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The Contrastive Study of Evaluating Compliment Response and Thanking Strategies Used in ILI pre-intermediate vs. Touchstone 3 Textbooks

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Abstract

One of the hotly debated topics within the field of pragmatics is the evaluation of speech acts. However, few studies have attempted to compare the inclusion of speech acts in international published books and internal publishing books in the Iranian context. Therefore, the present study aimed at investigating two important speech acts of compliment responses and thanking in pre-intermediate Iran Language Institute (ILI) and *Touchstone 3* books. 12 dialogues of *Touchstone 3* and 27 dialogues of ILI pre-intermediate textbooks were analyzed and the number of the instances and the mean of each speech act was tallied. The results indicated that there was statistically significant difference between the frequencies of the thanking expressions in ILI pre-intermediate textbooks and *Touchstone 3*, while no statistically significant difference was found between the frequencies of the compliment responses in ILI pre-intermediate textbooks and *Touchstone 3*. The findings also revealed that *Touchstone 3* enjoyed a higher mean in the compliment responses than ILI pre-intermediate textbooks, whereas the mean of thanking in ILI pre-intermediate textbooks was higher than that of *Touchstone 3*. The findings have important implications for EFL teachers, material developers, and policy makers to be aware of pragmatics issues in textbooks.

Keywords: Contrastive analysis; Textbook evaluation; Speech acts; Compliment response; Thanking strategies

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1. Introduction

Learners' communicative competence is the ability to express expeditiously what they mean in the target language to achieve communication in real-life situations (Hymes, 1972). To be competent, learners must have profound knowledge of pragmatics because L2 proficiency is positively correlated with pragmatic transfer (Takahashi & Beebe, 1987). In addition, nowadays, textbooks are an important element in most language programs as the most common educational tools in classroom to practice the communicative functions of language (Cutting, 2002; Halliday, 1978).

Therefore, due to the role of textbooks in the process of learning and teaching , the present study aims to investigate the compliment responses and thanking expressions in ILI pre-intermediate series and *Touchstone 3* through two text-analytic tools namely, Holmes' (1988, 1993) framework of compliment response categories, and Cheng's (2005) taxonomy of thanking.

Research Questions

Based on the purpose of the current study the following two questions are raised:

1) Are there any significant differences in the proportion of speech act of compliment response in ILI pre-intermediate textbooks and *Touchstone 3* based on Holmes' (1988, 1993) representational framework?

2) Are there any significant differences in the proportion of speech act of thanking in ILI pre-intermediate textbooks and *Touchstone 3* based on Cheng's (2005) taxonomy of thanking?

2. Literature

One of the most hotly debated issues within the field of applied linguistics is pragmatics which is defined by Brown (2007, p. 388) as "conventions for conveying and interpreting the meaning of linguistic strings within their

contexts and setting". A central concept in the study of pragmatics and pragmatic competence is speech act.

In this respect, learners' knowledge of speech acts is of particular significance to achieve pragmatic competence. Two of the most commonly used speech acts are thanking expressions and compliment responses (e.g., Cheng, 2005; Hinkel, 1994; Ohashi; 2008). Thanking or expressing gratitude is a complex act potentially involving both positive as well as negative feelings on the part of the giver and receiver. Herbert (1989, p. 38) defines compliment responses as "… anything that follows an identifiable compliment".

An important factor that is taken into account when evaluating a textbook is the frequency of the language functions. So far, some studies have linked textbook evaluation with speech acts (e.g., Jalilian & Roohani, 2016; Meihami & Khanlarzadeh, 2015; Nu & Anh, 2018; Vellenga, 2004). In order to compare local and global ELT textbooks, Meihami and Khanlarzadeh (2015) attempted to compare three speech acts, namely apologizing, refusing, and requesting in *American English File*, *Interchange*, and *Top Notch* as global textbooks with *ILI series* as local textbooks. The results showed that both local and global ELT textbooks were successful in providing the speech acts of refusal and request, however, both failed in providing adequate strategies for apology.

As indicated, the above studies have mostly reflected a general assessment of such textbooks and a small proportion has explored the speech acts. Therefore, this study is of novelty as it explores the speech acts of compliment response and thanking based on Holmes' (1988, 1993) representational framework of compliment response and Cheng's (2005) taxonomy of thanking in *Touchstone 3* and ILI pre-intermediate textbooks in the context of Iran.

3. Methodology

For the purpose of this study, 12 dialogues of *Touchstone 3* written by McCarthy, McCarten, and Sandiford (2005) and 27 dialogues of Iran Language Institute (ILI) pre-intermediate series were selected and analyzed based on the Holmes's (1988,1993) and Cheng's (2005) frameworks.

4. Results

Touchstone 3 had higher number of compliment responses with 111 as compared with ILI pre-intermediate series with 64 compliment responses; however, there was no statistically significant difference between the frequencies of the compliment response in ILI pre-intermediate textbooks and *Touchstone 3*.

Comparing the proportions of different thanking strategies, it can be concluded that there are higher number of thanking expressions in ILI pre-intermediate textbooks (45) in comparison with Touchstone 3 (19). There was also significant difference between the frequencies of the thanking expressions in ILI pre-intermediate series and Touchstone 3.