The Linguistic Presentation of Speech Acts in Top-Notch Intermediate Textbooks

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Abstract

The role of textbooks as one of the main sources of language input in addition to the teacher and other learners cannot be ignored in the process of language learning, especially in EFL contexts since learners mostly rely on textbooks for second language learning. Therefore, more attention should be paid to the evaluation of the textbooks to meet the needs of both teachers and learners. As such, the purpose of this research is to analyze and evaluate the pragmatic information of Top-Notch Intermediate textbooks which are used in most EFL institutes in Iran. Specifically, the article investigates the linguistic presentation of speech acts in the textbooks and the provision of sufficient contextual and meta-pragmatic information for the facilitation of learning the speech acts. The results indicated that there are three typical ways of presenting speech acts in the textbooks 1) using dialogues in conversation models, 2) using lists of expressions, and 3) using dialogues as well as the grammar section. In addition, there is inadequate contextual and meta-pragmatic information in terms of the speech acts included in the textbooks. The article also has some implications for teachers, materials writers and textbook designers in terms of the pragmatic aspect of the target language.

Keywords: Linguistic presentation, L2 pragmatics, Top-Notch Intermediate textbooks, Speech acts

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The phenomenon of globalization and its subsequent side effects such as ever increasing interaction among various members of society, in most cases with different cultural backgrounds, has brought about the urge for individuals to develop their pragmatic knowledge. It is now generally acknowledged that one of the crucial aspects of communicative competence is pragmatic competence (Backman & Palmer, 2000; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Farashaiyan & Tan, 2012 a, b). This competence necessitates the ability to opt out and identify the forms of utterance appropriately in a special context (Kasper & Rose, 2002). More importantly, this knowledge gives a speaker the ability to convey his/ her intents and meanings by means of speech acts in appropriate forms within a given socio-cultural context of communication (Farashaiyan et al., 2014). To put it in other words, this facet of language competence entails both possessing linguistic devices for conveying speech acts and perceiving the socio-cultural limitations on the utilization of these communicative means (Thomas, 1983; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Tan & Farashaiyan, 2015).

It is widely accepted that the major and the most important aspect of L2 pragmatics is speech acts (Kasper, 2006; Farashaiyan & Muthusamy, 2017a). A speech act is defined as a function of the language within which an utterance serves a purpose in any exchange of communication (Austin, 1962), and the action is expressed via speech acts (Searle, 1976). Therefore, when we intend to offer something to someone, make an apology, ask for some services, invite someone for a party, refuse or accept something and etc, we perform speech acts (Muthusamy & Farashaiyan, 2016 a, b). Moreover, speech acts can act as "islands of reliability" for learners (Diepenbroek & Derwing, 2013, p. 4).In this regard, House (1996) contended that they can both boost pragmatic ability and contribute to fluency by emphasizing on formulaic chunks, while other aspects of language such as grammar and vocabulary are still developing (Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005; Tan & Farashaiyan, 2013).

It is worth mentioning that most of language learners may not recognize the forms of the second language which are socially and culturally appropriate in that context of interaction. As a result, in order to develop their pragmatic competence, learners must be catered for language teaching materials that offer authentic instances of speech act strategies or semantic formulas (Vakilifard et al, 2015; Muthusamy & Farashaiyan, 2016 c). Thus, the significance of the language textbooks for the teaching of these kinds of communicative means has been considered as an important issue to language learners since speech acts are important elements in pragmatic development, (Diepenbroek & Derwing, 2013). This is owing to the common sense that "language textbooks play a central role in language classes" (Chapelle, 2009, p. 141). In addition, for the development of language learners' pragmatic competence, they should complement the classroom teaching with real instances of speech act semantic formulas (Ekin, 2013).

As such, it can be claimed that language textbooks play an important role in the domain of teaching and learning of L2 pragmatic aspect of the target language. It is due to the fact that they "are considered the next important factor in the second/foreign language classroom after

the teacher" (Riazi, 2003, p. 52). Furthermore, another preponderance of using textbook is that they can direct learner's aims because learners would not take their learning process seriously if no textbook exists. Textbooks can be utilized as a syllabus. If the textbooks do not exist in class, learners will not concentrate well on the materials and it may lead to teacher-centered classroom. Additionally, textbooks can play an important role of a supporter and helper for fresh teachers (Poupari & Bagheri, 2013; Farashaiyan & Muthusamy, 2017b).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The textbook is 'the visible heart of any ELT program' (Sheldon, 1988: 237). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, textbooks have always been considered as the major source of input for learners after teachers. Therefore, it is obvious that textbooks have a vital role and the potentiality to make English learners competent communicatively.

It is envisaged that the textbooks have more communicative value since the domain of the communicative language teaching has reached its highest peak for the past few years. Therefore, communicative value has been the major cornerstone for the evaluation of speech acts and language functions in ESL textbooks. This is owing to the fact that recent probes have focused on the relationship between forms and functions. Furthermore, speech acts have rooted in communicative competence which is proposed by Hymes (1972). It is worth mentioning that in order to perform speech acts, the speaker is supposed to choose speech act strategies appropriately in the given context (Farashaiyan & Muthusamy, 2017a). Thus, it is apparently worth studying to find out if learners are exposed to enough input on the part of their course books to let them achieve L2 pragmatic knowledge, and practically apply them in real life.

Regarding the importance of language textbooks as one of the main sources of input in the development of target language pragmatic knowledge, however, little studies have been conducted on textbook evaluation in term of pragmatic information, especially in EFL settings. Most studies have been conducted in ESL contexts (e.g., Boxer & Pickering, 2009; Delen & Tavil, 2010; Diepenbroek & Derwing, 2013; Petraki & Bayes, 2013). In addition, most of the textbook analyses have investigated the type and range of speech act strategies used in producing one to three speech acts. There is a paucity of research with regard to the linguistic presentation of speech acts in terms of pragmatic input, output and feedback in the textbooks and the presentation of contextual and meta-pragmatic information. Therefore, in the continuation of the cited studies and to fill the existing gap, the present study analyzed and evaluated the pragmatic content of Top-Notch intermediate textbooks intended for use in most Iranian EFL institutes. Specifically, this study looked at (1) the linguistic presentations of the speech acts in the intermediate To-Notch textbooks and 2) the presentation of contextual and meta-pragmatic information accompanying them. Therefore, the following research questions guided the present study:

1.3 Research Questions

1. How are the speech acts linguistically presented in the Top-Notch intermediate textbooks?

3.   2. Are the contents of these textbooks pragmatically appropriate and efficient with regard to the presentation of contextual and meta-pragmatic information accompanying the speech acts?

2. Methodology

2.1 Materials

The materials used in this study consist of the all sections (language focus, vocabulary, reading/listening, task, and further skill) of Top-Notch intermediate textbooks (pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate). Generally, Top Notch series consist of 12 textbooks on the whole, written by Joan Saslow and Allen Ascher, and published in the United States of America by Pearson Longman Inc, in 2006. The focus of the present study is on the intermediate levels of Top Notch series consisting of the six textbooks of Top Notch Intermediates A and B, and containing 30 units on the whole. The textbooks combine the comprehensive syllabus and reliable teaching resources that have made the course so popular with brand-new features, making it even fresher and easier to use. All sections of the textbooks were examined to search for the linguistic presentation of speech acts and the presentation of contextual and meta-pragmatic information accompanying the speech acts.

Each textbook is comprised of 5 units. Every unit is begun with a vocabulary section. Every vocabulary part is followed up with some other parts including conversation strategies, grammar, speaking, pronunciation, listening, reading and writing.

2.2 Data Collection Procedure

The data for this study were accumulated from all sections of pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate Top-Notch series (vocabulary, conversation strategies, grammar, speaking, pronunciation, listening, reading and writing). Therefore, the researchers examined all these parts in six textbooks to gain a measure regarding the presentation of speech acts. Each section in these books consists of a number of sentences ranging from 9 to 15 sentences. Each sentence contains 6 to 10 words on the average.

2.4 Data Analysis Procedure

Since this research is mainly qualitative, no special statistical analyses have been needed. Therefore, the entire analysis of the present study has been carried out by careful inspection of all sections included in the six books of Top Notch Intermediates. . The purpose of this analysis was to find out the linguistic presentation of speech acts and contextual and meta-pragmatic information accompanying the speech acts involved in the contents of the textbooks.

Moreover, the pragmatic analysis was exclusively on the completed conversations and the uncompleted dialogues were ignored due to the reason that the intentions of the speakers were not clear since our main criterion in realizing the speech act was the illocutionary force of the speakers involved in the conversations. Therefore, the focus of the researchers was on the content analysis of the textbooks through which they examined the contexts of using speech acts in these textbooks. Concerning the reliability of the manually coding procedure,

two raters including both researchers examined all sections of the textbooks and they reached the agreement.

3. Results

The textbook set analyzed in this study include six student Top-Notch intermediate books (pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate) intends to be used for all Iranian EFL learners , who have been studying English for at least some months as their foreign language. It is claimed that the book adopts a theme-based syllabus and follow a 'learner-centered approach and communicative approach with task-based teaching being the central teaching method' .The following sections analyze and discuss the books together with their accompanying materials with respect to (1) the linguistic presentation of the speech acts included in six student books, and (2) the contextual and meta-pragmatic information accompanying these presentations.

3.1 Linguistic Presentations of Speech Acts

Since textbooks are the main source of teaching in Iranian educational system and instructors have to follow what is inserted in the textbooks, so the researchers decided to show some images of textbooks to visualize the scenario of pragmatics presentation. As a whole, three typical ways of presenting speech acts in the textbooks are 1) using dialogues in conversation models which a certain speech act is explicitly presented in the topic such as "ask for a recommendation" and "apologize for lateness" (see Figures 1 & 2), or it is implicitly included in the conversation model "make an excuse to decline" (see Figure 3), 2) using lists of expressions (see Figure 4), and 3) using dialogues as well as the grammar section (see Figure 5) as illustrated below.
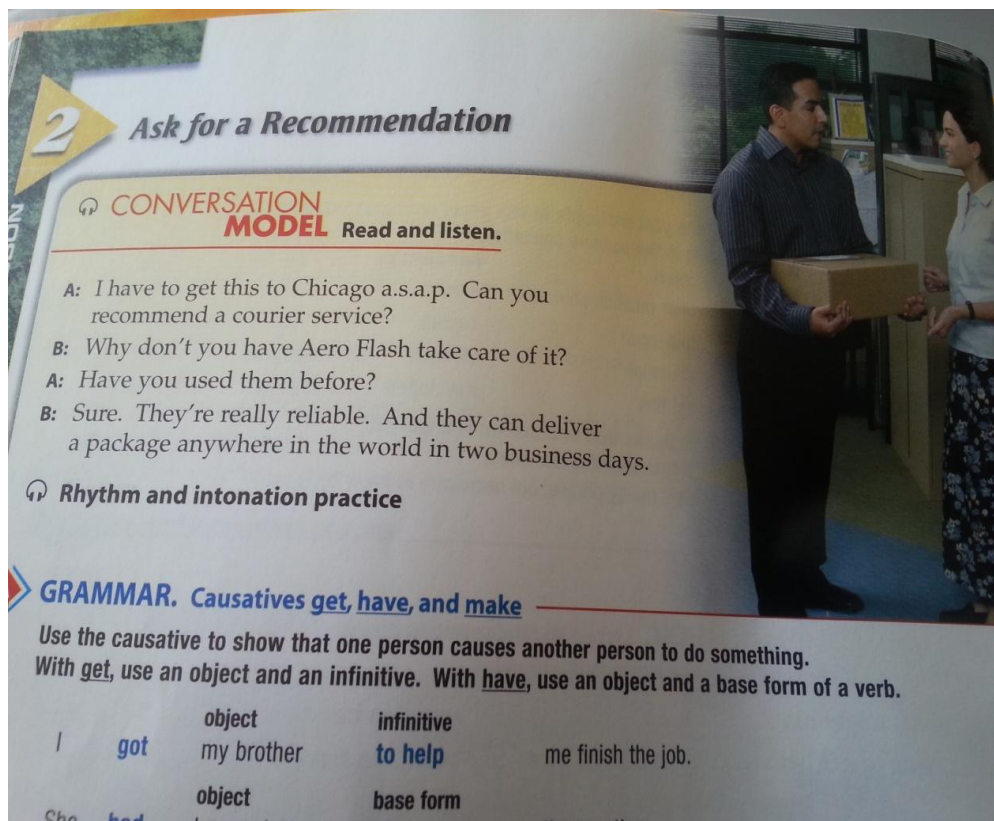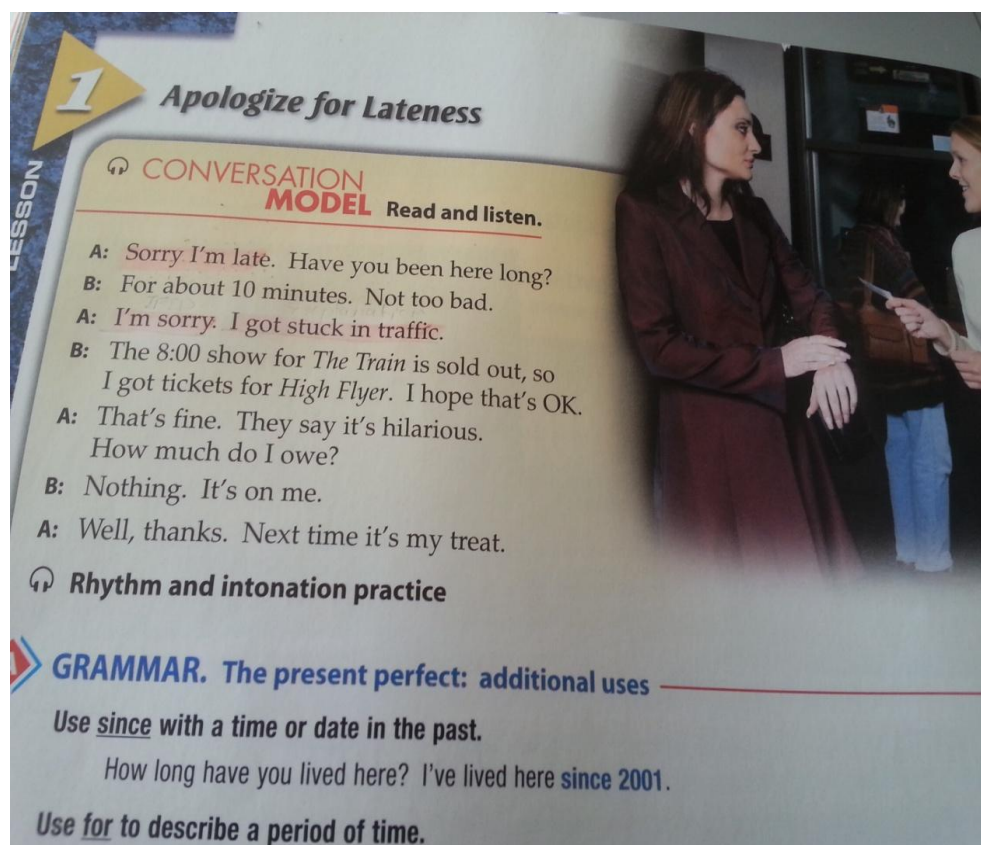
Figure 1. Presentation of speech act in the topic (Top-Notch 3A,P.30)

As the above image (3.1) reveals, this conversation activity has been designed to present the speech act of recommendation as it is seen in the topic of the conversation model. In this regard, the speaker has used the expression "why don't you" to recommend a service to the hearer. There is no more information regarding other linguistic forms or semantic formula for the speech act of recommendation in this activity.

Figure 2. Presentation of the speech act in the topic and conversation (Top-Notch 3B, P. 76)

The above image is another example in representing speech acts in the topic and conversation. This activity introduces the speech act of apology as it is shown in the topic "Apologize for Lateness". The expressions of "sorry" and I'm sorry" are used by the speaker to apologize the hearer for his lateness. Another strategy which is used is an explanation "I got stuck in traffic".

Figure 3. Presentation of refusal speech act in the conversation (Top-Notch 3A, P.45)

Another way of representing speech acts is that they are implicitly included in the conversation model and there is no information regarding its usage in different contexts (metapragmatic information). The above image introduces the speech act of refusal in the topic as "Make an Excuse to Decline Food". The expression "Thanks. But I'll pass on the chicken" shows the implicit representation of "I'll pass" as a refusal strategy to decline the food.

Figure 4. Presentation of speech acts through lists of expressions or strategies (Top-Notch 3B, P. 102)

Using lists of expression or semantic formulas is another way of presenting speech acts. As the above image demonstrates, in addition to the inclusion of the speech act of disagreement in the conversation model in line 4 "Actually, I'm against the death penalty", a list of expressions for two speech acts of disagreement and agreement are provided besides the conversation model. The given lists just show some expressions or strategies to be used in disagreeing or agreeing in situations but no information is provided with regard to the extent of formality/informality of each form.
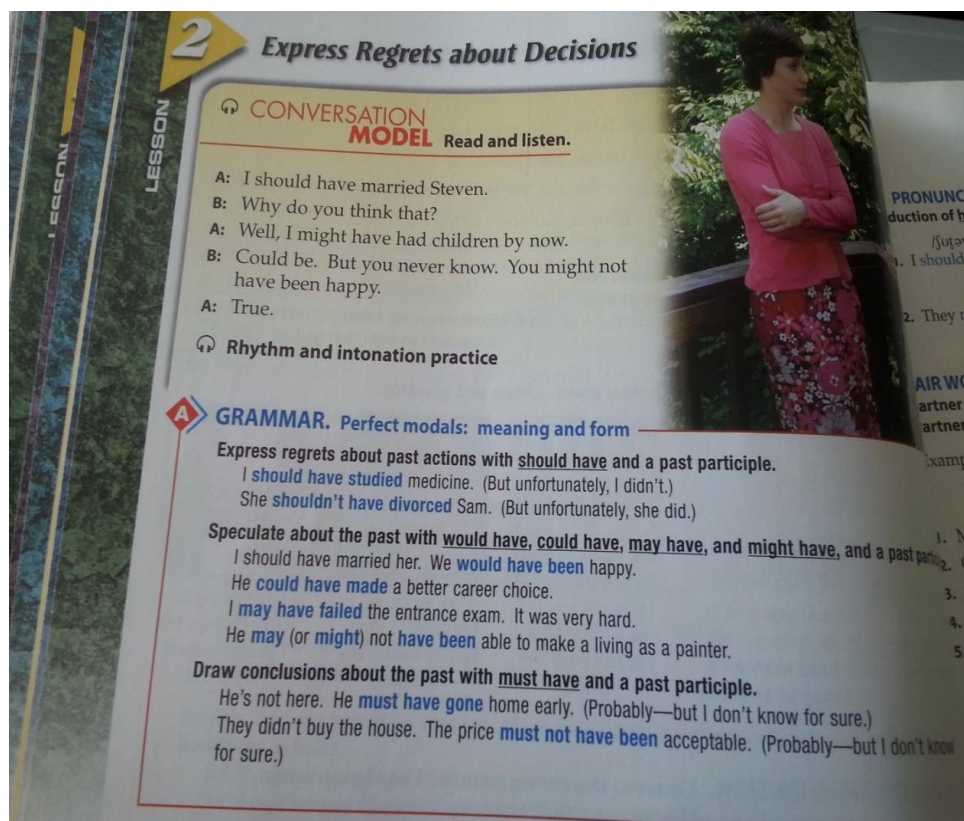
Figure 5. Presentation of speech acts through grammar (Top-Notch 3A, P. 42)

The above image shows the speech act of regret in both the conversation model and grammar section. In the grammar section, it is introduced as perfect modals which illustrate different functions of should have, would have, could have, may have, might have, and must have.

Figure 6. Practice of speech act through conversation pairwork (Top-Notch 3A, P. 31)

With regard to the practice of the speech acts, the books mostly present two ways, role-play activity pair-work activities. The above image shows the practice of speech act of recommendation through a role-play activity included in the conversation pairwork. The learners should role play the activity and ask for a recommendation by using the guide and ads.
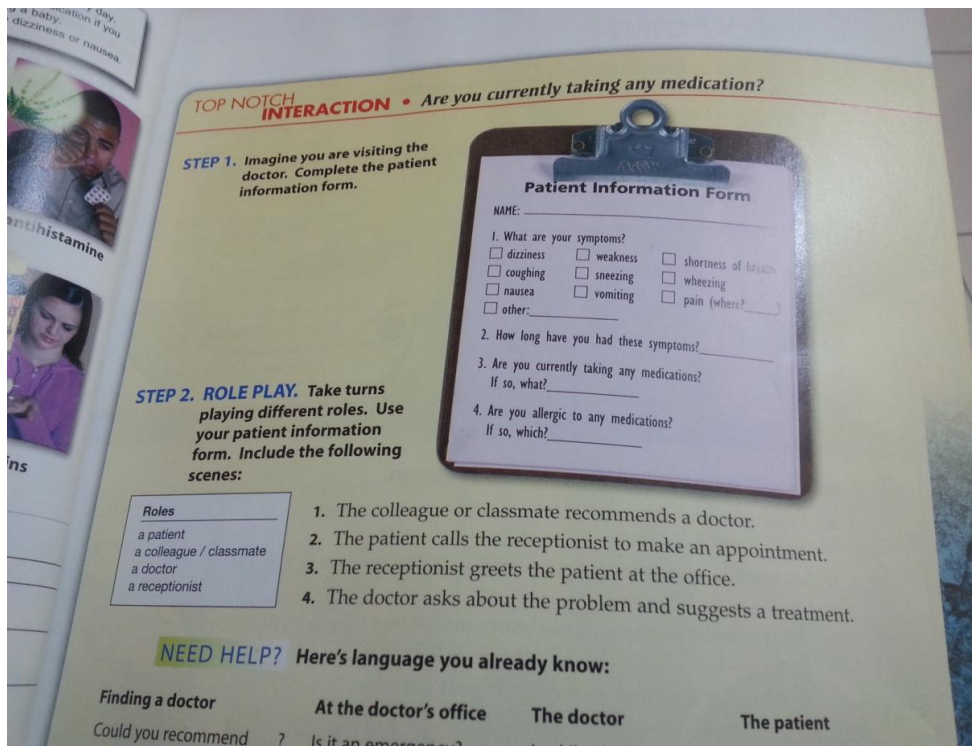
Figure 7. Practice of speech act through role-play in interaction activity   (Top-Notch 3A, P. 23)

To practice the above activity, the instructor should ask learners to make a conversation in pair work using the previous conversations (role-play). The learners put themselves in different situations (for example one doctor and the other patient) and talk about different diseases. For example, the doctor role suggests some treatments to the patient.   In comparison with the other two theoretical conditions of pragmatics instruction, namely input and output, there is no information with regard to pragmatic feedback in the textbooks.

3.2 Presentations of Contextual and Meta-pragmatic Information

When looking at the contextual presentations of the different speech acts, the findings also seem to suggest no information with regard to the contextual and meta-pragmatic information of speech acts under study. For example, the intermediate textbook presents the acknowledging thank speech act in the conversation model as a list of expressions as illustrated below.

3.2.1 Example 1

Conversation Model

A: Excuse me. I think you forgot something.

B: I did?

A: Isn't this jacket hers?

B: Oh, you're right. It is. Thanks so much.

A: My pleasure.

Acknowledging thanks

My pleasure

You're welcome

No problem

Don't mention it

Not at all

(Top-Notch 2 B, P. 112)

The book does not give any information with regard to the formality/informality of forms in performing the speech act of thanking response (acknowledging thank) and there is not any example of their use in different situations. In addition, there is no information regarding the social and contextual factors affecting the choice of the appropriate form in the pertinent situation.

3.2.2 Example 2

Conversation model

Recommend a Book

A: What's that you're reading?

B: It's a Hemingway novel, *The Old Man and the Sea.*

A: I've always wanted to read that! Is it any good?

B: Oh, I'd highly recommend it. It's a real page-turner.

A: Do you mind if I borrow it when you're done?

B: Not at all.

As you be seen in the above example, there is no information about the contextual factors involved with regard to the speech act strategy.

(Top-Notch 3 B, P. 76)

Example 3

Vocabulary: Ways to disagree politely. Listen and practice.

I think smoking is a disgusting habit.

That may be true, but if you only smoke in your own house, you're not hurting anyone but yourself.

I think more people should be active in politics. That way we Would have better governments.

I see what you mean, but it's not realistic to expect everyone to care.

3. Our president is doing an excellent job.

Well, on the one hand, he's not corrupt. **But on the other hand,** he hasn't done much to improve the country.

I think we should just vote against everyone who's in office now. That's a good way to get change.

That's one way to look at it, but how do we know inexperienced candidates will be any better than what we already have?

(Top-Notch 3 B, P. 112)

Regardless of the way the speech acts are presented, however, all speech acts are presented out of context (see above examples). That is, there is no explicit information about the relationship between the speakers, for example, how close they feel to one another, or how likely can one impose what one wants on the other. Nor is there a description of the contextual variables (social power, social distance and imposition of the speech act) that might help to judge the degree of imposition of the speech acts involved (see Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987). In some other cases, the relationship between the speakers could be inferred from their roles in the conversation parts (e.g. customer and salesperson, father and son, patient and doctor). Nevertheless, the textbooks seem to offer little attempt, either explicit or implicit, to draw learners' attention to these variables and its effects on the speech act produced.

Findings also seem to suggest an inadequate amount of meta-pragmatic information which should be included for each speech act. Meta-pragmatic information is about when, where, and to whom it is appropriate to perform a particular speech act and what expression would

or would not be appropriate in a particular context of culture and context of situation. Nonetheless, there is no information with regard to the meta-pragmatic information in all six examined textbook. The point just is that the information is only minimal in the sense that it is concerning only the relative degree of directness, for example, saying: '*I agree with you completely*' shows a strong agreement while saying: '*I completely disagree*' indicates a strong disagreement. No other explanation is given regarding when, where, and to whom each of these expressions might be used.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this research showed that the six Top-Notch intermediate textbooks present the speech acts by 1) using dialogues in conversation models, 2) using lists of expressions, and 3) using dialogues as well as the grammar section. Furthermore, the findings also are suggestive of the fact there is no information with regard to the contextual and meta-pragmatic information of speech acts under study. In fact, it is necessary to provide learners with contextual clues and meta-pragmatic information on politeness issues or norms of appropriateness in such a way that they can comprehend diverse socio-cultural restrictions in making use of speech acts in different cultures (Farashaiyan & Muthusamy, 2016 a, b) .Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) have also contended that the three contextual factors of the degree of social distance between speakers (D), their relative power status (P), and the degree of imposition of the given speech act (R) should be considered by speakers since these factors can assists them to pay attention to politeness issue in using the speech acts involved (Ellis, 2008; Nguyen, 2005, 2007)

In general, it is usually supposed that all textbooks simply conceal the linguistic facets of a target language, but with regard to language use, particularly the pragmatic dimension, most of them may function ineffectively. Top Notch intermediate books which are the focus of this research, are also in the same vein. That is probably owing to the fact that insufficient materials with regard to the communicative aspect of language has been incorporated which pragmatics is at the heart of communicative facet of second language (Alemi & Irandoost, 2012; Tan & Farashaiyan, 2016). As such, the inadequate input in EFL settings is considered as one of the most main reasons (Delen & Tavil, 2010; Muthusamy & Farashaiyan, 2016c). In this regard, Cook (2011) claims that restricted input and output are the characterization of EFL instructional contexts. This restriction is due to two facts: first, instead of means of socialization and a communication tool, target language is considered as an object of study and second, the teacher-fronted situation of classroom organization(Bouton, 1996; Kasper & Rose, 2001; Salazar Campillo, 2007; Schmidt, 1994; Uso-Juan, 2007; Vellenga, 2004).

In sum, this research has illustrated that textbooks do not always represent a true and sufficient source of pragmatic information. Thus, it is argued that there is a need in providing realistic models of L2 pragmatic in EFL contexts. In addition, rules of use should be explained sufficiently and squired with the models due to the facilitation of learners' development of pragmatic competence in the L2. In addition, textbook developers and the editors can take the mentioned pragmatic shortcomings (lack of contextual and meta-pragmatic information) under the rigorous scrutiny to modify and revise all Top-Notch

series and other developing textbooks.

This study also suggests the explicit instruction of speech acts and meta-pragmatic information on politeness issues or norms of appropriateness by language instructors as a sort of remedy to these pragmatic shortcomings in Top-Notch intermediate textbooks since their learners have relatively restricted accessibility to authentic input in terms of the pragmatic aspect of the second language and they are mostly only depend on textbooks for language learning.

This research has a number of limitations. The first limitation is that only the Top-Notch intermediate textbooks were considered for the pragmatic evaluation. In addition, the pragmatic evaluation was confined to the presentation of speech acts and contextual and meta-pragmatic information.   Future research can evaluate other aspects of L2 pragmatics in these textbooks. In addition, Top Notch intermediate series can be examined from diverse aspects other than the pragmatic one. Other studies can be replicated and conducted on different textbooks other than Top Notch intermediate series.

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