Teaching speech acts in EFL context

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1 Introduction

Being able to communicate involves both understanding what to say and how to express it. The two aspects in question primarily focus on how speakers of a specific language generate particular utterances during communication. This skill, often called pragmatic competence, is necessary to effectively manage communication to convey the speaker's intended message to the hearer or among interlocutors. In this respect, Limberg (2015) highlighted that pragmatic competence deals with the ability to communicate meanings and intentions through speech acts (such as requests, invitations, and arguments) in a way suitable for the social and cultural context.

For English language teachers, working with speech acts and the rules that regulate them in a classroom setting has potential, promises, and challenges. As such, teachers require sufficient knowledge for presenting speech acts and assisting students in understanding their pragmatic-related aspects, all while maintaining the viewpoint that speech acts are both promising and challenging to deal with. Speech acts may be difficult to understand for students with lower competence levels or for those who may not have had much exposure to the language outside of a language classroom. However, because conventions differ systematically between languages, cultures, and particular groups—and often even within groups—language learners must acquire unique conventionalized forms in a new language. Furthermore, when interpreting meaning in L2 contexts, language learners rely primarily on their cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Wardhaugh, 2006; Christison, 2018). To understand speech acts, one must look beyond linguistic proficiency and consider the functions of utterances and how speakers employ patterns to communicate and engage with one another. Therefore, it would be advantageous and crucial to recognize the socio-cultural norms on the use of language to express speech acts and linguistic features to communicate.

The primary concerns of previous studies is that a speech act is regarded as a pragmatic element. In this regard, the research examined speech as a pragmatic act element from various angles. As such, previous studies focused on the types and effects of instruction, activities, and teaching methods (Taguchi, 2012; Tajeddin and Pezeshki, 2014; Felix-Brasdefer and Cohen, 2015; Nicholas, 2015; Couper and Watkins, 2016; Siegel, 2016; Bardovi-Harlig et al., 2017; Bataineh et al., 2017). Meanwhile, others focused primarily on the method and assessment (Zhu, 2012; Youn, 2014; Yazdanfar and Bonyadi, 2016). Briefly, the research in question looked into the broad explicit and implicit ways of teaching pragmatics in target language instruction.

Along the lines of the above argument, some research studies indicated that different approaches of the employment of pragmatic language aspects have different effects following the gender, status, social distance, and class size of the interlocutors

(Ren and Gao, 2012; Taguchi, 2012; Zangoei et al., 2014; Carassa and Colombetti, 2015; Tromp et al., 2016; Wijayanto et al., 2017). Briefly, these findings suggest the effects of these approaches on pragmatic language production and comprehension. Furthermore, students who complete the awareness-raising task with clear instructions can improve their capacity to engage appropriately and raise their odds of successful communication (Zeff, 2016).

The results of previous research studies were primarily concerned with pragmatic issues in the classroom. At this point, some research was interventional, others were observational. The former focuses primarily on a realistic classroom setting, with the researcher addressing pragmatic difficulties related to the target language—the latter deals with raising awareness of a purposeful intervention used in the classroom. Furthermore, the primary goal of the former is to outline factors that affect pragmatic-target language acquisition. The latter studies whether teaching a particular pragmatic feature is possible and evaluates the practicality and eligibility of the employed approaches.

Providing opinion in teaching speech acts in the EFL classroom is important because it equips teachers with strategies to enhance students' conversational skills and classroom practices. Integrating speech acts into classroom activities enhances interactivity and communication among students, enabling them to practice authentic dialogues such as making requests, delivering compliments, or expressing apologies. This approach not only facilitates students' comprehension of the subtleties of language usage but also fosters their active involvement and enthusiasm. Participating in these organized conversational exercises enhances students' pragmatic proficiency, enabling them to employ English in a more authentic and suitable manner across different situations. Generally, emphasizing speech acts in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching enhances the learning process by integrating language practice with cultural comprehension, resulting in improved and significant communication abilities.

This paper's primary goal is to clarify practical pedagogical approaches for teaching pragmatics, with an emphasis on speech acts. Pragmatics includes the essential factor of language learning, which includes employing language in real-life social contexts for effective communication. Learners must comprehend and use speech acts, including offers, apologies, and requests, to effectively negotiate various interpersonal and cross-cultural communication settings. This paper seeks to provide practical teaching strategies and a thorough literature evaluation to assist teachers willing to improve their student's ability to use speech acts in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom interactions.

2 Literature review

2.1 Classroom interaction

A classroom is an educational setting where students and teachers can come together for a predetermined amount of time with the intention of learning. Teachers and students can organize language production through interaction, which applies to spoken and written language. As such, classroom research concerns organizing the classroom to understand the opportunities and types of input teachers give to assist students in developing their pragmatic competencies (Martínez-Flor, 2013). The opportunities are related to the process of interaction between teachers and students. When defining pragmatics, consideration is given to these aspects, encompassing the study of language use in social contexts. Standing on this point, students need to be aware of the linguistic and strategic choices made available to them in a given context (Siegel, 2016). Moving further, pragmatics skills are mandatory for students to communicate successfully in the classroom. These skills, integrated into using language appropriately at the syntactic and semantic levels, assist students in adapting to L2 socio-cultural norms despite potential difficulties in encountering pragmatic content while attempting to communicate in an L2 or target language.

Learners must be able to deal with the target language's context and pragmatics-related language skills to interact pragmatically (Taguchi et al., 2016). In this respect, language learners should be able to interact pragmatically in various contexts. By ignoring the context, the learners may face unintended repercussions and unwelcome treatment (Siegel, 2015). The two main reasons learners fail at interactions are sociolinguistic and pragmatic errors. The former addresses how learners select L1 forms and methods to include in their interlanguage. Meanwhile, the latter addresses culturally diverse interpretations of the importance of context-external and context-internal variables. Stated differently, it pertains to the speaker's ability to modify speech act methods in light of socio-cultural variables throughout a communicative speech event (Zhu, 2012; Felix-Brasdefer and Cohen, 2015; Limberg, 2015, 2016). However, it can be challenging to distinguish between these ideas in real-world communication, but they should be viewed as one in a classroom setting because they are axiomatically related.

In the EFL context, participants (teacher and learners) are exposed to pragmatics through various input sources, including teacher utterances, audio-visual tools, and printed materials. As such, both must extensively look into the input in question to foster classroom interaction (Shintani, 2012). More intriguing is that different theorists have defined sufficient and high-quality input differently, whether studying interaction in a natural or classroom setting, highlighting the diverse perspectives on what constitutes effective language acquisition and the varying methodologies for optimizing student learning experiences (Rothman and Guijarro-Fuentes, 2010).

Pushing further, classroom interaction is the main factor in language development, particularly in oral performance. Language acquisition can be well- accomplished, highlighted by a widely accepted theory, the i + 1 hypothesis developed by Krashen, following the value of commodity exchanges in the classroom. Learners are exposed to language input whose structure is beyond their existing level of language competence. The theory implies that teachers must have good language proficiency since their utterances are likely the learners' primary input source. The entire amount of input heavily depends on how quickly and effectively learners build their lexicogrammar and fluency (Saito and Hanzawa, 2016). In order to make this real, teachers must provide learners with the chance to interact and process the inputs they are exposed to. The

more learners engage, the more understandable the input becomes. However, it should be emphasized that students constructively learn only when the input is incomprehensible to them.

More specifically, learners might have linguistic inputs through "the talk" in classroom interactions. The input would be beneficial in gaining a solid grasp of the pragmatic aspects of communication and how speech acts are uttered. Classroom interaction and speech act utterances should be considered regardless of the method, methods, tasks, and other learning activities given to the learners. Consequently, it is necessary to comprehend speech acts knowledge within the framework of the entire conversation sequence (Nicholas, 2015).

In order to accomplish this knowledge, teachers and learners alike need to be conscious of the language they employ and how it makes pragmatic sense concerning the context they are in. Giving learners opportunities is essential by implementing specific guidelines and assigning tasks and learning activities that could lead to meaningful classroom interactions. More importantly, pragmatic and sociolinguistic, requiring flexibility in language choices and behaviors, are also essential. It is crucial to take into account the adaptability of the context and the flexibility of word choice when analyzing language input samples that either come before or after specific utterances (Ren and Gao, 2012; Martínez-Flor, 2013; Tajeddin and Pezeshki, 2014; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2015). Thus, speech acts do not occur in isolation of a discourse.

The previous studies of pragmatics in the EFL classroom interactions are intriguing since they demonstrate the value of placing learners in instructional phases either explicitly or implicitly and the teachability of every pragmatic feature. In other words, the results represent the natural outcomes of interventional research. Furthermore, all of the findings stress how crucial it is to expose students to a wide variety of appropriate context-based inputs and provide opportunities for interactive communication of specific pragmatic-related aspects. Stated differently, teachers have a significant role in connecting pragmatic language production to the EFL classroom context.

2.2 Speech act

Speech acts deal with dialogue units that employ both reality and meaning. By using a variety of speech patterns, such as instructions, statements, and questions, one strives to fit in with the world around them and go outside of it (Carr et al., 2012). In order to comprehend speech act (Christison, 2018), one needs to grasp the true meaning of utterances and how speakers employ syntactical patterns in interaction to convey meaning beyond language proficiency.

Austin was the one who originally coined the term speech act (Austin, 1955). Meanwhile, Searle reinterpreted it in 1969 and defined a speech act as an utterance that serves a performative purpose in a context, such as extending an invitation, a welcome, congrats, a warning, or an order. Then, speech acts vary depending on the situation. As such, three main categories appear, namely, literal meaning (locutionary), intended meaning (illocutionary), and natural consequence or action (perlocutionary).

Following Austin's theory, Searle (1969) divided illocutionary acts into five categories: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. The inclusion of question one later expanded these five categories to six. These six categories were modified by Clark and Clark (1977) to include three classifications, namely, illocutionary point, direction of fit, and sincerity condition. Irrespective of the classified types, a commonality is that each type plays a unique communication role within a different setting.

For language teachers, interpreting the speech act theory may present challenges due to its ambiguity, context dependence and cultural norms. Speech acts analysis in isolated adjacency pairs might cause failure as it is not put into a broader interaction in which speech acts should be delivered over several turns (LoCastro, 2012). Speech acts are seen as unified single utterances or in pairs, which is considered to be an oversimplification of speech. Speech acts must thus be understood in the context of the entire discourse sequence. Nicholas (2015) and Limberg (2016) emphasized that language learners must completely comprehend speech acts in real-world discourse. To overcome the challenges, it is crucial to employ language in the broader context while considering pragmatic knowledge.

It was also discovered that speech acts frequently contributed to developing other pragmatic traits, including politeness (Tajeddin and Pezeshki, 2014; Wijayanto et al., 2017). They confirmed that in addition to social distance and status level, speech acts may prompt different impoliteness frequencies and strategies. The degree to which speech acts are understood depends on how well the speaker can comprehend the target language using their awareness of cultural and linguistic systems. The failure of this ability could result in negative pragmatic transfer. Therefore, to prevent this, learners need to develop more than only pragmatic skills and metapragmatic awareness (Ren and Gao, 2012). It can be accomplished by increasing their awareness of any potential pragmatic ramifications of a person's language choice (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2015; Siegel, 2016).

Pragmatic motivation is a significant contributing component to the production of speech acts since it has been demonstrated to assist learners in producing pragmatic L2 speech acts (Tajeddin and Moghadam, 2012). In addition, other research reported that textbook material is a significant factor in assisting students in producing speech acts (Thi and Nguyen, 2011; Meihami and Khanlarzadeh, 2015; Limberg, 2016). In this context, textbooks can be used as a source of pragmatic language for speech act productions. Previous research has also focused on speech acts' pragmatic language production strategy, especially in requests and apologies. The learners' approach is heavily influenced by their socio-pragmatic competency and pragmalinguistic knowledge (Zhu, 2012; Zangoei et al., 2014; Carassa and Colombetti, 2015; Saleem et al., 2021). Hence, the findings support the idea of Limberg (2015), which recommends integrating pragmatic and socio-competence.

Thus, working with speech acts and the principles that govern them in a classroom setting is exciting, challenging, and promising. It focuses primarily on how speakers of a particular language produce particular utterances in communication; after all, being able to communicate involves more than just knowing what to say.

How to say it is also essential. As such, learners should be engaged with both in classroom teaching interactions.

3 Method

Since this is a conceptual paper, a methodical search technique was used to find pertinent papers about speech act theory, politeness, directness, and cross-cultural communication using a variety of internet databases and keywords. Selected papers focused on these essential elements were subjected to inclusion and exclusion criteria, mainly concerning studying English as a foreign language (EFL). Methodological rigor and theoretical soundness were assessed by analyzing, categorizing, and interpreting the gathered data. A thorough review of speech act research was carried out by synthesizing the literature's findings and identifying key themes, patterns, and unsolved problems.

4 Discussion

This article is concerned with teaching speech acts in EFL classroom interactions. In order to enable students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes to navigate real-life communication situations effectively, teaching speech acts—a critical component of pragmatics—requires a methodical and deliberate approach. As such, this essay highlights the value of theory, practice, and cultural sensitivity while outlining a thorough approach to teaching speech actions in EFL classes.

Creating a robust theoretical base is the first step in teaching speech acts. Teachers should introduce the idea of speech acts to their students, describing how language is used for various communicative tasks, including asking for things, expressing gratitude, and apologizing. This theoretical knowledge offers the foundation students need to understand the fundamental ideas behind speech acts. Once the theoretical foundation is established, providing lots of practice opportunities is crucial. Role plays, realistic simulations, and practical exercises are helpful resources for teaching speech acts. Students might participate in role-playing exercises to practice speaking in context with speech acts. They can use their theoretical knowledge and get real-world experience in a controlled, secure classroom setting (Nicholas, 2015).

For example, students work in pairs or small groups, with one student acting as a server and the other as a patron in a restaurant. The focus is on the client making courteous requests following theoretical instruction, utilizing expressions such as "May I request..." or "Could I please have..." Students alternate in their responsibilities, responding politely to demands and exercising cooperation. While a realistic simulation with props and expressions enables students to practice polite request writing practically, role play guarantees that everyone gains experience. This activity gives pupils a secure and supervised setting to perform speaking acts, promoting self-assurance and practical efficacy.

Teaching speech acts must have a strong cultural awareness component. The employment of speech acts, directness, and politeness are all governed by different cultural norms and customs. Teachers should talk to their pupils about these cultural differences, emphasizing how crucial it is to modify speech acts to suit the particular cultural context in which they are employed (Taguchi et al., 2016; Darong and Neldis, 2023). This cultural sensitivity guarantees that EFL students can converse successfully in various authentic contexts.

To teach the speech act of making requests to a varied class of EFL students while taking into account cultural differences in directness and politeness might be carried out through the following example. The class starts with an introduction highlighting the need to be sensitive to cultural differences in politeness and directness when conducting speech acts. Case studies are used to highlight these differences, and then students participate in conversations in small, culturally varied groups to express their cultural ideas. Cultural role-plays in many contexts facilitate students' exposure to and adjustment to various cultural contexts. Following each role-play, students can share their findings and learn about the advantages and disadvantages of adapting speech acts for various cultural contexts through discussions and feedback. This strategy promotes cultural awareness and flexibility by adapting their speech acts to particular cultural norms (Christisson, 2018). It guarantees that EFL students can communicate effectively in various real-world contexts.

In speech acts, feedback is as important as practice and cultural sensitivity. Teachers should give students constructive feedback on using speech acts to improve their language skills and better understand the appropriate times and ways to perform different speech acts (Snead and Freiberg, 2017; Darong and Guna, 2023). Peer evaluation and self-evaluation can be combined to promote student introspection and growth. The feedback should be encouraging and constructive. The objective is to increase pupils' confidence while assisting them in improving their speech acts. Additionally, it is critical to establish a welcoming and safe space where students may receive feedback and feel empowered to change how they use language.

It is also advantageous to use natural things in the curriculum. Speech acts done by native speakers in recorded conversations, films, textbooks, and other media offer priceless insights regarding the situations in which these expressions are utilized (Thi and Nguyen, 2011; Meihami and Khanlarzadeh, 2015; Chun, 2016; Limberg, 2016). Students can better understand the subtleties of employing speech acts by analyzing sources.

It is imperative to tackle the possible hindrances and difficulties students encounter while acquiring speech acts (Al-Ghazalli and Al-Shammary, 2014). Common challenges can be the inability to decide whether a speech act is acceptable for a particular context, the fear of being impolite, or the misuse of particular speech acts. In order to build students' confidence and competence, teachers should proactively address these issues and offer solutions. Last but not least, evaluation and assessment are essential to making sure that students have learned the use of speech acts (Sawaki et al., 2013). Students' progress can be measured, and areas where additional growth is required can be identified through regular quizzes, tests, and practical evaluations. Students are also encouraged to stay interested and involved in the learning process utilizing ongoing assessment.

Given the vital role of assessment (Power and Tanner, 2023), a variety of methods are used to evaluate students' comprehension

of speech acts, including written and oral exams, observations, self-evaluations, peer assessments, quizzes, projects, and the use of precise rubrics. Students are assessed orally through talks, role-plays, and group activities to gauge how well they apply speech acts in real-world situations. Written evaluations that measure their capacity for articulation and analysis of speech acts include essay questions and conversation writing. Peer evaluations, observations, and reflection all provide information about their level of self-awareness and teamwork. Tests, quizzes, and project-based assessments measure their theoretical understanding and practical application. A thorough overview of their development throughout time can be obtained through portfolios. Teachers can guarantee a more thorough assessment of their students' understanding and competency in speech acts, in line with learning objectives, by employing this wide variety of assessment techniques (Ziashahabi et al., 2020).

To sum up, teaching speech acts in EFL interactions is a complex process that calls for a solid theoretical basis, real-world practice, cultural sensitivity, feedback, real-world resources, problem-solving techniques, and efficient assessment (Nicholas, 2015; Christison, 2018). Using an all-inclusive approach, teachers can give EFL students the tools to effectively use speech acts in everyday conversation, improving their language proficiency and intercultural competency. Students gain practical abilities for effective communication and theoretical knowledge when speech acts are taught via problem-solving strategies. By encouraging critical thinking, flexibility, and cultural sensitivity, this method equips students to handle a range of communication difficulties in authentic settings. More importantly, the teaching speech act should go along with its instructional design. In this regard, effective learning of necessary skills by learners in EFL classrooms is contingent upon the quality of the instructional design used for teaching speech actions. A well-structured instructional design should include some essential components to optimize learning results. The design should, first and foremost, start with a precise and quantifiable set of learning objectives. The speech acts to be taught, the situations in which they are employed, and the expected skill levels (Limberg, 2015). By clearly defining these goals, teachers better guide their students and help them understand the lesson.

The instructional design must incorporate a scaffolded approach. It entails segmenting the learning process into digestible chunks, beginning with basic speaking actions and progressing to more intricate ones. With the help of this incremental technique, students can progressively improve their proficiency with speech acts by building on their current knowledge and abilities. In order to support students in gradually increasing their level of skill, scaffolding offers opportunities for supervised engagement, organized practice exercises, and models. Furthermore, various instructional tools and materials that aid learning should also be incorporated into the instructional design (Ziashahabi et al., 2020). Some examples include textbooks, internet sites, audio recordings, and genuine texts with real-world speech acts. Students can interact with speech acts in various settings using various tools, strengthening their comprehension and real-world application. To sum up, a well-designed instructional design for teaching speech acts in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom should begin with specific learning objectives, utilize a scaffolded approach, and incorporate various teaching materials and resources. The design

will guarantee that students receive a thorough, organized, and hands-on education in speech acts, improving their capacity to communicate meaningfully and culturally appropriately in English.

To date, incorporating the teaching of speech acts in EFL classroom interactions is an extremely important approach for promoting a thorough understanding and proficiency in the language. By incorporating speech acts into classroom activities, teachers may equip students with practical communication skills that go beyond basic grammatical accuracy. This approach improves students' capacity to negotiate diverse social contexts with confidence and cultural sensitivity (Tanduk, 2023). By giving importance to speech acts, students not only enhance their learning experience but also become better prepared for real-life interactions, resulting in more genuine and impactful language use. Incorporating speech acts into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching is crucial for cultivating language learners who are well-rounded, proficient in communication, and culturally sensitive.

5 Conclusion and limitation

In order to effectively teach speech acts in EFL interactions, theory and practice must be balanced. Start by providing a robust theoretical framework explaining speech acts' fundamentals and cultural nuances. There is a need to highlight the contextual nature of speech acts and the influence of cultural backgrounds and interpersonal connections. Promoting cultural awareness and modifying communication approaches in various settings is also essential. Besides, it is crucial to incorporate the practical application into role-plays and simulations so that students can practice using speech acts in real-world situations, which is followed by a feedback process. Ultimately, it gives learners flexible, culturally sensitive communication abilities to successfully negotiate various linguistic and cultural environments.

Since this article is concerned with a literature review, further studies in the field need to be carried out. It contributes to the comprehension of teaching speech actions in EFL classrooms, enhancing language instruction's effectiveness in multicultural and multilingual settings.

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