

Speech Acts in EFL Context: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

As a part of crucial skills of communicative competence, there have been enormous studies discussing speech acts. This study aimed at investigating speech acts as interlanguage pragmatics focusing on EFL context. Two main questions addressing on (1) how speech acts availability in text-book used by EFL learners, (2) the frequency of speech acts occurring in the EFL classroom context. By reviewing 20 journals from various reliable sources thematically, it is found that speech act availability in the textbooks exists with an unbalanced proportion of speech act types. In addition, the books provide fewer various strategies of speech acts. Concerning the frequency of speech acts in the EFL classroom, directives are mostly used by the teacher while students tend to use various kinds of speech acts. Further study suggested digging into more contextual settings.

Keywords: Speech Acts, EFL, Text-Books

INTRODUCTION

When people express an utterance, sometimes it is not always describing something, but they also do something (Austin, 1962). Speech acts are known as a theory that the 'words' have some meaning. In our communication, we produce some utterances that contain grammar, action, and intention. When we are producing speech acts, we will have an intention of our utterance and it can influence the behaviour of the hearer. Grundy (2008) classifies three dimensions that will occur when we are saying something that is locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts. The locutionary act means the act of saying something (Wijana, 1996, p.17) or what the speaker means to deliver. The illocutionary act is the act of doing something or the right words of the message. A perlocutionary act is a speech act that aims to state something to influence the interlocutor to have a certain effect (Leech, 2011, p.199) or the reaction from the hearer to the speaker's message.

Searle (1979) elaborated on five types of speech acts, that is declarative, assertive, expressive, directive, and commissive. Declarative here is the speech act that changes the condition through the utterance, for example, "I sentence you to six months in prison!" Assertive is to what extent the speaker believes the truth of a proposition, for example, "No one makes better cakes than I do." Next is expressive speech acts which express what the speaker feels (pain, joy, sorrow, etc.), for example, "I'm really sorry! Or Congratulations! Besides, there is a speech act that the speaker uses to get someone to act something namely a directive, for example, "Could you lend me a pencil, please?" The last is commissive which uses a speaker to commit themselves to the action in the future (promise, threats, pledges, etc.), for example, "I'll be back soon" or "We will not do that."

The speech acts should be taught in EFL learners' classes because they need to achieve communicative competence. In any level of education, the learners come from a piece of different backgrounds knowledge, cultural context and diversity social. In teaching and learning interactions in the class, the contribution of students to express their idea and knowledge is needed. The speech acts that the learners do in their class has a different meaning from each speaker to the speech partner. The meaning is not directly expressed clearly by the partner because the speaker usually expressed the meaning through implications which is it should be understood by a partner. Therefore, the use of speech acts in Indonesian EFL classes will reduce misunderstanding because of the inappropriate use of speech acts. In a nutshell, speech acts as a part of pragmatic competence are considered needed to master. Based on the previous explanation, the present study attempts to evaluate (1) speech acts availability in the English textbook provided for the EFL learners, and (2) speech acts that are frequently used both by teachers and students in an EFL classroom context.

METHOD

This literature-review research presents and examines previous studies related to speech acts in the EFL context. There were 20 journals written in local, national, and international journals from the year 2012 to 2022. The articles were analysed thematically based on the area of speech act use in EFL classroom context and text-book as learning media used by EFL learners.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Speech Acts Analysis on EFL Text Book

Despite the enormous source of learning such as the internet, text-book however still take an important part in teaching learning, especially in the ELT context. It is regarded as a reliable source of learning provided by teachers, schools, or courses. In relation to speech acts as today's important skill to master, this section will evaluate textbook analysis on speech acts in the area of EFL/ESL context in several countries.

Despite the development of digital resources and the large amount of material available on the internet, textbooks continue to play an important part in the teaching and learning process in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). Because they are meticulously chosen and designed by specialists in the subject, these conventional printed materials are generally regarded as dependable sources of learning and are usually offered by teachers, schools, or language courses.

Textbooks are extremely important when it comes to mastering speech acts in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL). Speech acts include the communicative acts and intentions underlying language use, such as requests, suggestions, apologies, promises, and more. Developing expertise in speech actions is essential for effective communication because it guarantees that learners can transmit their intended meaning in a variety of social circumstances.

Considering the importance of politeness strategies as an adequate skill of communication, the study done by Alemi & Roja (2012) attempted to investigate the frequency of speech acts focusing on complaints and compliments strategy provided by the books entitled English Result used in the Iranian context. The result shows that there was an adequate frequency of both compliments and complaints availability in the textbook. However, the strategies provided especially for complaints seems to be less varied which might cause a misunderstanding perception of British culture of complaints is too straightforward. Further study on the same area and focus was also done by Jalilian & Roohani (2016). With a similar context, this study investigated an English course book series called Touchstone. Different from the previous one, it is revealed that based on analysis, the speech acts of complaints outnumbered the compliments. In addition, even though various strategies for both skills are available, it is acclaimed to be less authentic.

Nourdad et al., (2016) investigated by comparing the new version of the textbook series entitled The Prospect 1 and 2. Using the theory of Searle (1979) on speech acts classification, this research aimed at revealing the speech acts knowledge contented in the book. The study revealed that there are no significant differences between both versions. The frequency of assertive, declarative, expressive and commissive in the new version appear respectively with 40.5%, 37.97%, 17.72% and 3.79%. Unfortunately, there is no single content of declarative speech provided by the book. In a nutshell, there is no balance knowledge related to speech acts. Ignoring declarative speech acts will make the students know nothing about this kind of speech act.

In the Indonesian context, Refualu et al., (2021) investigated the frequency and function of speech acts in the ninth grader text-book entitled Bahasa Inggris (English): Think Globally Act Locally for Grade IX as the compulsory source of learning English in Junior High School provided by the government. The frequency of speech acts is dominated by assertive followed by directives and expressive with the same percentage. Commissives and declarations are in last place respectively with less than 3% each. Additionally, it also revealed that the function of each speech act appears. However, not all functions of speech acts are provided, such as the missing "vowing" in the commissive speech act, blaming and condoling in expressive, etc. This finding emphasized the previous research about the unbalance speech act frequency available in the book in addition to the missing functions of speech acts.

In relation to speech acts as a branch of pragmatics study, authentic material is considered an important aspect in building students' speech acts. A further study done by Vaezi et al., (2014) attempted to compare speech acts of English text-book written by native and non-native speakers in the Iranian context. The textbook entitled Right Path to English was written by a non-native while the New Interchange series were written by a native speaker of English. Although there were different percentages of each category, there were similarities in the dominance of speech acts appear. Assertive, directives, expressive, commissive and declarative exist

respectively. However, in the book written by non-native speakers, there was zero appearance of commissive and declarative. Furthermore, the language used by non-native speakers tends to be more direct than the native speaker one, claiming that it depends on the culture that influences the target language.

What are the speech acts that are frequently used in EFL class contexts?

Besides elaborating on speech acts in the textbook, some previous studies also evaluate the kinds of speech acts that frequently appear or are used in EFL classes. In observing some previous studies in the context of the use of speech acts in EFL class, the present study classifies into two categories, the first is the types of speech acts used by teachers and the second is the types of speech acts used by learners.

Studies that presented the use of speech acts by the teachers carried out by Indah (2019), Santosa & Kurniadi (2020), Suryandani & Budasi (2021), Mukhroji, et al., (2019), Yanti, et al., (2021) and Ivana, et al., (2020). The data collected by some scholars took in different places such as Iran, Jordanian and also mostly in Indonesia. The objectives of the previous studies were the same that is to investigate the types of speech acts used by teachers when they are teaching EFL learners in the class. There were no differences between the result of the use of speech acts by the teachers in Iran and Indonesia. They produced the same result that the directives speech Act frequently occurs used by teachers. Based on the results of some studies, the directive speech acts get high percentages such as in the study of Indah (2019) reach 62% with 133 utterances of the directive, Santosa & Kurniadi (2020) and Mukhroji, et al., (2019) reach 70%, Suryandani & Budasi (2021) 46.95% with 185 utterances.

The previous studies stated that the use of directives in EFL classes for teachers is because they have to teach using communicative language. The speech act occurred when teachers give commands, request, invite and also motivate EFL learners. Using directive speech acts will lead to improving the success skills of students. Moreover, some studies also revealed that it can enhance the students' communication in class and their critical thinking. It can be concluded that learning pragmatics of speech acts very useful for everyone to know the meaning of our utterances especially in the classroom. The study by Saadatmandi, et al., (2018) who explore the possible impact of teaching pragmatics in the use of the request speech act stated that the pragmatics give a significant impact on the students to perform of request speech act. Differently from others, there is a study from Zayed (2014) who also investigated the use of speech acts in the classroom by teachers and learners. The result revealed that teachers and students are not able to produce speech acts properly even though they have already practised using speech acts such as compliments, requests, or apologies.

The second categories are the type of speech acts used by learners. There are six studies which revealed speech acts that frequently occurred in the classroom by learners, those are Budiasih, et al., (2017), Fahmi (2018), Mukhroji, et al., (2019), Neama & Neama (2021), Nugroho & Rekha (2020), and Hamidi (2018). Differently from the types of speech acts produced by teachers who mostly use directive speech acts, the type of speech acts used by learners are various. Some studies such as Budiasih et al., (2017), Fahmi (2018), and Mukhroji et al., (2019) revealed that speech acts applied by learners are assertive, directive, commissive, and expressive. Furthermore, Hamidi (2018) found that the learners used thanking (0.58%), apology (0.58%) and refusal (1.16%).

Besides the use of speech acts in previous studies, the other studies by Nugroho & Rekha (2020) also identify the use of speech acts in requests. This study investigates the most and the least employed request strategies among Indonesian EFL learners. Based on the investigation done by researchers, it is found that the request strategies that the most frequently used by learners are conventionally indirect and the least is non-conventionally indirect request.

To know the understanding of speech acts of advice by learners, Neama & Neama (2021) investigate the ability of learners to recognize and produce the speech act of advice. The researchers want to know to what extent the students can recognize and produce the speech act of advice. The study highlighted that the learners are not able to recognize it. The learners are frequently wrong and unanswered speech acts of advice in all situations. Moreover, the learners only have an average level to produce the speech act of advice.

In this study, from investigating some previous studies, the researchers not only present the types of speech but also the comparison between the use of speech acts by EFL learners and native speakers. The study from Şanal & Ortaçtepe, (2019) and Babaie & Shahrokhi (2015) examines the differences in speech acts used by EFL learners and native speakers. The studies stated that EFL learners could not produce completely of the speech act in oral and written productions. There were differences in terms of frequency used of speech acts between EFL learners and native speakers.

While the study from Harooni & Pourdana (2017) they observed the politeness and indirectness in EFL listening comprehension and also whether they are gender-bound. The results found that there are no differences between males and females in terms of listening comprehension and the fluency of internal and external modifiers comprehension of politeness and indirectness request speech act.

Most of the research was done between 2012-2020. Unfortunately, the context of EFL is only limited to Indonesian and Iranian contexts. However, in a nutshell, most of the study similarly focused on the importance of speech acts in a textbook as a reliable source of language learning in a classroom context. In addition, authenticity needs to be concerned more to give a real example of target language communication.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed various articles about speech acts in the EFL context, focusing on the textbook used by the students and its use in a classroom context. The first finding implication will be on the text-book writer of English as a foreign language. First, authenticity is an important aspect that should be inserted in the content of the book, since students need real context of target language to gain their socio-pragmatics competence. Secondly, there should be a balance kind of speech acts available in the textbook to give a complete knowledge of this competence. Finally, to create a better-quality English textbook, there must be various strategies of communication-based on particular speech acts to give a wider example for students to learn.

The second result found that there are two categories of using speech acts in EFL classrooms. The first category is the use of speech acts by teachers and the second is the use of speech acts by learners. The speech acts that frequently appeared when used by teachers in the classroom are mostly directive speech acts. They mostly used directive speech acts to adopt the concept of communicative

language teaching. Meanwhile, the speech acts that are used by learners are various such as assertive, directive, commissive, and expressive.

Moreover, there are some studies also discussed the comparison of using speech acts by EFL learners and native speakers which found that the EFL learners could not produce the speech acts completely as native speakers. Besides that, the other study also revealed that in politeness and indirectness request speech act, there is no gender-bound of the EFL learners.

This in-depth examination of papers on speech acts in the EFL setting throws light on critical aspects for textbook writers, instructors, and researchers seeking to improve students' socio-pragmatic competence. The study's findings have important implications for the design and implementation of EFL textbooks, as well as the use of speech acts in EFL courses. It emphasizes the need of infusing authenticity into content for English as a foreign language textbook writers. Real-life contexts and examples of speech acts should be weaved throughout the content to expose students to authentic language use in a variety of social situations. Students can improve their pragmatic communication skills by developing a deeper grasp of cultural nuances and appropriate employment of speech acts.

Another important point raised by the study is the need for textbooks to include a balanced depiction of various speech acts. Offering a varied range of speech acts, such as assertive, directive, commissive, and expressive, allows learners to obtain a thorough understanding of the various functions and intentions underlying language use. Such a comprehensive approach helps EFL students develop well-rounded language fluency and strong communication skills. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the significance of incorporating communication-based solutions for specific speech actions within the textbook. Learners can see how different speech acts manifest in different communication situations by offering diverse instances and scenarios in which different speech acts are used. This not only improves comprehension but also equips students to use appropriate speech acts in their interactions, so improving communicative competence.

The study distinguishes two groups of speech acts performed in EFL classrooms: those utilized by teachers and those used by learners. Teachers' use of directive speech acts is consistent with the concept of communicative language teaching, which emphasizes interactive and learner-centred techniques. Learners, on the other hand, exhibit a varied spectrum of speech acts, demonstrating their engagement in multiple communication styles as they gain pragmatic competence.

Moreover, comparing speech act utilization among EFL learners and native speakers reveals a disparity in students' ability to properly produce speech acts as native speakers. This research emphasizes the importance of targeted education and practice in speech acts, as EFL learners may struggle to understand the nuanced subtleties and cultural appropriateness of specific speech actions. Addressing these gaps through explicit instruction and exposure to real language use can help learners bridge the gap over time.

Finally, the research uncovers an intriguing issue of politeness and indirectness in request speech acts. The lack of gender differences among EFL learners shows that gender stereotypes have little influence on the acquisition of politeness tactics. This research emphasizes the necessity of teaching and practising politeness in language learning situations so that students can negotiate international conversations with cultural awareness and respect.

In conclusion, this study gives useful insights into the significance of speech acts in the EFL context, as well as practical implications for the production of high-quality English textbooks and effective classroom teaching practices. Educators can better equip EFL learners with the key pragmatic competence required for successful cross-cultural communication and language competency by considering authenticity, balance, and a varied range of communication-based examples, and it emphasizes the continued need for additional research into speech actions and their use in language learning, with the goal of continuously improving language instruction for EFL learners globally.

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