

Chapter 5

Performing Speech Acts: Focussing on Local Cultural Norms in the Englishes We Use

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ABSTRACT

When we speak we use speech acts. Examples of speech acts include performing greetings, giving compliments and responding to compliments, making complaints and responding to complaints, making and responding to requests, congratulating, and consoling. In English language textbooks we normally see one response to some of these speech acts. For example, “thank you” as a response to a compliment or “good morning/afternoon/evening” as a greeting. As English has become a world language spoken by non-native speakers of English, many non-nativised cultural norms when performing speech acts are noted in real-time interactions. In this chapter, examples of nativised speech acts expressed in acceptable English are drawn from a number of data sources ranging from both real-time interactions, literary sources, which are a reflection of life, and social media, which encompass Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp messages. Pedagogical ramifications of such authentic real-time data are discussed. The result will be the teaching of the English emerging from localised cultural norms in the speech acts we perform.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, identity has excited interest of researchers from a wide range of disciplines; particularly a marked shift has been witnessed from hard-core psycholinguistic models of second language acquisition to greater interest in sociological and anthropological dimensions of language and education. A number of scholars have worked on language and education drawing from socio-cultural, post-structural and critical theory (Norton and Toohey, 2001; Block, 2003). Rather than focus only on the linguistic input or output of second language acquisition, the above scholars have chiefly concentrated on the intersection between the language learner and the larger social world in diverse cultural, social and historical contexts (Norton, 2011).

Background

Identity and classroom pedagogies have inspired much research from scholars in different contexts. Lee's (2008) findings on postsecondary institutions in Canada suggested that there is often a disjuncture between pedagogies conceptualized by the teachers and their actual classroom practices. Various other researchers have worked on the same theme identifying identity related questions in classroom pedagogies and have suggested transformative strategies to expand identities. Clemente and Higgins (2008) drew on their longitudinal study of pre-service English teachers in Mexico to question the dominant role of English in the globalized economy and illustrated the ways in which the non-native English teachers sought to appropriate and perform English without sacrificing local identities. In a more or less similar research, Stein (2008) surveyed the ways in which English language classrooms in under-resourced township schools became transformative sites in South Africa in which textual, cultural, and linguistic forms were re-appropriated and 're-sourced', with a view to validating those practices that had been marginalized and undervalued by the apartheid system. Cummins (2000) presented case studies of three schools in the United States, Belgium, and New Zealand that have made a positive difference in the lives of bilingual-bicultural children by affirming in every facet of the school operation the value of children's languages and cultures. The notion of identity versus language learning is in accord with post-structuralist, socio-cultural and critical theories that conceive of language not only as a linguistic system, but also as a social practice. Being fluent in English does not mean we are abandoning our identity or traditions. Instead, by mastering the English language we are able to compete in the fast-paced global economy while still preserving our culture and values. We can use the English language to communicate about our culture, custom and knowledge with the rest of the world. Proficiency in our own language is also

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