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Book Review

Book Review: *Speech acts in English: From research to instruction and textbook development.* Cambridge University Press.

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Book Information

1. Background

Developing the pragmatic competence of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners is one of the most challenging areas in second/foreign language (L2) acquisition (Ellis, 2013). One crucial reason is that the language input EFL learners receive is mostly from teaching materials (Andrews, 2007), which have, unfortunately, been found to be problematic in the treatment of pragmatic knowledge. As such, relevant research has found numerous problems concerning the distribution of pragmatic information in EFL textbooks, especially the unbalanced and unsystematic representation of different speech acts, and this strand of research continues. Few existing studies, however, provide practical solutions to the problems from the perspective of EFL instruction and materials development. Pérez-Hernández's monograph puts forward a new cognitive pedagogical grammar approach and offers innovative activities and practice materials for teaching directive speech acts, with a focus on advanced Spanish EFL learners.

2. Introduction

Chapter 1 starts by pointing out that the book delves into a subgroup of the most representative and frequently used directive speech acts, including orders, requests, beggings, suggestions, advice acts, and warnings. The author then explains the challenge of learning these speech acts, which often stems from their complex and diverse nature and the disconnection between their poor treatment in EFL textbooks and research advancement on pragmatics. To address this, she claims that teaching how to perform directive speech acts should involve the semantic and constructional aspects, and the areas of discrepancy between first/native language (L1) and L2, using an explicit teaching approach and authentic language examples.

In Chapter 2, the author builds the theoretical framework of the book by critically reviewing three theories concerning speech acts, which are named metaphorically as Teams I, II, and III. They differ from each other in their acceptance or rejection of Levinson's (1983) Literal Force Hypothesis (LFH), that is, people calculate the speech acts of sentences according to their forms. For instance, three major sentence types (i.e., declarative, interrogative, and imperative) are associated with three illocutionary forces (i.e., stating, questioning, and ordering/requesting). Team I accepts the LFH and believes that speakers fully codify their intention in language, denying flexible and creative language use in communication (e.g., CAN YOU DO X? forms should correspond with questions, overlooking their use as speech acts like requests.). Team III rejects the LFH and argues that people calculate the meaning of every utterance they hear, envisioning daily interactions as high-cognitive cost behavior and failing to explain why some expressions are more frequently used than others for communicating speech acts (e.g., CAN YOU DO X? constructions can be more widely interpreted as requests than ARE YOU ABLE TO DO X? forms, although they are synonymous.). Team II holds an intermediate position by its convention-based theories, depicting safer and more creative and efficient ways of communication as compared to Teams I and III. However, it believes that a speech act is either conventional or not (e.g., CAN YOU DO X? forms should be more easily recognized as conventional expressions of requests, so speakers can short-circuit the inferential

process for understanding them as acts of requesting rather than questioning.). It also overlooks the social aspects of speech acts (e.g., COULD YOU DO X? forms are motivated by the need to be polite.). Team II thus holds a dichotomous view of conventionality, oversimplifying the interpretation and production of speech acts.

After reviewing the weaknesses and picking out the strengths of contemporary theories on illocutionary acts, and gathering psycholinguistic and neuroscientific evidence about speech act processing, the author integrates existing theoretical findings into a cognitive-constructional approach to directive speech acts within the cognitive linguistics framework. The new approach captures two dimensions of directive speech acts: Illocutionary Idealised Cognitive Models (ICMs) and families of illocutionary constructions. On the one hand, the Illocutionary ICMs relate to the semantic/pragmatic aspects of speech acts, consisting of ontology and structure. The ontology comprises eleven attributes (e.g., Agent, Addressee's capability, Speaker's need, Politeness, Cost-benefit, etc.), and the structure involves three social variables (i.e., Power, Social distance, and Formality) and captures the interplays between the attributes or between one attribute and one or more variables. On the other hand, the families of illocutionary constructions, relating to the formal aspects of speech acts, comprise base constructions and realization procedures. For example, regarding the act of requesting, the base constructions (e.g., Can you do X?, I would like X, or I would like you to do X.) activate essential attributes like Capability or Willingness, but the realization procedures (e.g., *if possible*, *if you will*, *please*, or *kindly*.) instantiate other attributes connected to social behavior and expectations, such as Optionality or Politeness. As a result, a base construction combined with a varying number of realization procedures yields request constructions that differ in the number of illocutionary attributes and degree of explicitness. The phenomenon that the same speech acts do not activate the same number of attributes is labeled *(multiple source)-in-target metonymy*, through which different source subdomains are projected onto the same illocutionary target domain. Hence, people interpret and produce speech acts according to a range of linguistic, social, interactional, and contextual factors rather than one of the three aspects concerning sentence forms, inference, or conventionality, as claimed by the three teams above.

Chapter 3 reports a mixed-method study of the representation of speech acts in advanced EFL textbooks for Spanish English learners. The quantitative investigation, encompassing a broader range of objects of analysis and data compared to previous studies, focuses on six directive speech acts in ten textbooks. Drawing from the theoretical framework described in Chapter 2, the qualitative analysis is undertaken to scrutinize the treatment of speech acts in the textbooks from four aspects: semantics/pragmatics, construction, conversation, and typology. The results of the study reveal a weak and inconsistent representation of the six speech acts in most textbooks, indicating a lack of implementation of theoretical research advancements on the aforementioned aspects. The findings also justify the need for explicitly teaching directive speech acts, as already highlighted in

Chapter 1. In this connection, Chapter 4 translates the cognitive-constructional approach proposed in Chapter 2 into a cognitive pedagogical grammar of directive speech acts, offering a fine-grained description of their semantic/pragmatic, formal, and cross-linguistic/cultural knowledge. Furthermore, Chapter 5 presents the design of twenty-one practical activities like consciousness-raising or knowledge development for teaching the six directive speech acts to advanced Spanish EFL learners. Paralleling the three strands of knowledge as to speech acts in Chapter 4, the activities are divided into three groups of seven, corresponding to the teaching and learning of the semantic/pragmatic, formal, and cross-linguistic/cultural aspects of the speech acts, respectively.

The book concludes in Chapter 6 with its major contributions and directions for future research. The author suggests that further studies extend the scope of the investigation to speech acts other than directives, e.g., assertives, commmissives, or expressives, and validate her theoretical framework by experimental research in the fields of EFL teaching and learning and psycholinguistics.

3. Evaluation

The most significant contribution of the book lies in that the author creatively applies the notions of ICM, metonymy, and construction to the study of speech acts, thereby integrating seemingly contradictory pragmatic theories within cognitive linguistics. Specifically, Chapters 2 and 4 showcase a systematic and comprehensive description of the semantic and formal properties of speech acts in English and Spanish, which are valuable resources for raising the pragmatic awareness of EFL teachers (Andrews, 2007). Textbook researchers can easily follow the methodology in Chapter 3 to investigate the treatment of directive speech acts in EFL materials. Visual representations of the underlying force metaphors of speech acts in Chapters 4 and 5 are particularly worthy of mention. They enable learners to perceive the semantic features of speech acts from multiple aspects. The practical activities in Chapter 5 offer an excellent model for instructors and materials developers to design innovative L2 classroom activities for teaching speech acts. Overall, the book bridges the long-standing disconnection between research findings on speech acts and their implementation in teaching practice. It fills a gap in materials research which usually draws on theories without considering research into EFL materials (Garton & Graves, 2014). The proposed activities and practice materials for language teachers and learners also respond to the lack of attention to users in previous studies on EFL materials (MacGrath, 2021).

Readers can refer to the following aspects when reading the book or implementing the proposed cognitive pedagogical grammar approach in EFL teaching. Firstly, there may be an inconsistency as to whether an explicit instruction approach to speech acts is suitable for advanced, intermediate, or beginner-level EFL students. The author claims in most chapters of the book that the approach is particularly fitted for advanced EFL students, who have the language ability to understand explanations

in L2 instruction. However, at the beginning of Chapter 5, she notes that the approach is also useful in lower levels of instruction when EFL learners are taught in L1. Regarding speech acts, the challenge in learning may be more relevant to their semantic, formal, or cross-cultural aspects. Attributes like agent or cost-benefit, for example, may be easier to understand than metonymic operations or formal features like base constructions and realization procedures.

In addition, the author suggests that Chapters 4 and 5 are accessible to non-specialist readers as they are presented in jargon-free language. For instance, technical terms like illocutionary ICMs or illocutionary constructions and realization procedures in Chapter 2 have been substituted by *know-what* or *know-how* of directives. In fact, a deep understanding of the authors' review and revision of contemporary theories as to speech acts in Chapter 2 is a prerequisite for comprehending the entire book. Readers, therefore, need to have some knowledge of pragmatics and cognitive linguistics. Moreover, the use of real language data from L1 and L2 corpora is a crucial step to implement the proposed approach in EFL teaching. As the book targets Spanish EFL learners, the cross-linguistic/cultural comparison is conducted between English data from the British National Corpus (BNC) and the iWeb corpus and Spanish data from the Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual (CREA) and Corpus del Español del Siglo XXI (CORPES XXI). In the context of EFL teaching in other regions or countries, teachers should extract language data from different corpora. Thus, some prior knowledge of corpus linguistics is also necessary. Alternatively, EFL teachers from different cultural backgrounds can look for authentic language examples from research on the speech acts of their mother tongues. Similarly, as directives are ubiquitous in human languages, language instructors can borrow ideas from Pérez-Hernández's theoretical framework and apply the same principles to creating activities and materials for teaching speech acts of any L2. By doing so, L2 teachers of German in China can, for example, teach differences in the semantic attributes and constructional nature of speech acts between German and Chinese.

Finally, the book compares speech acts between two L1 languages, Spanish and English. However, English is no longer exclusive to L1 speakers; it is a globally used lingua franca, which has been increasingly accepted in the field of EFL teaching (Jenkins, 2012). In communication between L1 and L2 speakers, L1 speakers may not always adhere to the pragmatic principles of their mother tongue in the same way as they communicate with people from their culture. Also, imagine the interaction between Spanish and Chinese EFL speakers. To what extent do they observe the pragmatic maxims of English when both are not L1 English speakers? Given this, EFL teachers, in addition to comparing English with their L1, should also refer to the corpus of English as a lingua franca when designing practical activities with real examples of speech acts (House, 2010).

Nevertheless, the book's strengths far outweigh the minor problems mentioned above. Pérez-Hernández's work has made a theoretically significant improvement in the study of speech acts and, more importantly, offered a practical approach and an innovative perspective to L2 instructional pragmatics. Unlike books focusing solely on theories of speech acts or the development of L2 pragmatic competence, the comprehensive theoretical framework, a wealth of authentic language examples from corpora, and related teaching activities make this monograph well-researched, readable, and practical. The book is a must-read for instructors who are bewildered by the teaching of speech acts with textbooks, a reference book for materials developers who deal with the poor treatment of pragmatic knowledge in textbooks, and a valuable guide for materials researchers who aim to conduct a more comprehensive investigation on the representation of speech acts in textbooks.

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