



INVESTIGATION INTO SPEECH ACTS REALIZATIONS IN ENGLISH FOR PALESTINE TEXTBOOKS: FOCUS ON REQUESTS AND APOLOGIES

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ABSTRACT

This research investigated the realizations of request and apology speech acts in eleven English for Palestine textbooks taught at Grades 5 to 11 at Palestinian public schools, focusing on requests and apologies. Requests presented in the dialogues and conversations were identified, counted and classified according to the nine strategies developed for the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP, 1989). Apologies, on the other hand, were identified, counted and classified following the five apology strategies developed by Cohen and Olshtain's (1981). Moreover, metapragmatic information related to requests and apologies was explored. The findings revealed that only (39) instances of requests are presented in the textbooks, realized by two strategies out of nine. As for apology, only (18) instances are presented in the textbooks, realized by (3) strategies out of (5). The findings also showed that the textbooks do not present any explicit metapragmatic information about the two speech acts under study. The paper concludes with recommendations for materials writers, inviting them to benefit from the findings of the study in revising and enhancing the pragmatic content of the textbooks.

KEYWORDS

pragmatic content; speech acts; requests; apologies; metapragmatic Information

INTRODUCTION

Research on textbooks analysis and evaluation abounds with studies that focus on the occurrences of pragmatic elements in the textbooks. Special focus on pragmatic competence coincides with the popularity of communicative language teaching, which advocates as its major objective the development of students' communicative competence (CC) in English as a foreign/second (EFL/ESL) learning and teaching. CC, according to Tarvin (2015), is the "ability to use language, or to communicate, in a culturally appropriate manner in order to make meaning and accomplish social tasks with efficacy and fluency through extended interaction. (p. 6).





Savignon (1991) defines CC as “the ability of classroom language learners to interact with other speakers, to make meaning, as distinct from their ability to recite dialogues or perform on discrete-points of grammatical knowledge” (p.3). Communicative Competence comprises four sub-competencies: linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic and discourse. Pragmatics is the use of language in context. Pragmatic competence, according to Ishihara (2007), is “the ability to use language effectively to achieve a specific purpose and understand language in context.” (p. 21)

Searle et al. (1980) stressed that, “The theory of speech acts starts with the assumption that the minimal unit of human communication is not a sentence or other expression, but rather the performance of certain kinds of acts, such as making statements, asking questions, giving orders, describing, explaining, apologizing, thanking, congratulating, etc.” (p.7).

Textbook developers responded to this call for developing L2 pragmatic competence by incorporating pragmatic content into textbooks. There has been a shift of focus in textbook analysis and evaluation studies on speech acts realizations, such as requests, apologies, compliments, thanks, promises, among others.

The present study focuses on the representation of the request and apology speech acts in the twelve textbooks (Grades 1to 12), used at government schools in Palestine. In 1999 the Palestinian Ministry of Education initiated a project to design and produce national curricula for all the subjects taught at the twelve grades in government schools. The Guidelines for the English curricula were prepared by a team of Palestinian educationalists and the textbooks were written by British authors. The **English for Palestine** textbooks are based on communicative language teaching principles and methodology.

The General Guidelines for the English language curriculum (2015) state clearly the curriculum is based on the communicative language teaching principles. The overriding goal of EFL teaching and learning is to develop students’ communicative competence (both linguistic and pragmatic), which prepares them well for engaging in cross-cultural interactions with others with different world views, life experiences, languages, and cultures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section is limited to review of previous research that investigated pragmatic content in English as a foreign/second language textbooks, which is the focus of the present study.

Ton Nu and Murray’s (2020) study explored pragmatic content in 6 textbooks used by Vietnamese school students. One of the study aims was to survey the topicalized speech acts





covered in the textbooks. The results showed that requests are only covered in one textbook and apologies are not covered in any of the 6 textbooks. They noted that this result is not consistent with the goal of the textbooks, which is to develop students' communicative competence.

Namaziandost et al. (2019) surveyed the speech acts in the conversations in three textbooks (**Prospect One, Two and Three**) used in Iranian high schools and institutions. They used Searle's (1976) categories of speech acts. They found that the speech acts were not distributed equally.

Karlsson (2018) studied the pragmatic input in two Swedish EFL textbook series regarding the request speech act. The results showed that both textbooks series "lack explicit information about requests", (Abstract). Moreover, there are few activities aimed at students' practicing request in English.

Li (2018) investigated the pragmatic elements available in New Vision College English listening and speaking textbooks used by EFL students at Chinese universities. He found that, "The overall amount of pragmatic knowledge (speech acts, metapragmatic information, and contextual variables) is inadequate and the coverage of that knowledge is not comprehensive" (Abstract, i).

Barron (2016) explored the use of request speech act in an EFL series (Cornelson) taught at German schools (Grades 5-20). The results showed that of the nine request strategies identified in the literature only three were used: mood derivable, locution derivable and query preparatory. Moreover standard request situations were used.

Aksoyalp and Toprak. (2015) investigated the presentation of the speech acts of complaints, apologies and suggestions in 17 EFL textbooks used by students with different proficiency levels (from beginner to advanced). They used three different taxonomies for the analysis of the tree speech acts. They found that the complexity of the speech acts under study increased with the different proficiency levels. Moreover the finding showed that apologies were presented in simple routine formulas (Sorry; I'm so sorry). They concluded that pragmatic content should receive more attention by materials writers.

Gholami (2015) investigated pragmatic knowledge in three Iranian EFL textbooks taught to high school and pre-university students. The findings showed that just a few sentences or phrases are written for the sake of representing speech acts.

Nourdad and Khiabani (2015) explored pragmatic content in two EFL textbooks (**Prospect 1 and 2**) used at first and second junior high schools in Iran. Analysis of speech acts was done





following Searle's (1979) model. The findings showed that the textbooks lacked equality and variation in the distribution of speech acts.

Meihami and Khanlarzadeh's (2015) study explored the frequency of the speech acts of requests, refusals and apologies presented in conversations and dialogues in in global and local EFL textbooks taught at elementary level. Three frameworks were used in the analysis of the three speech acts. The findings showed that requests were the most frequent speech act, followed by refusals and apologies.

Dendenne (2014) investigated the representation of the speech acts of requests and apologies in three Algerian ELT secondary schools textbooks. Occurrences of the two speech acts were identified, coded and analyzed. The findings showed that the distribution of the two speech acts is "random". Moreover, learners are exposed to few linguistic forms for producing requests and apologies. Besides there is a lack of explicit focus on the presented data.

Aribi's (2014) study surveyed request strategies covered in EFL materials taught to Tunisian EFL learners, using the directness scale developed by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989). The results showed that there is excessive use of direct request strategies. Moreover "mood derivable" and imperatives is the most frequently used. He recommended that students should receive wider pragmatic input and metapragmatic information should be provided.

Previous studies on *English for Palestine* mainly focused on evaluation of certain aspects of the textbooks. For example, Karaki (2016) evaluated task-based learning in EFP (Grade 9). Awad (2013) evaluated EFP (12th Grade) from the teachers' perspectives. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, the only study that investigated the pragmatic content in **English for Palestine** textbooks is Qawasmi's (2016) MA thesis. The study explored the frequency and distribution of speech acts, politeness strategies and metapragmatic information in English for Palestine textbook (Grade 9). The corpus consisted of twelve conversations covered in the first period of the 12 units in the Pupil's Book (A and B). The data analysis adopted Searle's (1976) taxonomy of speech acts as well as Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. The results showed that the speech acts of requesting and apologizing occurred twice and five times in the two books, respectively. Qawasmi commented on these results by saying that "the forms of requests are repeated such as *can/could you*". (p. 71) and that "there is little variation of forms that achieve the same language function "the speech act". (p.70). She gave the form (I am sorry) for apologizing.

The above survey of relevant literature shows that there exists a gap in the research on the pragmatic content of the EFL textbook series (*English for Palestine*) used at the Palestinian





public schools. Even the only study by Qawasmi (2016) is limited to Grade 9 textbook. The present study, in contrast, aims to study the occurrences of request and apology speech acts in 11 **English for Palestine** books taught at Grades 5 to 11.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study addressed five research questions:

- To what extent is the request speech act covered in the materials?
- What strategies are used in realizing requests in the materials?
- To what extent is the apology speech act covered in the materials?
- What strategies are used in realizing apologies in the materials?
- To what extent is metapragmatic information provided in the materials?

METHODOLOGY

This research uses descriptive-analytic method, with a qualitative approach.

Materials

The materials under study are the English curriculum books (**English for Palestine**) taught at Grades 1 to 12. Initial screening of the contents of books (1-4 and 12) revealed that no mention of pragmatic content was made. So, the researcher decided to limit the analysis of pragmatic input to grades (5-11). Grades (5-10) each consisted of two books (A and B). So the study corpus consisted of 11 books.

English for Palestine textbooks were designed and written in 2000. The Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education curriculum Department commissioned a team of English language specialist from universities and schools to prepare the Guidelines for designing the English curriculum for Government schools. The Guidelines were sent to a Macmillan publishing company to write the materials (2014).

The Guidelines state that the syllabi should be designed according to communicative language teaching principles.

In the present curriculum, communicative competence (CC) is the goal. CC consists of the knowledge that users of a language have internalized which enables them to understand and produce messages in the language. Various models of communicative competence have been proposed; however, most of these models recognize that it entails both linguistic competence (i.e. knowledge of grammatical rules) and pragmatic competence (i.e. knowledge of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behaviour in a particular situation). Thus, the core objectives for teaching





English in Palestine fall under these two categories with sociolinguistic, strategic, and discourse competence included under the rubric “pragmatic competence. (p. 17)

The Guidelines also stress the importance of functions and notions: “The functional-notional approach to language teaching considers language as a vehicle for performing language functions and notions” (p. 87). They mention the two functions “Expressing and Inquiring about Getting Things Done” (e.g., requesting) and “Expressing and Determining Moral Attitudes” (e.g., apology).

Instruments

Requests were analyzed following the framework developed for the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP), which was developed “to investigate cross-cultural and intralingual variation in two speech acts: requests and apologies”. (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, p. 11). This framework has been used by almost all the research studies that analyzed English requests and apologies across a range of languages and cultures. The CCSARP investigated native speakers of Danish, three dialects of English (American, British, and Australian), Argentinean Spanish and nonnative speakers of English, German, and Hebrew. Data were collected via a DCT that consisted of 16 situations (8 requests and 8 apologies). The situations represented the two variables of social dominance and social distance.

The CCSARP identified a requestive sequence, namely the *head act*, *perspective*, *supportive moves*, and *internal modifications*.

The head act can be manifested in one of nine directness levels:

Direct:

- mood derivable* (e.g., “Leave me alone”);
- performatives* (e.g., “I’m asking you to leave”);
- hedged performatives* (e.g., “I would like to ask you to give your presentation next week”);
- obligation statements* (e.g., “You’ll have to move that car”);
- want statements* (e.g., “I really wish you’d stop bothering me”);

Conventionally indirect

- suggestory formulae* (e.g., “How about cleaning up?”);
- query preparatory* (e.g., “Would you mind moving your car?”);

Unconventionally indirect

- strong hints* (e.g., “The kitchen is a mess”); and
- mild hints* (e.g., “You’ve been busy here, haven’t you?”).

With regard to apology speech act, Cohen and Olshtain (1981) identified five apology strategies:





An expression of an apology. The apologizer uses a word, expression, or sentence containing a verb such as "sorry," "excuse," "forgive," or "apologize." (e.g., *I'm sorry: I apologize; I'm terribly sorry*)

Acknowledgement of responsibility. The offender accepts the blame, e.g., *"It's my fault."*

An explanation or account. The speaker indirectly apologizes by mentioning the cause of the infraction, e.g., *"The train was late."*

An offer of repair. The speaker offers to pay for the damage caused, e.g., *"I will buy you one."*

A promise of non-recurrence. The apologizer promises not to repeat the offence, e.g., *"I will be more careful next time."* (119-125)

Among the factors that influence the choice of apology strategy are: familiarity, age, seriousness of the offence.

Procedure

Each occurrence of requests and apologies in the dialogues and conversations that appeared in in the eleven (11) textbooks was identified and classified according to the strategy used in realizing each instance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of the data analysis s will be presented according to the research questions.

First Research Question: To what extent is the request speech act covered in the materials?

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage of the request speech act occurrences in the materials

Table 1: Distribution of the request speech act occurrences in the materials

GRADE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
5 th	10	26
6 th	1	3
7 th	4	10
8 th	13	33
9 th	11	28
10 th	0	0
11 th	0	0
Total	39	

The above table shows that the total number of request instances (39) in 11 books is inadequate, taking into account that the Guidelines for the English curriculum state that the curriculum is





supposedly communicative, in which coverage of pragmatic competence should be paramount. Moreover, requesting is a common speech act. In addition, the results show that there is no balance in the distribution and sequencing of requests in the seven grades (5th to 11th).

Second Research Question: What strategies are used in realizing requests in the materials?

Table 2 presents the distribution of request strategies in the materials

Table II: Distribution of request strategies used in the materials

GRADES	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	TOTAL
5 th	8							2		10
6 th	1									1
7 th	3							1		4
8 th	12							1		13
9 th	4							7		11
*10 th	0									0
*11 th	0									0
TOTAL	28							11		39

NOTE: S1= mood derivable S2= Performatives S3= hedged performative
S4 = obligation statements S5= want statements S6= suggestory formulae
S7= query preparatory S8= strong hints S9= mild hints

The above table shows that only two (2) request strategies out of nine were used in the corpus, namely **Mood Derivable (28)** and **Strong Hints (11)**. Grades 10 and 11 books do not include dialogues. However in in Grade 10 (Unit 7, p. 14), there is a pronunciation exercise that explicitly refers to requests. It asks the students to say if the intonation is rising or falling. It reads:

Practice your pronunciation: intonation in requests. Do the requests for help go up or down?

- Excuse me, but can you help us, please? _____
- Could you tell us the way to the Palestine hotel, please? _____
- Can you tell us the way to the Craft Centre, please? _____
- Could you explain how to get to the Islamic Bank, please? _____

It is worth mentioning that this is the only instance in which reference is clearly made to requests in the corpus.

The researcher believes that coverage of request speech act is so inadequate. Only 38 instances of requests appear in 11 textbooks that are used in Grades 5 to 11. Besides, requests are among the speech acts that students may need and use in real-life situations. In addition the Ministry of





Education Guidelines for the writing the textbooks underscores the fact that communicative competence is that main goal of teaching English as a foreign language at all government schools.

Examples of request strategies used in the corpus:

Mood Derivable:

Could you get my Mum’s clothes? (9th grade, unit 13, p. 64)

Please give them their sweaters. (5th Grad B), Unit 12, p.20)

Could I speak to her, please? (8th Grade, Unit 12, p.52)

Strong hints:

Brrrr, I’m getting cold. (5th Grade B), Unit 12, p. 20)

Sameera: I haven’t brought her any clothes. (Indirectly asking Haneen to bring some clothes.) (Grade 9 B, Unit 13, p. 64)

I’m getting thirsty. (Grade 9, Unit 5, p. 52)

There are some pieces in the fridge. (Indirectly asking her to cook them). (Grade 9B, Unit 8, p.4)

Third Research Question: To what extent is the apology speech act covered in the materials?

Table 3 presents the distribution of the apology speech act occurrence in the materials

Table III: Distribution of the apology speech act occurrences in the corpus

GRADES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
5 th	0	0
6 th	4	22
7 th	5	28
8 th	5	28
9 th	3	17
10 th	1	5
11 th	0	0
TOTAL	18	

The above table shows that only (18) apology instances appear in the 11 books, which is a small number bearing in mind that the English curriculum is supposedly communicative and states that the ultimate goal of teaching is to develop the learners’ communicative competence. Moreover Grades 5 and 11 books do not include any instances of apology. Besides, the distribution of apology instances is progressive.





Fourth Research Question: What strategies are used in realizing apologies in the materials?

Table (4) presents the distribution of apology speech acts in the corpus

Table IV: Distribution of apology strategies used in the materials

GRADES	S1	S1+S2	S1+S3	S4	S5	TOTAL
5 th						0
6 th	3		1			4
7 th	2	2	1			5
8 th	2		3			5
9 th	1		2			3
10 th			1			1
11 th						0
TOTAL	8 (44%)	1 (5.5%)	9 (50.5%)			18

Note: S1= An expression of an apology S2= Acknowledgement of responsibility
S3= An explanation or account S4= An offer of repair
S5= A promise of non-recurrence

The above figures show that (8) instances only consisted of an expression of an apology while (1) consisted of a combination of an expression of an apology and accepting responsibility and (9) consisted of a combination of an expression of an apology and explanation or account. The distribution of the three strategies is disproportionate. Focus is on S1 and S3. This limits the exposure of the learners to a variety of apology strategies.

Examples of apology strategies used in the corpus.

S1: An expression of an apology

6th Grade (B) Unit 17, p. 56

Amy, I can't hear you. Please speak slowly.

Oh I'm sorry Miss Smith.

8th Grade (A): Unit 6, p. 64

Tina: Listen, Nadia, I want to say sorry for yesterday.

Nadia: Oh, because you shouted, "Leave me alone!"

S1+S2: An expression of an apology and Acknowledgement of Responsibility

7th Grade (B), Unit 16, p. 48

Father: I can hear you very well but I can't see you.

Majed: **Sorry – I made a mistake. I didn't turn on the camera. Can you see me now?**

S1+S3: An expression of an apology and An Explanation or Account

Grade 7th (B), Unit 11, p.12

Peter: I don't think we are moving at all. We can't go any faster, can we?

Taxi driver: **I'm sorry but we can't. There's a lot of traffic.**





Grade 8th (A), Unit 1, p. 4

Tina: Well, let's email each other.

Nadia: Sorry, but we can't at the moment. My brother Sami is using the computer.

Grade 9th (A), Unit 4, p. 40

Waleed: Hi, Jamie. I tried to call you yesterday evening, but you were out.

Jamie: Sorry. I was getting some books from the library.

Fifth Research Question: To what extent is metapragmatic information provided in the materials?

Metapragmatic information refers to explicit description and explanation of speech acts and strategies. Surveying the contents of the eleven *English for Palestine* Pupil's Books under study showed no explicit reference to speech acts, except in the table of contents. Only instances of speech acts are embedded in the dialogues. The researcher believes that explicit description and explanation of speech acts raise the pragmatic awareness of the students. This finding lends support to the findings of previous studies that investigated the use of metapragmatic information in EFL textbooks and highlighted its importance. For example, in his survey of 27 studies that dealt with the methods of teaching pragmatics, Taguchi (2015) found out that, "... providing explicit metapragmatic instruction exerts positive influence on learners". (p. 27). Likewise,

Halenko and Jones (2011) reached a similar conclusion based on the performance of learners who received explicit metapragmatic knowledge about requests.

The findings of the analysis of the two speech acts (requests and apologies), the strategies used to realize them, as well as the metapragmatic content provided in the corpus, indicated paucity of coverage of the two speech acts and realization strategies and absence of metapragmatic information. These drawbacks cast serious doubts about the claim made in the Ministry of Education Guidelines, which repeatedly state that the main goal of the English curriculum is to develop the learners' communicative competence (both linguistic and pragmatic).

Besides the above limitations, neither the Pupil's Books nor the Teacher's Books explicitly describe, explain or even make reference to speech acts and their realization strategies. Such explicit pragmatic knowledge raises the awareness of learners and consolidate their assimilation of pragmatic competence. The literature review abounds with research studies that stress the significance of exposing EFL learners to explicit pragmatic knowledge.

The present study is limited to two common speech acts (requests and apologies) as well as their realization strategies. Moreover only the dialogues and conversations were surveyed for occurrences of the two speech acts.





The current study fills a gap in the literature on pragmatic content in **English for Palestine** series taught at Grades 5-11 in public schools. The findings provide materials writers with information about the coverage of the two speech acts, which can be used in revising the pragmatic content of the textbooks under analysis. Such revision heightens the awareness of the learners of pragmatic content.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above findings, the following conclusions can be drawn. First, the coverage of request and apology speech acts in the 11 books is inadequate. Only 39 instances of requests appear in the all the dialogues and conversations. Besides only 3 out of 9 realization strategies are covered. As for apology, only 18 instances and 3 out of five realization strategies appear in the corpus. In addition, metapragmatic information is no-existent in the corpus. It is recommended that materials writers address the paucity of the amount of request and apologies presented in the textbooks by adding more instances and a variety of contextual variables that cover the different realization strategies. The analysis shows that most of the interlocutors are friends or family members, which limits the learners' exposure to pragmatic content. Besides, explicit metapragmatic information about the two speech acts under study should be added.

The researcher believes that more research studies should investigate speech acts other than requests and apologies in *English for Palestine* series.

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