amongst the five textbooks prescribed for young learners. While it is important to expose the learners to samples of speech acts, textbooks—the chief sources of exposure to the speech acts—do not seem to be providing an opportunity for the learners to do so.

The findings of this study conform with those of Alemi et al. (2013), Ekin (2013), Poupari and Bagheri (2013), Kohandani et al (2014) and Aksoyalp and Toprak (2015) (cited in Vakilifard, 2015) that declaration speech act was absent in the five textbooks that were analyzed.

As discussed earlier, textbooks are the chief sources for learners to be exposed to authentic use of language. Hence there is a dire need to revise the materials to provide opportunities for learners to be exposed to authentic samples of speech acts and also use them in contexts. This would ensure the development of their communicative competence.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has implications for materials designers. In today's era where English is the language of success and career, it is imperative to prepare the learners to be competent users of English. Instructional materials have a major role in contributing to the development of language competence of the young learners. This study contributes to research in pragmatics and speech acts and recommends that the lacuna identified in the distribution of the speech acts be addressed. Further, it would be necessary to check if the distribution of the speech acts is even in the instructional materials prescribed for learners in higher classes.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Alemi, M. Roodi, F. & Bemani, M. (2013). Pragmatic Investigation in Three Global English Textbooks. *Internet Journal of Language, Culture and Society*, 37, 55-60.
- [2]. Aksoyalp, Y. & Toprak, T.E. (2015). Incorporating pragmatics in English language teaching: to what extent do EFL course books address speech acts? *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 4(2), 125-133.
- [3]. Moradi, A and Afraz, S (2013). A Textbook Evaluation of Speech Acts and Language Functions in High School English Language Textbooks (I, II, and III) and Interchange Series, Books I, II, and III. Retrieved from [www. European-science.com](http://www.European-science.com)
- [4]. Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [5]. Searle, J.R. (1976). A classification of illocutionary acts. *Language in Society*, 5(1), 1- 23. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4166848>
- [6]. Vellenga, H. (2004). Learning pragmatics from ESL and EFL textbooks: How likely? *TESL-EJ*, 8 (2), 25-38.

XXX " Investigating The Distribution Of Speech Acts In Primary School Textbooks In Telangana State, India: A Case Study " (Quest Journals) *Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science* 6.9 (2018): 42-45