

Evaluation of Pragmatic Information in an English Textbook: Focus on Requests

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Abstract : Learning to request in a foreign language is a key ability within pragmatics language teaching. This paper examines how requests are taught in English Unlimited Book 3 (Cambridge University Press), an EFL textbook series employed by King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia to teach advanced foundation year students English. The focus of analysis is the evaluation of the request linguistic strategies present in the textbook, frequency of the use of these strategies, and the contextual information provided on the use of these linguistic forms. The researcher collected all the linguistic forms which consisted of the request speech act and divided them into levels employing the CCSARP request coding manual. Findings demonstrated that simple and commonly employed request strategies are introduced. Looking closely at the exercises throughout the chapters, it was noticeable that the book exclusively employed the most direct form of requesting (the imperative) when giving learners instructions: e.g. listen, write, ask, answer, read, look, complete, choose, talk, think, etc. The book also made use of some other request strategies such as ‘hedge performatives’ and ‘query preparatory’. However, it was also found that many strategies were not dealt with in the book, specifically strategies with combined functions (e.g. possibility, ability). On a sociopragmatic level, a strong focus was found to exist on standard situations in which relations between the requester and requestee are clear. In general, contextual information was communicated implicitly only. The textbook did not seem to differentiate between formal and informal request contexts (register) which might consequently impel students to overgeneralize. The paper closes with some recommendations for textbook and curriculum designers. Findings are also contrasted with previous results from similar body of research on EFL requests.

Keywords : EFL, requests, saudi, speech acts, textbook evaluation

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