A SOCIOPRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE SPEECH ACT OF REQUESTING IN LOCAL ENGLISH COURSEBOOKS

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ABSTRACT

The speech act of requesting is a speech act commonly found and used in daily conversations. It is an intriguing research topic of pragmatics, particularly pragmatics in materials development, which is a sub-topic of language teaching. Earlier studies of pragmatics in language teaching reported that English teachers tend to look down on pragmatic aspects when teaching the language, including being ignorant of sociopragmatic information about language use in English coursebooks. For this reason, this paper discusses the findings of a sociopragmatic analysis in a local English coursebook. A content analysis employing pragmatic and sociopragmatic theoretical frameworks and a pragmatic judgment task by a native speaker of American English was carried out to investigate the sociopragmatic information in the course book. Results indicated that it did not contain an adequate amount of sociopragmatic knowledge indicating sociopragmatic failure. Thus, it implies that the coursebook may not be reliable language input for pragmatic competence improvement.
Keywords: speech acts; sociopragmatics; language coursebooks; materials development

ABSTRAK

Tindak tutur 'request' merupakan tindak tutur yang banyak ditemukan dan digunakan dalam percakapan sehari-hari. Ini adalah topik penelitian pragmatik yang menarik, khususnya pragmatik dalam pengembangan bahan ajar, yang merupakan sub-topik pengajaran bahasa. Studi pragmatik sebelumnya dalam pengajaran bahasa melaporkan bahwa guru bahasa Inggris cenderung tidak menghiraukan aspek pragmatis ketika mengajar bahasa, termasuk mengabaikan informasi sosiopragmatis penggunaan bahasa dalam buku pelajaran bahasa Inggris. Oleh karena itu, makalah ini membahas temuan analisis sosiopragmatik dalam buku pelajaran bahasa Inggris lokal. Analisis konten dengan menggunakan kerangka teori pragmatis dan sosiopragmatis dan tugas penilaian pragmatis oleh penutur asli bahasa Inggris Amerika dilakukan untuk menyelidiki informasi sosiopragmatis dalam buku pelajaran tersebut. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa buku bahsa Inggris local yang dianalisis tidak memuat pengetahuan sosiopragmatik yang memadai yang menunjukkan kegagalan sosiopragmatis. Dengan demikian, ini menyiratkan bahwa buku tersebut kemungkinan tidak dapat dijadikan input bahasa yang dapat diandalkan untuk peningkatan kompetensi pragmatis.
Kata Kunci: tindak tutur; sosiopragmatik; buku pelajaran bahasa Inggris; pengembangan bahan ajar

INTRODUCTION

Doing things with words or speech acts (Yule, 1996) is defined as any utterance said to serve communicative functions. Speech acts are inseparable from daily communication and therefore, what English language teachers teach includes speech acts. Speech acts in language coursebooks are integrated into language functions such as making an invitation, describing people, asking for and giving opinions, or agreeing/disagreeing. Each language function presented represents the function of the language.

In one of the local English coursebooks for Indonesian EFL learners, for example, expressions taught dealing with making invitations are 'Would you like to come to my house?', 'Would you like to go to a concert'?, and 'Would you like to go to a

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movie with me'? These expressions are introduced in a coursebook for ten graders of senior secondary schools.

Speech acts in ELT (English Language Teaching) materials have been an intriguing research topic since they are closely related to cross-cultural pragmatics. According to House and Kádár (2021), 'cross-cultural pragmatics encompasses the comparative study of the use of language by human beings in different languages and cultures.' An earlier study on cross-cultural pragmatics was conducted by Thomas (1983); however, Thomas (1983) was more concerned with cross-cultural pragmatics failure divided into two types called sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistic failure.

A study of the speech of requesting in an English coursebook was carried out by Guerra and Flor (2003) resulting in a report that the textbook analyzed indicated an insufficient, unreal, decontextualized, and pragmatically inappropriate use of requesting strategies.

Another investigation on the speech act of requesting in a local English coursebook was done by Barron (2016). Her research findings revealed that on a sociopragmatic level, the role relations in the conversations or dialogues found in the book were explicitly stated; however, the context and the setting were overgeneralized. Thus, the book contained little amount of information regarding cross-cultural pragmatics.

Concerning the issues of the speech act of requesting, this paper attempts to address two research questions:
1. How was the speech act of requesting realized, in terms of sociopragmatics, in a local English coursebook?
2. To what extent was sociopragmatics incorporated in the coursebook?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speech acts and Pragmatics

Speech acts, which are a subfield of pragmatics, are concerned with how words are used to present information and to carry out

actions. (Cutting, 2002). Yule (2010, p.128) defined pragmatics as 'the study of invisible meaning, or how we recognize what is meant even when it isn't actually said or written.' while Chapman (2011) explained that pragmatics is a study of meaning in context. Therefore, analyzing speech acts deals with the meaning of what people say in context.

Austin (as cited in Cutting, 2002) divided speech acts into three degrees of utterances or what people say namely locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts. Locutionary acts are what is said, illocutionary acts are the intention or the function of what is said while perlocutionary acts include information on the effect or consequence of saying something,

Searle (1969;1979) divided speech acts into five categories called assertives, commissives, directives, declaratives, and expressives. Each category includes language functions as seen in the table below.

Table 1: Speech Act Taxonomy

Category	Sub-categories
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.
Expressives	Greeting, thanking, apologizing, regretting, commiserating, congratulating, condoling, deploring, welcoming, surprising, blaming, praising.
Commisives	Promising, vowing, offering, threatening, refusing, pledging, intending, vowing to do or to refrain from doing something.
Declarations	Declaring, christening, firing from employment, resigning, dismissing, naming.

Source: Vaezi et al. (2014, p.169)

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Cross-Cultural Pragmatics

Pragmatics has always been inseparable from culture as each culture has different ways of saying things. What is considered a request in one culture might contain other types of speech acts in another culture. Cross-cultural pragmatics, according to Stadler (2018, p. 2),

> 'can be said to investigate the speech behavior and norms of different cultures, focusing on contextually derived meaning, the appropriateness of language usage in differing cultural contexts, and the complexities and challenges tied to the acquisition of pragmatic competence.'

Alcón-Soler and Safont-Jordá (2008) said that pragmatic competence is the ability to use language appropriately in particular communication contexts and on the part of members of particular speech communities.

In a nutshell, to be able to use proper language in a speech community, pragmatic competence is required. The less pragmatic knowledge we have, the less ability we have to comprehend utterances and communicate what we mean appropriately.

Cross Cultural Pragmatics Failure

One of the significant studies of cross-cultural pragmatics was conducted by Thomas (1983). She underlined two important pragmatic failures called pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure. Pragmalinguistic itself is defined as 'the study of the particular resources that a given language provides for conveying pragmatic meaning' whereas sociopragmatics 'relates pragmatic meaning to an assessment of participants' social distance, the language community's social rules and appropriateness norms, discourse practices, and accepted behaviors.' (Marmaridou, 2011, p.77)

To put it simply, Richards and Schmidt (2010) defined pragmalinguistics as linguistic means to serve communication functions of an utterance while sociopragmatics is concerned with the appropriate context or circumstances of the utterance.

Thomas (1983) further said that pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics failure represent language in use. Therefore, if a language coursebook contains inadequate knowledge of sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics, the language in use in the book fails which implies it does not communicate what people mean appropriately.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This present study was conducted by employing a qualitative approach. The data, focusing on the speech acts of requesting, were taken from two local English coursebooks namely 'Interlanguage: English for senior high school students XI' (Priyana et al., 2008) and 'Interlanguage: English for senior high school students XII' (Priyana, et al., 2008). To address research questions one and two, they were analyzed using the theoretical framework of speech acts and sociopragmatics. In addition, the pragmatic judgment task was employed to give further information regarding how the speech acts were realized sociopragmatically in the coursebook and to what extent the book incorporated sociopragmatics in the coursebook.

FINDINGSS AND DISCUSSION

1. Granting a request

Granting a request is one of the language functions introduced to 11th graders of senior secondary schools. They learn how to grant a request. The locutions (language expressions) the students learn are as follows.

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Figure 1. The speech act of requesting 1

Granting Request

In the dialogue between Ayu and Palupi you find the following expressions:
Ayu   : Will you tell me about it?
Palupi : *Sure, I will.*
Ayu   : Let's try to make *lepat* sometimes.
Palupi : *OK.*

Sure, I will and ***OK*** are expressions to grant a request.
Here are other expressions that you can use:
▪ Alright.
▪ Certainly.
▪ Right away.
▪ Of course.

(Source: Interlanguage: English for Senior High School (Grade XI))

The language expressions of granting a request that were introduced to the students here are 'sure', 'I will, and 'Ok'. These three words/phrases are realized as seen in the following conversation.

Conversation 1

Ayu   : Well, I was wondering if there is any thanksgiving festival in your hometown.
Palupi : Well, there's one that I know. It's called Maras Taun.
Ayu   : Will you tell me about it?
Palupi : Sure. Maras Taun is a harvest festival celebrated by rice farmers. But   then, it is also celebrated by fishermen. If the farmers celebrate their harvest, the fishermen celebrate the success of fish hauling and the calmness of the sea. Nowadays, both celebrate their good earnings in a year together.

(Source: Interlanguage: English for Senior High School (Grade XI))

In this conversation, although the social relationship between Ayu and Palupi is not explicitly stated, it implies that they are classmates/schoolmates and therefore, sociopragmatically, the expressions of granting a request and the expressions relevant with the speech act of requesting (the underlined one) should have been informal.

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However, the pragmatic judgment task results showed that it was way too formal which resulted in the inappropriateness of the speech act used in this context.

Conversation 2

Ayu   : Ratu, will you accompany me to Palupi's house?
Ratu   : Alright**.** But, what are you going to do there?
Ayu   : I want to ask her about a thanksgiving festival in her hometown.
Ratu   : Hey, look it's very dark outside. I think it's going to rain. Get the umbrella, please.
Ayu   : OK. Oh, do you want to wear rubber sandals?
Ratu   : Yes, that would be great. Could you get them for me too?
Ayu   : Sure.
Ratu   : Thanks.

(Source: Interlanguage: English for Senior High School (Grade XI))

Similar to conversation 1, the speaker and the hearer in conversation 2 seem to have more of an informal relationship. Thus the locutionary acts of granting a request require informal expressions. However, in terms of sociopragmatics, the results of the pragmatic judgment task indicated inappropriateness. The rational explanation was 'Will you accompany me' in 'Will you accompany me to Palupi's house?" is too formal and therefore is not appropriately used in this context. 'Accompany' should be replaced by 'go' as the social relationship between the participants in conversation 2 is informal (between friends).

2. Complaining

Another language function or illocutionary act introduced to the 11th graders deals with complaining and blaming. However, the locutionary acts indicated the speech act of requesting.

Figure 2. The speech act of requesting 2

(Source: Interlanguage: English for Senior High School (Grade XI))

How the speech act of requesting found in 'complaining' was realized can be seen in the conversation below.

Situations:
Anita is in the school library. Anita complains to the librarian about the conditions of the books that she is going to borrow.

Anita	: Excuse me, Ma'am. <u>Can you do anything about the cover of this book</u>? It's torn.
Librarian	: Oh, sure. I'll mend it.
Anita	: <u>I'm afraid that this one also needs mending.</u> I'm afraid we'll lose some pages if we don't bind it again.
Librarian	: Yes, I think it should be mended also. But I'm afraid that you won't be able to borrow this book today. It takes time to bind. What about tomorrow?

(Source: Interlanguage: English for Senior High School (Grade XI))

'Can you do anything about the cover of this book?' is a locutionary act of a request. Although it appeared when students learn how to complain, it was an utterance that could be analyzed from the speech act of requesting theoretical framework, including from indirect

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speech acts theories whose example indicated by the use of the expression 'I'm afraid that this one also needs mending'.

In this context, the utterance 'Can you do anything about the cover of this book?' is sociopragmatically appropriate as it suits the relationship between the speaker and the hearer. The locutionary act has fulfilled metapragmatic information in terms of the social relationship (to whom an utterance is said) (Nguyen, 2011).

However, 'I'm afraid that this one also needs mending' sociopragmatically sounds too formal, according to the native speaker of American English. He underlined the use of 'I'm afraid' and 'mending' are not appropriate expressions in this particular situation resulting 'unnaturalness' in English language use.

3. Requesting

Another language function introduced in the coursebook is requesting.

Figure 3. The speech act of requesting 3

(Source: Interlanguage: English for Senior High School (Grade XII))

The expressions used in the speech act of requesting through the illocutionary acts of 'Requesting' do not indicate oddity or they are pragmalingustically acceptable. According to Richards and Schmidt (2010), pragmalinguistics is concerned with common expressions of certain illocutionary acts. For example, expressions that are often used in greetings and meetings are 'how are you?' (in a more neutral situation), 'how are things?' or

'how are you doing? (in a more informal situation).

However, the list of expressions of requesting above seems to contain an indeaquate amount of sociopragmatics information. The results of the pragmatic judgment task for 'Requesting' here revealed inappropriateness as all of them show formality which to some extent, does not represent the language used by school students.

Furthermore, in the following conversation, how the expressions of requesting were realized was too formal whereas the speaker and hearer social relationship shows informality.

Anita : Oh, come on Dad, <u>would you allow me to take a part time job</u>, please?
Father : No, dear. I wouldn't let you get a job before you finish your study. Your job is to be a student.
Anita : But, Dad, I'd be very grateful if you'd just let me take the part time job.

Having a look at the conversation above, it can be said that the underlined locution 'would you allow me to take a part-time job?' was way too formal considering the social relationship between the speaker and the hearer here. Interaction between children and parents, according to Thomas (1999, as cited in Nurdiana, 2019), should employ a more direct language as the social distance between parents and children indicate a low social distance. Therefore, in this context, sociopragmatics seems to be neglected.

4. Persuading

Figure 4. The speech act of requesting 4

(Source: Interlanguage: English for Senior High School (Grade XII))

Through the coursebook, students were further introduced to another illocutionary act dealing with the speech act of requesting called persuading. As seen in figure 4, this language function contains locutions of how to persuade someone.

The expressions containing the speech act of requesting are 'Can I/Could I/Couldn't I persuade you…..?' and 'Won't you…….please?'. Pragmalingustically, the pragmatic judgment task conducted by the native speaker of American English illustrates odd expressions because they are not common locutions used in real-life situations. This reveals a pragmalinguistic failure that may impede communicative interactions based on sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistic perspectives.

Taking into account the sociopragmatic point of view and the pragmatic judgment task, the expressions listed in figure 4 indicate inappropriateness. Similar to the other locutions used in other language functions, the expressions failed to bring the 'naturalness' of language use because all of them were considered formal language whereas the users of the book are secondary school students which in authentic situations, most of them use more neutral and informal language than the formal one.

Let's have a look at the conversation below. Although there is no explicit information about the social relationship

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between 'Virga' and 'Denias', it can be said that they have a low social distance relationship (schoolmates/classmates) which is supposed to result in more direct language use (informal).

Virga : Denias, you told me that the play is adapted from a fairy tale. Have you heard or read the story? The title sounds so interesting.
Denias : Yeah, I have ever heard the story told by my English teacher.
Virga : <u>Won't you tell me the story, please</u>?
Denias : Hey, it's not going to be interesting if you know the story!
Virga : Come on Denias. <u>How can I persuade you to tell me a bit about the story</u>?
Denias : Trust me! It's not going to be surprising if I let you know the story!
Virga : But, in fact, you knew the story before. I think it would be a pity if we didn't know the story first.
Denias : Virga, I just happened to know the story, and I think you'll enjoy watching the play without knowing the story more.
Virga : All right, maybe you're right.

'Won't you tell me the story, please?' and 'How can I persuade you to tell me a bit about the story?' indicate formal expressions which should have been used by any speaker and hearer whose social distance belongs to the high one. As a result, these expressions are sociopragmatically inappropriate which may cause sociopragmatic failure.

This study attempts to discuss sociopragmatics in language teaching materials. The findings revealed that the data analyzed (language expressions/locutions indicating the speech act of requesting) lacked sociopragmatics information which may result in sociopragmatic failure. It implies that the local English coursebooks that became the sources of data for the present research did not serve communicative functions whereas the authors of the coursebooks claimed that through the coursebooks, students will be able

to improve their communication skills that integrate communicative language functions.

Communicative language requires communicative competences which one of them is called pragmatic competence. Two sub-pragmatic competences that should be one of the goals of language learning and be incorporated into ELT materials are sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics. By understanding and being knowledgeable of these two sub-pragmatic competences, students will be able to improve their communication skills that are pragmatically approved.

The results of this study corroborated earlier research on ELT materials by Vellenga (2004), Dat (2008), and Nguyen (2011). Many ELT materials, according to Vallenga (2004) and Nguyen (2011), do not provide an adequate amount of pragmatic knowledge, whereas Dat's study focused on the advantages and disadvantages of regional ELT materials. One of his conclusions is that local ELT materials' native language is converted into English to make the materials compliant with Ministry of Education standards. The textbook materials are consequently linguistically incorrect, leading to linguistic inaccuracy and imprecise content.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

To conclude, the locutions or language expressions related to the speech acts of requesting introduced to the students in the two local English coursebooks were realized inappropriately from sociopragmatic perspectives. They resulted in sociopragmatic failure which impedes the attainment of communicative language functions. Indonesian EFL learners may not be able to use appropriate expressions in real-life situations. For example, they speak English without taking into consideration the social relationship between interlocutors, the setting, and the topic. As a result, they keep using formal language in whatever situations. The language used will sound 'weird' or

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'unnatural' which might lead to misunderstanding when communicating with monolingual users of English.

Suggestions

In future studies, more speech acts taken from different local English coursebooks should be investigated to confirm earlier research on pragmatic information, particularly sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic information. By doing so, Indonesian materials developers can have insights into how to devise English language materials for teaching and learning that incorporate knowledge of pragmatics.

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