A Pragmatic Analysis of Speech Acts and Language Functions: The case of *English Result Series*

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Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to analyze the conversation sections of *English Result Series* from the pragmatic dimension of language functions and speech acts. For this purpose, all conversations from all four levels (elementary, intermediate, pre-intermediate, and upper-intermediate) of the books were selected and two pragmatic models of Halliday (1975) and Searle (1976) were applied to analyze them. The results showed that the conversations in these textbooks are not pragmatically efficient with regard to language functions and speech acts. Finally, some implications for teachers, material developers, and textbook designers were proposed.

Keywords: textbook evaluation, speech acts, pragmatics, language functions, English Result Series

INTRODUCTION

Low (1987, p. 21) states that "Teachers generally need to screen materials, in order to predict their suitability for particular classes". To achieve this aim, textbooks should be evaluated. Careful inspection of learning materials will unveil their strengths and weaknesses. In this way, any reconsideration of language textbooks which is needed, can be done.

According to Riazi (2003, p. 52), "Textbooks play a very crucial role in the realm of language teaching and learning and are considered the next important factor in the second/foreign language classroom after the teacher." Vellenga (2004) conducted a comparison between EFL and ESL textbooks. The results showed that, the amount of information that is presented in the books, in order to become pragmatically efficient, is not sufficient.

Based on the results of a survey which performed by Chadran (2001) through interviews with the teachers, she found out that teachers wanted to participate in

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designing the learning material and in general, they preferred commercially produced textbooks rather than those were taught in Malaysian schools.

By applying the Hymes' (1972) scheme, Razmjoo (2007) made a comparison between the Iranian high school and private institute textbooks. The results showed that private institute textbooks are more adapted to CLT principles than high school textbooks. Based on Littlejohn's (1998) framework, Bahrami (2011) made an evaluation of Intermediate Top Notch. The results revealed the strengths and weaknesses of these textbooks which might be beneficial for both teachers and textbook designers.

Soozandefar (2011) investigated the conversation parts of Top Notch Fundamental textbooks based on Halliday's (1978) language functions and Searle's (1976) speech acts model. The results indicated that the conversations in these textbooks are not pragmatically efficient. Since many different textbooks are available in the market, selecting an appropriate textbook which meets the learners' needs seems difficult. Though many textbook evaluations conducted in Iran, few studies have been conducted on the newly arrived English result Series.

In order to achieve the objectives in this study the following questions were addressed by the researcher:

1. What are the types of language functions in the conversation texts?
2. How frequently each language function is used?
3. What are the types of speech acts in the conversation texts?
4. How frequently each speech act is used?
5. Are the conversations of these four English Result Series pragmatically efficient with regard to the existence and the distribution of speech acts and language functions?

METHOD

Material

The materials selected for analysis include *English Result series* developed by Hancock &McDonald, series developed to be used by non-native learners of English.

- Hancock, M. & McDonald, A. (2011). *English result* 1 student's book. Oxford: Oxford university press
- Hancock, M. & McDonald, A. (2011). *English result* 2 student's book. Oxford: Oxford university press
- Hancock, M. & McDonald, A. (2011). *English result* 3 student's book. Oxford: Oxford university press
- Hancock, M. & McDonald, A. (2011). *English result* 4 student's book. Oxford: Oxford university press.

Data Collection Procedure

The data for this study contains the conversations in English Result series textbooks. The significant role of dialogues in making situations for interlocutors to make use of different speech acts and language function in their speech is not deniable. Thus, in order to gain a measure regarding speech acts and language function, the conversation parts in the textbooks have been examined. In order to sample the conversations of these 4 textbooks, the most important criterion which should be taken into account is different topical contexts or themes. Though in qualitative researches analyzing 10% of the whole population, for examining all the conversation available in the textbooks, is considered enough, all conversations, dialogues, or interviews available in the textbooks have been examined and investigated.

Data analysis

As the study is mainly qualitative, no special statistical analyses have been needed. Therefore, the entire analysis of the present study has been carried out by careful examination of the conversations included in the four books of English Result Series on the basis of Searle's (1976) speech acts and Halliday's (1975) language functions models. The aim of this observation was to find out the various types of speech acts and language functions involved in the contents of the conversations. Basically, the only quantitative analysis performed in this study includes some simple statistical analyses like counting the frequencies of the occurrence of each sub-category of Searle's (1976) speech act taxonomy and Halliday's (1975) language function model as well as their percentages presented in different tables. Moreover, the chi-square test was reported in order to show the distribution levels of these pragmatic variables.

RESULTS

Table 1. Overall frequencies and percentages of language functions in all 4 levels of *'English Result Series'*

Code	Functions	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Instrumental	17	0.75
2	Regulatory	8	0.35
3	Interactional	543	23.97
4	Personal	157	6.93
5	Heuristic	664	29.31
6	Imaginative	7	0.309
7	Representational	869	38.36
8	Total	2265	

The above table reveals the representation of the different types of language functions in all 4 levels of *English Result Series.* Based on Table 1, the percentages of language functions show that 0.75% refers to instrumental, 0.35% regulatory, 23.97% interactional, 6.93% personal, 29.31% heuristic, 0.309% imaginative, 38.36% representational functions. Therefore, looking at this table, one can conclude that the overall minimum of all language functions deals with imaginative ones, i.e. 0.309%,

while the overall maximum of all refers to representational functions, i.e. 38.36%. To test the statistical significance of the difference, Chi-square test was run. Table 2 summarizes the findings:

Table 2. Chi-Squre Results

	Frequency
Chi-Square	2420.077[a]
df	6
Asymp. Sig.	.000

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 323.6.

According to this table, the difference between the frequencies of these language functions is significant and meaningful. In other words, the language functions in the conversations of all 4 levels of *English Result* are not distributed equally and not at the same or close levels of frequency, i.e. Sig. = .000 (p<.05).

Table 3. Overall frequencies and percentages of speech acts in all 4 levels of *'English Result Series'*

Code	Functions	Frequency	Percentage(%)
1	Assertive	953	40.5
2	Commissive	58	2.46
3	Directive	796	33.82
4	Expressive	546	23.2
5	Declarative	0	0
T		2353	

As Table 3 shows, the percentage of assertive speech acts are 40.5%, those of commissive ones equals 2.4%, directive ones 33.8%, expressive ones 23.2%, and those of declarative speech acts are 0%. As a result, it can simply be concluded that the overall minimum frequency and percentage belong to declarative speech acts, i.e. 0, and the overall maximum ones refer to assertive speech acts, i.e. 40.5%.

To test the statistical significance of the difference, Chi-square test was run. Table 4 summarizes the findings:

Table 4. Chi-Squre Results

	Frequency
Chi-Square	780.540[a]
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 588.3.

Based on this table, the difference between the frequencies of these speech acts is significant and meaningful. In other words, the speech acts in the conversations of all 4 levels of *English Result series* are not distributed equally, i.e. Sig. = .000 (p < .05).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results showed that the maximum frequency of language functions in all four levels of English Result Series referred to representational function and the maximum of frequency of speech act referred to assertive speech act. That is because most of the conversations are organized in the form of the request, i.e. exchanging the information.

In order to answer the first and second question, the result of this study showed that some language functions, i.e. imaginative are approximately neglected in the conversation parts of these four textbooks. As Halliday (1975) states that a good conversation consists of all types of language function, and though textbooks are supposed to provide the learners with sufficient authentic and reliable patterns and samples of real-life communication, the lack of one or ignorant of other language functions should be considered as a serious concern. In addition, the results of this study are in harmony with a similar research that was done by Soozandehfar (2011), according to that study, imaginative function was absent in the conversations in both Top Notch Fundamental A and B.

Regarding the third and fourth question, as the results showed, one speech act, i.e. declarative out of the six, based on Searle (1976) taxonomy was approximately neglected, while others, i.e. assertive, commissive, directive, and expressive were completely covered in the conversation parts of these four textbooks. Form the pragmatic point of view, the lack of the declarative speech act can be considered as a significant pitfall of the textbooks as Cutting (2004) states, people frequently use declarative speech act in their daily conversations.

Considering previous question, to answer the fifth question, the results of the statistical analysis showed that the distribution of different types of language functions and speech acts are not equal in all four levels of English Result Series.

These shortcomings regarding the language functions and speech acts in the conversations of these four textbooks will surely lead the learners to encounter with a number of difficulties in communicating in real-life situation. Therefore, learners tend to focus on some limited types of language functions while learning through these books, so that they will become strong in the use of some types of the language functions, while they are weak in that of the others. So, from a pragmatic point of view, English Result Series are considered as weak textbooks, and reconsideration is strongly recommended.

The findings of this study are beneficial for language teachers, language learners and textbook designers and textbook publishers as follows. The findings of this research suggest that in an efficient textbook all different types of language functions and speech

acts have to be covered. Moreover, the findings insist that all 4 levels of English Result Series are not fully provided different types of language functions and speech acts.

Furthermore, it is recommended that, in designing language textbook, material developers take into account the different types of language functions and speech acts in order to fulfill the pragmatic aspect of real life communication.

Further study can be replicated with other parts of the series, for instance reading parts. It is also suggested that, the study be replicated with other English textbooks, for instance '*The American English Flies Series*'. In addition it would be interesting to conduct similar studies on the basis of other pragmatic taxonomies and models.

Furthermore, it is highly suggested that the textbooks are investigated with other models or even a blended model from other researchers in order to provide more dependable results.

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