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M.A. Thesis in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)

AN EVALUATION OF THE PRAGMATIC DIMENSION OF TOTAL ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS

By
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Supervised by
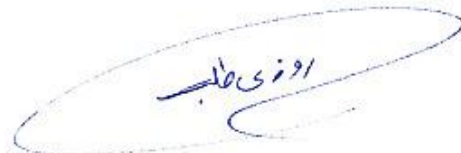**Dr. R. Sahragard**

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IN THE NAME OF ALLAH

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DEDICATED TO

       MY DEAR FAMILY MEMBERS

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Abstract

An Evaluation of the Pragmatic Dimension of Total English Textbooks

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This study was intended to analyze the listening tapescripts of the Elementary and Pre-intermediate levels of Total English textbooks from the pragmatic dimension of language functions and speech acts in order to see whether the listening tasks are pragmatically informative or not. For this purpose, 8 conversations from the two books were selected randomly, and then, the two pragmatic models of Halliday's (1978) language functions and Searle's (1976) speech acts were applied to qualitatively analyze these sample listening tapescripts. Furthermore, Chi-Square test was run to delineate the level of distribution for the specified pragmatic variables in the tapescripts. The results revealed that the recordings in these textbooks are not efficient due to both the lack of a number of language functions and speech acts and also the unequal distribution of these pragmatic variables.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0. Introduction

The first part of this chapter is devoted to the background and rationale for textbook evaluation. In the second part, the role of English language textbooks, including Total English series, has been reviewed in EFL contexts. In the next part, the frameworks of the study, including Halliday's (1978) Functional Model and Searle's (1976) Speech Act Taxonomy, are introduced. In this respect, the significance of these two models in the realm of pragmatics has been discussed. Moreover, the next part refers to the statement of the problem, and in the fourth section, the objective of the current study is specified. Finally, the significance of the present study has been stated.

1.1. Background

Today, there are an increasing number of English language textbooks available in the market. However, it can be so difficult particularly for an inexperienced teacher to know what to look for in an English textbook. Most of the institutes, private and state schools, and colleges choose textbooks based on what publishers offer and make available. Also there are many teachers who have made rash decisions concerning English textbooks which led to useless working materials, frustrated teachers or learners and wasted money and time (Hajizadeh, 2008). Therefore, it is very important to carefully decide which textbook should be purchased, and for what course and what purpose. As Nunan (1989) states, materials are in fact an essential element within the curriculum and do more than simply lubricating the wheels of learning. They act as curriculum models for

teachers to follow in developing their own materials.

Therefore, selecting the appropriate textbook is one of the most challenging tasks for teachers, institutes, colleges, and whoever involved in English language teaching and learning. As a result, the significance and the position of textbook evaluation become more vivid. In fact, evaluation is basically a matching process which concerns matching learners' needs with available solutions (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). As Low (1987) states, teachers generally need to screen materials in order to predict their suitability for particular classes. According to Sheldon (1988), there are several reasons for the evaluation of textbooks. Among these reasons, he suggests, are administrative and educational decisions in which one can see considerable professional, financial, or even political investment. As there are many different ELT textbooks in the market, there is a necessity for their evaluation in order to be able to recognize the advantages of one over the others, which in turn will lead to the adoption of the appropriate textbook. As Jahangard (2007) puts it, the evaluation of textbooks "would go a long way in ultimately assisting teachers with making optimum use of a book's strong points and recognizing the shortcomings of certain exercises, tasks, and entire texts." Also, Genesee (2001) states that evaluation in TESOL settings is a process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting information to make informed decisions through which student achievement will increase and educational programs will be more successful. Therefore, textbook evaluation can be considered as a tool to question and develop our own ideas as to what is required. In Cunningsworth's (1995) opinion, through textbook evaluation and then identifying strengths and weaknesses in textbooks, an optimum use can be made of strong points, and weaker points can be adapted or substituted from other textbooks.

1.2. The Role of English Language Textbooks in EFL Contexts

English language textbooks play a significant role as the basis of teachers' performance in EFL classrooms, including those in Iran. O'Neill (1982) mentions that most teachers are inclined to follow the text's methodology, vocabulary, and sequence to the letter. Both teachers and students tend to use the written and grammatical exercises and the oral work of the textbook in hand as their main source of information (Ariew, 1982; Macian, 1986). Ariew (1982) also considers the textbook as a means of motivating students to pursue language for their purposes. Ur (1996) explains a number of advantages of using a textbook as well. Moreover, Grave (2000) states that what one teacher considers an advantage in a textbook, another teacher may consider a disadvantage. Edge and Wharton (cited in Tomlinson, 2002) state that,

> New teachers may approach books in the first instance looking for practical guidance, but their interaction with the book also provides an opportunity for them to take on board some of the methodology behind the suggested activities and to apply it in other circumstances. Experienced teachers may recognize a book's theoretical position more quickly and interact with it more critically. (p. 68)

No teacher is entirely satisfied with the text used, yet very few manage to teach without one. Moreover, Hutchinson and Torres (1994) state that the textbook is an almost universal element of teaching. No teaching-learning situation is complete until it has its relevant textbook. Sheldon (1988) agrees with this observation and suggests that textbooks not only represent the visible heart of any ELT program, but also offer considerable advantages for both the student and the teacher.

In addition, Haycroft (1998) suggests that the primary advantage of using textbooks is that they are psychologically essential for students since their progress and achievement can be measured concretely when being used.

Finally, Cunningsworth (1995) states the following roles that textbooks serve in the ELT curriculum:

1. An affective resource for self-directed learning.
2. An affective resource for presentation material.
3. A source of ideas and activities.
4. A reference source for students.
5. A syllabus where they reflect pre-determined learning objectives.
6. A support for less experienced teachers to gain in confidence.

1.3. Theoretical Frameworks

1.3.1. Halliday's (1978) Functional Model

Halliday's (1978) Functional Model is a significant model in the realm of pragmatics. This model discusses different types of functions in language in general which represents a system of meaning in reality while acquiring it and this indicates the socially-oriented characteristic of language. The development of such communicative functions in language necessitates a cognitive process which happens through the framework of interaction. As Garcis (2005) states, there is a subtle difference between "making meaning" and "manifesting meaning," i.e. the former is realized through applying "language functions" and the latter through "language structures." Halliday (1978) believes that such "making meaning" can be performed through the following "language functions":

- **Instrumental function:** this function is applied to satisfy our material needs or to get other people do us different things such as requests, suggestions, commands, and warnings. An instance of this function can be a request like the following:
  'Could you do me a favor?'
- **Regulatory function:** this function is served to control the behavior of others, e.g. rules, regulations, and laws. An example for the regulatory function could be an imperative sentence like the following:
  'Open this box.'

- **Interactional function:** this function is performed to form, establish, maintain, and change interpersonal relationships such as greetings, leave-takings, compliments, insults, and apologies. An example for this function could be the following apology:

  'Excuse me, I didn't get you.'

- **Personal function (here I come):** this function is used to identify and express the self. An instance of this function can be the following self-introduction:

  'I believe this is true.'

- **Heuristic function (tell me why):** this function is applied to extend one's knowledge of language itself or to explore the world around and inside. The following is an example of this function:

  'Do you have any brothers or sisters?'

- **Imaginative function (Let's pretend):** this function is applied to create a world of one's own or extend our own environment for humorous esthetic purposes such as telling jokes or tongue twisters. An instance of this function is the following:

  'How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck would chuck wood?'

- **Informative function (I've got something to tell you):** this function is used for communicating new information about people, things and actions. Such as describing, identifying, and narrating. The following is an example of this function:

  'The weather is hot and humid.'

- **Attention getting function:** this function is applied in many communicative situations generally for addressing people or trying to ask a question, give an offer, or give one's ideas.

  'Excuse me, lady.' (Halliday, 1978; Cited in Darali, 2007)

1.3.2. Searle's (1976) Speech Act Taxonomy

Searle (1976) presented a taxonomy based on the relationship between "the words" and "the world" and one who is responsible for making the relationship work. The category involves *representatives, commissives, directives, expressive,* and *declaratives.* Richards and Schmidt (2002) explain these speech acts as follow:

- **Representatives** are used when the utterance states what the speaker believes, like "describing" or "predicting something." The following is an example of such speech acts:

  'I have an apartment across from the school.'

- **Commissives** are used when an utterance commits the speaker to future actions like "promising" or "volunteering." The following can be considered as an instance of a commissive speech act:

  'Let me get it for you.'

- **Directives** are referred to as utterances in which the words make the hearer do something like "inviting" or "requesting." The following is an example of directive speech acts:

  'What are you drinking?'

- **Expressives** state the speaker's feelings like "regretting" or "apologizing." An instance of expressive speech acts is the following:

  'They are perfect for you.'

- **Declaratives** are utterances that change the world. For instance:

  'I hereby pronounce you husband and wife.' (Searle, 1976)

1.4. Statement of the Problem

According to Nation (1992), when trying to evaluate the bewildering array of materials available, perhaps the best advice is to think first "what one is trying to teach?" and then "is this the best way to teach it?" A clear instance of such necessity of assessment is on the very Total English series that have recently come to the Iranian market as an English language textbook. Mostly, those who choose to learn English through Total English textbooks mention just one main reason for their choice, i.e. they are new. As a result, this study is so curious to evaluate these series, which are recently used in institutes of Iran, from a pragmatic viewpoint in order to illustrate how pragmatically efficient these textbooks are and how they provide the learners with adequate communicatively efficient information.

1.5. Objective of the Study

This project is intended to analyze the listening tasks of the two Elementary and Pre-intermediate levels of Total English textbooks from a pragmatic perspective to see how pragmatically rich these textbooks are. As a result, this study performs this pragmatic analysis based on two pragmatic models including Halliday's (1978) Functional Model and Searle's (1976) Speech Act Taxonomy in order to find the different types of language functions and speech acts as well as their frequency, so that the overall pragmatic evaluation of the listening tasks of the two Elementary and Pre-intermediate levels of Total English textbooks can be concluded. Therefore, the following research questions, in particular, will be answered through the present study:

1. What types of language functions are presented in the listening tasks and how frequently are they distributed?
2. What types of speech acts are presented in the listening tasks and how frequently are they distributed?
3. How pragmatically efficient are the listening tasks of Total English Elementary and Pre-intermediate textbooks with regard to the existence and the distribution of speech acts and language functions?

1.6. Significance of the Study

Total English is one of the most recently published English language series that has been integrated into the EFL curricula and is increasingly gaining great popularity all around the world including EFL contexts, such as Iran. A growing number of institutes or even the tutoring in Iran are implementing these series in their curriculum. In fact, the starting point of learning a language is always important and as a result, this study has evaluated the two Elementary and Pre-intermediate levels of Total English series. Moreover, most people usually start learning English with a practical objective, i.e. to be able to communicate and be pragmatically competent in

their speaking and listening performance. In fact, on the one hand, with the advent of new technologies in mass media including satellites, internet, etc., and on the other hand, considering the fact that most of the programs in these media are presented in English language, which is the lingua franca of the present world, the need for efficient listening skills will be obvious. As a result, English language textbooks that are employed in EFL/ESL curricula should present efficient listening tasks which lead to communicatively competent listeners. This requires listening tasks that can develop learners' listening skills and abilities pragmatically and sociolinguistically which can be realized to a great extent through rich language functions and speech acts. Consequently, the pragmatic aspect of listening tasks in these two levels of textbooks becomes crucial for those who begin their English language studies through Total English series. In this respect, the present study has taken into account two pragmatic models, including Halliday's (1979) Functional Model and Searle's (1976) Speech Acts Taxonomy, are employed to evaluate the related tasks in these books.

Since Total English series are recently published and disseminated throughout the world for the purpose of teaching English language in EFL/ESL contexts and the fact that few studies have been conducted to evaluate the pragmatic aspect of these books which could be regarded as one of the most important aspects of teaching a language communicatively, the need for such a study can be greatly felt. As a result, the present study tries to fill this research gap and reveals this unknown reality concerning these two textbooks in Total English series.

The findings of this investigation will hopefully help teachers and institutes that have chosen Total English textbooks as instructional materials. Also the findings can help them with their approaches toward material development. Moreover, curious learners of English language who tend to start learning the language through Total English series will surely have a better view of the textbooks they have chosen.

CHAPTER TWO