

The Presentation of Speech Acts in EFL Textbooks Used in Primary and Secondary Schools in Thailand

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Article information	Abstract
<p>Article history: Received: 28 Aug 2024 Accepted: 18 Aug 2025 Available online: 25 Aug 2025</p> <p>Keywords: Speech acts Interlanguage pragmatics EFL textbooks Textbook analysis EFL teachers' perspectives</p>	<p><i>This study investigates the presence and distribution of speech acts in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks used in Thai primary and secondary schools. Additionally, this study explores the perspectives of Thai EFL teachers on the effectiveness of these textbooks in supporting the teaching and learning of speech acts. A mixed methods approach was employed. The quantitative component involved a content analysis of 57 EFL textbooks, and the qualitative component involved in-depth interviews with four English teachers. The findings revealed variations in speech act representation between grade levels and textbook series, with a focus on requests/commands, suggestions/advice, and greetings. Interview participants were generally satisfied with the coverage and authenticity of speech act representation in textbooks used in their classes but suggested including a broader range of scenarios demonstrating speech act use and providing more detailed explanations of speech act use in textbooks. The results have implications for textbook developers, highlighting the need to ensure balanced coverage of speech acts across grade levels and to provide more detailed explanations including metapragmatic information and practical examples. The study also suggests the need for schools to evaluate textbooks for adequate exposure to varied speech acts and comprehensive instructions.</i></p>

INTRODUCTION

With the continued focus on communication skills in second language (L2) education, there has been a recognition of the importance of pragmatic competence. Pragmatic competence, defined by Fraser (2010, p. 15) as “the ability to communicate your intended messages with all its nuances in any socio-cultural context and to interpret the message of your interlocutor as it was intended,” is an important aspect of communicative competence and is closely linked to the performance of speech acts. However, developing pragmatic competence and performing speech acts effectively can be challenging for L2 learners and teachers. These skills require speakers to have not only linguistic knowledge but also knowledge of nuances and norms of communication in a particular social environment. Despite the challenges, research suggests that pragmatics is teachable and that integrating it into language instruction supports learners’ development, leading to improved pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Jeon & Kaya, 2006; Olshtain & Cohen, 1990; Rose, 2005; Taguchi, 2011; Takahashi, 2010).

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks are crucial resources in L2 instruction and acquisition (Vellenga, 2004). In non-English-speaking countries, where exposure to English outside the classroom is limited and teachers may themselves have limited pragmatic competence (Kim & Hall, 2002), textbooks play a particularly important role as learners' primary source of pragmatic input (Barron, 2016). EFL textbooks can contextualize the use of speech acts through dialogues that simulate real-life interactions, which can help learners to understand the nuances of communication and the factors that influence linguistic choices. However, research has generally found that EFL textbooks are insufficient in both the amount and quality of their pragmatic content (e.g., Ishihara, 2010; Jakupčević & Portolan, 2021; Jiang & Deng, 2022; Ren & Han, 2016; Schauer, 2019; Ton Nu & Murray, 2020; Wilson, 2023).

In Thailand, the Ministry of Education (MOE) certifies EFL textbooks that meet the standards specified in the Basic Education Core Curriculum (BECC) 2008 (Ministry of Education, 2008). The BECC 2008 places emphasis on equipping students with English communication skills needed for practical language use in daily life. As of the time of research, the website of the Bureau of Academic Affairs and Educational Standards, which is an operational unit within the MOE's Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC), identifies 57 textbooks that have been certified for use in Thai primary and secondary schools (Office of the Basic Education Commission, 2024).

Although there have been many studies on pragmatic content and speech acts realization in EFL textbooks, a noticeable gap exists in research on this topic in the Thai educational context. Each learning environment is influenced by its learners' linguistic and cultural characteristics. EFL textbooks may differ, too, in terms of presentation and intended audience, with some prepared for general use among all L2 learners and others written specifically for learners of a particular place or linguistic background. The differences among EFL textbooks combined with the linguistic and cultural characteristics of Thai learners justify the need for a dedicated investigation into the EFL textbooks approved for use in Thai primary and secondary education. This study, therefore, examines the presentation of speech acts in EFL textbooks used in Thai primary and secondary education and explores their implications for pragmatic instruction by answering the following research questions:

1. To what extent are speech acts present in EFL textbooks used in Thai primary and secondary schools?
2. What is the distribution of different types of speech acts in EFL textbooks used in Thai primary and secondary schools?
3. What perspectives do Thai primary and secondary school EFL teachers have on how EFL textbooks can facilitate the teaching and learning of speech acts in their classes?

These research questions are designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the representation of speech acts in EFL textbooks used in Thai primary and secondary schools and their pedagogical implications. The first two research questions focus on identifying and quantifying the presence of predetermined speech act types in textbooks, emphasizing their representation and distribution rather than analyzing their linguistic forms. The third research question complements this by exploring how teachers perceive and utilize these resources in

practice. By combining these elements, the study bridges the gap between the content of EFL textbooks and their use in supporting pragmatic competence development in students. This mixed methods approach integrates content analysis and teacher perspectives, ensuring that the quantitative findings are contextualized with qualitative insights, creating a cohesive understanding of both what is included in the textbooks and how it is perceived and utilized in practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speech acts

A central concept in pragmatics is speech act theory formulated by Austin (1962), which emphasizes that language not only communicates meaning but also performs actions that can change our shared social space. For instance, when in a wedding ceremony, people utter “I do,” which performs the marriage rather than merely describing it. Austin (1962) introduced three dimensions of speech acts: locutionary acts, the production of the actual words that the speaker uses; illocutionary acts, the act of expressing the intention or force behind the words; and perlocutionary acts, the effect the utterances have on the hearer. Although all three aspects are present in speech acts, illocutionary acts, which convey a speaker’s intent, have been the focus in the field of pragmatics.

Searle (1976) expanded on Austin’s work by distinguishing between direct and indirect speech acts. Speech acts can be direct, such as in the utterance “Let’s go to the movies tonight.” The intended meaning can be understood fully as the utterance’s literal meaning; inference is not needed to decode the intended meaning. Indirect speech acts, by contrast, imply meaning without directly stating it. For instance, a response to a request with “I have to study for an exam” might imply refusal without directly saying as much. Searle (1976) also developed a taxonomy that classifies speech acts into five categories: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Assertives are statements that commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed statement. Directives aim to prompt the listener to do something, and include speech acts such as requests and suggestions. Commissives, such as promises and offers, commit the speaker to a future action. Expressives convey the speaker’s psychological state, describing the intention of speech acts such as apologies or congratulations. Declarations bring about a change in the social reality, like a judge declaring a verdict in a court case. By focusing on illocution as a basis for classifying speech acts, Searle’s taxonomy centers on the intention of the speaker to generalize the great variety of functions that speech acts have in communication.

Interlanguage pragmatics

According to Kasper (1996), “interlanguage pragmatics is the study of nonnative speakers’ use and acquisition of L2 pragmatic knowledge” (p. 145). Unlike cross-cultural pragmatics, which compares the pragmatic norms and language use of different cultures, interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) research is interested in how nonnative speakers develop and use their L2 pragmatic skills. Because of its focus on L2 acquisition, ILP can be considered a part of the

broader field of second language acquisition (SLA). By understanding how learners communicate in their L2 while still developing their understanding of the linguistic resources and sociopragmatic norms of the target language, ILP research can help to refine and complete existing theory on how the process of language acquisition occurs and how educators can address the needs of L2 learners as they develop their pragmatic competence (LoCastro, 2012).

Speech acts in EFL textbooks

The issues of how EFL textbooks include and teach speech acts and pragmatic features of language have been prominent topics within ILP research over the past 25 years. Several consistent themes have emerged from this research, most of which highlight shortcomings of textbooks regarding teaching pragmatic skills.

A notable trend found by researchers is that EFL textbooks give insufficient coverage to some types of speech acts. Ahmed et al. (2023) observed that the speech acts represented in Libyan secondary school EFL textbooks were dominated by some categories, namely representatives (i.e., assertives) while others, such as commissives (e.g., offers and promises), were underrepresented. In a study of EFL textbooks used in Hong Kong, Wilson (2023) made a similar observation, noting a tendency to overrepresent suggestions while including very few representations of offers, refusals, and promises.

Inconsistencies between textbooks are another observation in previous textbook surveys. In a survey of EFL textbooks used in Croatian primary schools, Jakupčević and Portolan (2021) reported that textbooks from Croatian publishers contained less pragmatic content than those from foreign publishers. Additionally, the study found inconsistencies between grade levels in terms of the type of speech acts presented. Between three and eight textbooks were surveyed for each grade level between grades 4–6. No single speech act appeared in every book for any grade level, and most speech acts were only present in less than half of all books in each grade level. Schauer (2019) also highlighted significant differences in the total number of speech acts included in EFL textbooks used in German primary schools, with instances of speech acts ranging from 150 to 505 in different textbooks. These inconsistencies reflect the lack of agreement among book publishers on how to sequence the presentation of speech acts and how much speech act-related content to include for young L2 learners according to grade level.

Another key observation found in previous textbook surveys is the limited metapragmatic information present in EFL textbooks. This includes explanations about when and where specific forms are appropriate, as well as guidance on how these forms differ in meaning, politeness, or formality. In their survey of Chinese EFL textbooks, Ren and Han (2016) reported a focus on linguistic form and an absence of accompanying metapragmatic information. The authors noted that even when textbooks arranged various linguistic forms according to levels of formality, no explanation was given about the features that make certain linguistic forms more formal than others. Ton Nu and Murray (2020) also described a lack of explicit metapragmatic information in EFL textbooks used in Vietnam. For example, the authors reported that although many different linguistic forms for suggestions were presented, there was no

explanation as to how these forms differed in politeness or meaning. This lack of explicit guidance restricts students' ability to understand and appropriately use speech acts in real-life situations. As Taguchi (2015) observed in her meta-analysis of 58 instructional intervention studies, exposure to language input alone is not as effective as an explanation that raises learners' awareness of the underlying rules and principles of the pragmatic features being presented.

Research has also observed that representations of speech acts in EFL textbooks lack authenticity. Studies from China (Jiang & Deng, 2022; Ren & Han, 2016) reported that the speech acts included in Chinese EFL textbooks often lacked realistic and contextually rich examples, which limits learners' ability to apply the target speech acts effectively in real-life communication. Studies of German EFL textbooks by Glaser (2020, as cited in Schauer, 2022) and Schauer (2019) also reported concerns about the lack of context and authenticity of speech act presentation. Schauer (2019) described the presentation of speech acts as formulaic, noting that textbooks did not provide sufficient context. Glaser's (2020, as cited in Schauer, 2022) observations were similar in that the representation of speech acts frequently failed to capture the nuances of authentic language use. This theme was also present in Bui and Nguyen's (2023) study of the speech act of disagreement in EFL textbooks used in Vietnam. The authors noted that while in real-life interactions, English speakers draw from a variety of linguistic forms and strategies to express disagreement, the textbooks in their study presented only a narrow range of these resources.

To date, there appears to be no research specifically addressing the presence of speech acts in EFL textbooks used in Thai primary or secondary schools. However, Wichien (2012) conducted a study on the pragmatic features presented in English commercial textbooks used as course materials for English-major students at a university in Thailand. The study revealed differences between the surveyed textbooks both in terms of type and quantity. Echoing the findings of the aforementioned studies by Ton Nu and Murray (2020) as well as Ren and Han (2016), the textbooks in Wichien's study lacked sufficient metapragmatic explanation. Moreover, the teacher books did not contain additional metapragmatic information beyond what was present in the student books.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a mixed methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a more holistic understanding of how speech acts are represented in EFL textbooks and how this representation of speech acts relates to teaching practices in the classroom. The quantitative component of this study involves a comprehensive examination of EFL textbooks approved by the Thai MOE for use in primary and secondary schools in Thailand. This examination focuses on identifying the quantity and type of speech acts present in each textbook and is, therefore, used to answer research questions one and two. The qualitative component of this study involves semi-structured interviews with Thai EFL teachers teaching at primary and secondary schools in Thailand and serves as a basis to address the third research question.

Textbook data collection and analysis

The data collection procedures for examining the presentation of speech act content in the EFL textbooks began with consulting OBEC's official website, which identifies the EFL textbooks endorsed for use in primary and secondary schools in Thailand for the 2024 academic year. At the time this study was conducted, 57 EFL textbooks were approved by OBEC, and all listed textbooks were available for purchase. These textbooks were produced by several publishers, some local and others international. Each textbook was accompanied by a teacher book, an audio CD, and an exercise book. However, in line with previous textbook survey studies (Jakupčević & Portolan, 2021; Schauer, 2019), this study focuses solely on student books because they are the primary resource for classroom instruction. Other materials, including teacher-prepared materials, workbooks, videos, audio CDs, and online materials, were excluded from the study.

The speech acts included in the coding scheme are apologies, compliments, congratulations, expressions of empathy, greetings, invitations, leave-takings, offers, promises, refusals, requests/commands, suggestions/advice, thanks, warnings, welcomes, and well-wishes (Table 1). Although there are other types of speech acts beyond this group, such as statements of fact or various types of emotional expressions (e.g., expressions of lamentation or exclamations), the decision to focus on the speech acts listed above is based on balancing the need for reliable and useful data with practical concerns.

Table 1
Speech act types

Speech act	Description	Example
Apologies	An utterance that expresses a speaker's regret for a past action	I'm sorry.
Compliments	An utterance that expresses a positive feeling or praise toward the listener	You're very good at playing the piano.
Congratulations	An utterance that expresses joy or approval for someone's success or good fortune	Congratulations!
Expressions of empathy	An utterance that expresses sympathy or understanding toward the listener's feelings or situation	What's the matter?
Greetings	An utterance used to initiate a social exchange	Hello!
Invitations	An utterance that presents the opportunity for a listener to participate in an activity	Would you like to play basketball with us?
Leave-takings	An utterance used to conclude an interaction	See you later!
Offers	An utterance where the speaker proposes to perform a future action for the benefit of the listener	I'll carry those cups for you.
Promises	An utterance that commits the speaker to a future action	I promise I'll get it today.

Speech act	Description	Example
Refusals	An utterance that expresses non-acceptance or disagreement with a request/command, invitation, offer, or suggestion/advice	I'd love to, but I can't this weekend.
Requests/commands	An utterance aimed at influencing the hearer to take a particular action	Could you turn up the volume?
Suggestions/advice	A non-obligatory utterance that provides guidance or an idea believed to be beneficial to the listener	Why don't you call her?
Thanks	An utterance that expresses gratitude	Thanks a lot.
Warnings	An utterance aimed to inform the listener about a potential danger with the intention of influencing their behavior to avoid a negative outcome	Watch out for that car!
Welcomes	An utterance that expresses greeting and happiness that the listener has arrived	Welcome to Miami, Brian.
Well-wishes	An utterance that expresses hope or good wishes for someone's future	Have a good vacation.

Attempting to categorize and analyze all possible types of speech acts would require significant time and resources, potentially making a survey of 57 textbooks impractical. Moreover, such an analysis would also bring with it issues of consistency and generalizability. Research involving some speech acts, such as speech acts expressing various emotions, is less extensive (Ronan, 2015), and the boundaries of these speech acts can be more ambiguous. This can make it difficult to consistently code and compare the data to other research, which limits the reliability and generalizability of the data. In addition, speech acts falling under Searle's (1976) broad category of representatives constitute statements of fact and are, therefore, less relevant to questions involving the presentation of pragmatic content related to social interaction and communicative language use. The targeted speech acts represent a wide range of social interactions relevant to students in grades 1–12, ensuring the findings address practical and meaningful contexts for language learners. Additionally, these speech acts are frequently found in EFL textbooks and are well-documented in ILP research.

By narrowing the focus to a well-defined set of speech acts, this study can analyze a greater number of textbooks, providing a more comprehensive view of how speech acts are presented in all MOE-approved textbooks. This approach also ensures direct relevance to the research questions. It enables a systematic assessment of speech acts across all textbooks approved by the MOE, which can reveal the extent to which textbooks differ in their presentation of pragmatic content. Such differences have important implications for schools, as textbook selection could potentially leave gaps in students' pragmatic development, thereby impacting their overall communicative competence.

It should be noted that in this study, speech acts of request and command were merged into a single category, "requests/commands," and similarly, suggestions and advice were combined as "suggestions/advice." In line with Searle's (1976) taxonomy, where both requests and commands share the same intended outcome of getting the hearer to perform an action, this study categorizes speech acts based on the presumed intention of the speaker, what Searle

(1976) referred to as the “illocutionary point” rather than their linguistic form or level of directness. In a similar way, suggestions and advice aim to influence a hearer’s future actions, albeit with varying degrees of directness.

The analysis of speech acts employed a mixed methods approach. Initially, a qualitative phase involved the identification and refinement of the definitions of 16 speech act types based on the framework established by Searle (1976) and informed by pilot testing of textbooks. The pilot testing involved reviewing a subset of textbooks, selected to represent a range of grade levels and publishers, to account for the variety of presentation and instructional content. This phase aimed to ensure that the selected speech acts were representative of the pragmatic content in the materials, while also refining the definitions of the selected speech acts in order to maintain consistency in their identification and coding. Subsequently, a quantitative analysis was conducted. Each of the 57 textbooks was examined line by line to identify instances of the aforementioned 16 targeted speech act types, and each instance of a speech act found on a page was categorized. Two raters, the researcher and a native English-speaking university lecturer with experience in teaching pragmatics, coded and analyzed each of the 57 textbooks independently, and the results were compared. Each instance of coding discrepancy was discussed and resolved according to the mutual agreement of both raters. To quantify the textbook data, the presence and type of any of the targeted speech acts on a page was recorded. A page containing one of the targeted speech acts was counted as a single page, regardless of the number of instances of that speech act on it. This method is similar to the approach used in studies by Jakupčević and Portolan (2021), Ji (2007), and Vellenga (2004), where any relevant pragmatic information on a given page was counted as a single page, regardless of its length or proportion within a page. To compare textbooks, percentages were calculated by counting the number of pages containing a speech act or speech act type and dividing this value by the total number of pages in the textbook. The data were then arranged and analyzed to identify patterns by comparing the presence of speech acts and distribution of speech act types according to book series and grade level.

Semi-structured interview data collection and analysis

Semi-structured interviews were designed to elicit insights into the teachers’ experiences in using EFL textbooks and their perspectives on the extent to which EFL textbooks can facilitate the teaching and learning of speech acts. Participants were selected through purposive sampling from graduate students in an education program at a university in Bangkok, as this technique allowed for the targeted selection of individuals with the specific knowledge and experience necessary to provide relevant insights while also ensuring diverse perspectives from teachers with experiences at different grade levels and educational contexts. Recruitment was conducted through an advertisement outlining the study’s purpose, participation criteria, and voluntary nature. Interested individuals who met the criteria—being employed as English teachers at primary or secondary schools in Thailand with at least three years of teaching experience—contacted the researcher directly.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with four participants—two teaching at primary schools and two at secondary schools. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes and was conducted in Thai to enhance precision and comprehensibility in communication. The interviews were audio-recorded, and the data from the interviews were analyzed qualitatively. Only the parts of the interviews that were considered relevant to the research questions were transcribed. The transcripts from the interviews were analyzed and sorted according to topics, with patterns emerging from the data being identified.

FINDINGS

Textbook survey

To address the first research question, all 57 textbooks were compared based on the number of pages containing instances of speech acts. The results are presented according to grade levels, including primary and secondary school. To better understand how speech acts are represented in the surveyed textbooks, the data were arranged and analyzed according to individual textbooks (Tables 2 and 3) as well as grade levels (Tables 4 and 5).

Table 2
The overall results of the presence of speech acts in primary-grade textbooks

Level	Textbook	Number of total pages	Pages with speech acts	Percentage of pages containing speech acts	Number of speech act types
Grade 1	Gogo Loves English 1	72	12	16.67	4
	New Say Hello 1	76	24	31.58	8
	Projects: Play and Learn 1	73	21	28.77	6
	Tops 1	110	33	30.00	8
	Smile 1	90	19	21.11	4
Grade 2	Gogo Loves English 2	72	12	16.67	6
	New Say Hello 2	81	19	23.50	8
	Projects: Play and Learn 2	73	29	39.73	8
	Tops 2	110	23	20.91	6
	Smile 2	90	15	16.67	4
Grade 3	Gogo Loves English 3	72	20	27.78	8
	New Say Hello 3	67	15	22.40	7
	Projects: Play and Learn 3	73	27	36.99	5
	Tops 3	110	34	30.91	9
	Smile 3	91	25	27.47	8
Grade 4	Gogo Loves English 4	72	17	23.61	8
	New Say Hello 4	106	11	10.40	4
	Projects: Play and Learn 4	109	33	30.28	7
	Tops 4	110	36	32.73	12
	Smile 4	91	19	20.88	8

Level	Textbook	Number of total pages	Pages with speech acts	Percentage of pages containing speech acts	Number of speech act types
Grade 5	Gogo Loves English 5	72	17	23.61	11
	New Say Hello 5	104	20	19.20	9
	Projects: Play and Learn 5	109	47	43.12	9
	Tops 5	110	30	27.27	9
	Smile 5	91	28	30.77	10
Grade 6	Gogo Loves English 6	72	16	22.22	5
	New Say Hello 6	129	27	20.90	9
	Projects: Play and Learn 6	109	36	33.03	10
	Tops 6	110	22	20.00	10
	Smile 6	91	29	31.87	10

As shown in Table 2, the highest percentage of a primary grade level textbook's pages containing a speech act was 43.12% (*Projects: Play and Learn 5*) while the lowest was 10.40% (*New Say Hello 4*). The largest difference between textbooks within a grade was observed in grade 5, in which the number of pages with a speech act ranged from 19.20% (*New Say Hello 5*) to 43.12% (*Projects: Play and Learn 5*). The grade level with the least difference between textbooks was grade 6, in which the number of pages containing a speech act ranged from 20.00% (*Tops 6*) to 33.03% (*Projects: Play and Learn 6*).

The *Projects: Play and Learn* series was consistently on the higher end of the range of percentages of pages with a speech act, and among the five textbooks series, this series contained the highest percentage of pages with a speech act for grades 2, 3, 5, and 6. It is important to highlight that all *Projects: Play and Learn* books were written under the supervision of OBEC and were designed based on a project-based learning approach, incorporating many activities that require students to do projects. The authors used cartoons featuring characters modeling how to conduct class activities outlined in the books. These characters' instructions mainly consisted of requests/commands directing other characters representing students to perform actions. This resulted in numerous pages dedicated to speech acts.

Variations between textbook series were also observed when comparing the number of speech act types included in each textbook. Among all primary grade level textbooks, this number ranged from four (*Gogo Loves English 1*, *Smile 1*, *Smile 2*, and *New Say Hello 4*) to twelve (*Tops 4*) speech act types. Within a single grade level, this range of four to twelve was observed in grade 4.

Table 3
The overall results of the presence of speech acts in secondary-grade textbooks

Level	Textbook	Number of total pages	Pages with speech acts	Percentage of pages containing speech acts	Number of types of speech act
Grade 7	New World 1	107	33	30.84	11
	Postcards 1	104	42	40.38	14
	Sky 1	101	34	33.66	9
	Sprint 1	121	34	28.10	11
	Team Up in English 1	122	36	29.51	10
Grade 8	New World 2	107	30	28.04	13
	Postcards 2	104	39	37.50	13
	Sky 2	100	39	39.00	10
	Sprint 2	121	36	29.75	12
	Team Up in English 2	122	37	30.33	11
Grade 9	New World 3	107	30	25.23	8
	Postcards 3	104	41	39.42	14
	Sky 3	84	33	39.29	11
	Sprint 3	121	33	27.27	12
	Team Up in English 3	122	26	21.31	12
Grade 10	New World 4	107	25	23.36	11
	Flash on English 1	108	37	34.26	12
	Success 1	139	37	26.62	10
	World Club 1	108	7	6.48	4
Grade 11	New World 5	107	41	38.32	12
	Flash on English 2	107	33	30.84	14
	Success 2	139	38	27.34	14
	World Club 2	108	7	6.48	11
Grade 12	New World 6	107	30	28.04	10
	Flash on English 3	124	26	20.97	10
	Success 3	140	29	20.71	11
	World Club 3	108	6	5.56	6

Compared to the primary level grades, in which each textbook series covered all six grades, there was more variation in the grades covered by the secondary school textbook series, as shown in Table 3. The survey included 27 books used at the secondary level, comprising seven book series. Among these, the *New World* series is the only textbook series that offers textbooks for use in all six secondary grade levels. Four book series, namely *Postcards*, *Sky*, *Sprint*, and *Team Up in English*, are used for grades 7, 8, and 9, and the remaining three textbook series, which are *Flash on English*, *Success*, and *World Club*, are used for grades 10, 11, and 12.

The textbook with the highest percentage of pages containing a speech act (40.38%) was *Postcards 1*, used for grade 7. The *Postcards* book series maintained a high percentage of pages with a speech act across grades 7 to 9. From the researcher's observations, the textbooks featured numerous dialogues integrated throughout. Each unit began with a dialogue relevant to the topic of the unit, and the dialogue usually consisted of over 10 turns, providing sufficient opportunities to incorporate various speech acts in the lesson.

Overall, the variation between textbooks in the early secondary grades (7–9) was less pronounced than that of the later secondary grades (10–12). Grade 8, for instance, contained the smallest difference between textbooks, ranging from 28.04% (*New World 2*) to 39.00% (*Sky 2*), while grade 11 contained the largest difference, with the percentage of pages containing a speech act ranging from 6.48% (*World Club 2*) to 38.32% (*New World 5*). This greater variation in the textbooks used in the later secondary grades is due to the presence of an outlier, the *World Club* textbook series, which is used for grades 10–12, and which consistently contained the lowest percentage of pages with a speech act across all grades, ranging from 5.56–6.48%. From the researcher’s observations, the textbooks in the *World Club* series tend to focus on reading, vocabulary, and grammar while rarely using dialogue to present transactional or communicative situations.

The trends described above with the proportion of pages containing a speech act were also reflected in the variety of speech act types. With each grade level covered by the *Postcards* series, grades 7–9, this series contained the greatest number of speech act types, with 13 (*Postcards 2*) and 14 (*Postcards 1* and *Postcards 3*) types of speech acts. In contrast, the *World Club* series, which consistently had the lowest percentage of pages with a speech act, also contained the least variety in terms of speech act types at each grade level covered (grades 10–12), with four, eleven, and six types of speech acts in grades 10, 11, and 12, respectively.

Table 4
Average percentage of pages containing various speech act types in primary-grade textbooks

Speech act type	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6
Individual type						
Requests/commands	12.36	16.93	16.50	12.13	15.49	12.19
Suggestions/advice	1.89	4.31	9.02	7.44	8.27	8.68
Greetings	9.21	3.07	3.35	4.01	6.10	2.69
Offers	2.54	2.16	4.18	1.87	1.57	1.50
Thanks	1.91	2.34	2.82	1.01	2.82	1.91
Refusals	1.18	0	2.22	2.85	2.79	0.77
Leave-takings	2.43	0.27	0.55	0.62	1.53	2.21
Apologies	0.79	1.01	0.92	0.46	0.68	0.78
Invitations	0	0	0.76	1.66	1.59	1.97
Promises	0	0	0.27	1.27	0.55	0
Well-wishes	2.34	1.30	1.46	0.22	0.69	0.59
Compliments	0	0.28	0	0.62	1.08	0.96
Expressions of empathy	0	0.55	0	0.73	0.36	0.40
Warnings	0	0.61	0	0.18	0.55	1.72
Congratulations	0	0	0	0	0	0.16
Welcomes	0.18	0.25	0	0.41	0.19	0
Any speech act type	25.63	23.49	29.11	23.58	28.80	25.61

As shown in Table 4, the data on the average percentage of pages containing a speech act revealed that there was no consistent upward or downward trend across the primary grades, with the textbooks used in the first and last primary grades, grades 1 and 6, containing similar figures of 25.63% and 25.61% of pages, respectively. The average percentages of pages containing a speech act fluctuated across grades 2–5. The percentage of pages in primary grade textbooks containing a speech act ranged from 23.49% (grade 2) to 29.11% (grade 3).

When analyzing the distribution of various types of speech acts across grade levels, three speech acts dominated the data: requests/commands, suggestions/advice, and greetings. The speech act of request/command was the most represented speech act at each primary grade level. The presence of requests/commands was also rather consistent, ranging only from 12.13% (grade 4) to 16.93% (grade 2). The speech act of suggestion/advice was the second most frequent speech act type for all primary grade levels with the exception of grade 1, in which it appeared on an average of only 1.89% of pages. This figure increased to 4.31% in grade 2 before leveling out in a range of 7.44% (grade 4) to 9.02% (grade 3) for the subsequent four grade levels. Greetings were the third most commonly present speech act in four grade levels (grades 2, 4, 5, and 6) and the second most common in grade 1, with an average of 9.21% of pages containing this speech act type.

The presence of other speech act types was scarce when compared to requests/commands, suggestions/advice, and greetings. It is notable that offers were present on 4.18% of pages in grade 3, making it the third most common speech act type for this grade. However, offers appeared on only 1.50% (grade 6) to 2.54% (grade 1) of pages in books used for the other primary grade levels. Another trend worth noting is that refusals appeared on an average between 2.22% and 2.85% of pages for textbooks used in grades 3–5. However, this speech act type was present on only 1.18% of pages and 0.77% of pages in grades 1 and 6, respectively, and refusals were not present in any textbook used in grade 2. The average number of pages containing all other speech act types was less than 3% for each grade level.

Overall, the later three grades contained a greater variety of speech act types than the earlier three grades, with grades 1–3 containing between 10 and 12 speech act types and grades 4–6 containing between 14 and 15 speech act types. However, the representation of many speech act types was quite limited, with averages of less than 1% at various grade levels. This suggests that while there was some representation at a particular grade level, some speech act types were not present in all textbooks and may have only been observed on one to two pages of textbooks in which they were present.

Table 5
The average percentage of pages containing each speech act type in secondary-grade textbooks

Speech act type	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Individual type						
Requests/commands	15.71	21.27	17.70	11.44	13.17	11.25
Suggestions/advice	7.10	10.39	10.92	4.39	11.50	8.37
Greetings	16.72	8.97	5.91	8.18	5.57	3.22
Offers	4.52	3.19	3.93	3.80	1.94	2.23
Thanks	3.69	3.74	5.56	3.07	1.42	0.92
Refusals	3.64	5.01	3.72	1.58	2.46	1.42
Leave-takings	5.89	2.02	1.81	2.19	2.06	1.59
Apologies	2.76	3.08	2.09	3.86	4.82	1.86
Invitations	1.73	2.43	2.27	0.23	0.70	0.38
Promises	0.19	1.55	2.93	0.47	2.41	1.25
Well-wishes	1.47	0.91	0.57	0.23	0.18	0.44
Compliments	0.88	3.13	1.28	0.23	0.41	0
Expressions of empathy	0.52	0.93	0.90	1.29	0.88	0.47

Speech act type	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Warnings	0.19	0.38	0.55	0.47	0.93	0.44
Congratulations	0	0.58	0.37	1.01	1.13	0.59
Welcomes	0.59	0.17	0.58	0.23	0.41	0
Any speech act type	32.50	32.92	30.50	22.68	25.75	18.82

The data on the average percentage of pages containing a speech act revealed a downward trend across the secondary grades, as shown in Table 5. Grades 7 and 8 textbooks had averages of 32.50% and 32.92% of pages containing a speech act, respectively, followed by 30.50% for textbooks used in grade 9. The average dropped to 22.68% and 25.75% in grades 10 and 11, respectively. Grade 12 contained the lowest average percentage, with a speech act appearing on only 18.82% of pages, the fewest of any secondary grade level.

As with the primary grades, the representation of speech act types was dominated by three speech act types, namely, requests/commands, suggestions/advice, and greetings. Requests/commands were the most prominent speech act type, representing the largest percentage of pages from grades 8–12 and the second largest percentage in grade 7. This ranged from 11.25% of pages of grade 12 textbooks to 21.27% of pages in grade 8 textbooks. Fewer requests/commands were observed in the later secondary grades (grades 10–12) than in the early secondary grades (grades 7–9). Suggestions/advice were the second most prominent speech act type represented in four grades (grades 8, 9, 11, and 12) and had the third highest proportion of pages in the remaining two grades. Overall, the average number of pages of secondary grade textbooks containing an instance of suggestions/advice ranged from 4.39% (grade 10) to 11.50% (grade 11). No discernable trend of increasing or decreasing representation was observed in the data for suggestions/advice. The speech act of greeting appeared on an average of 16.72% of pages in grade 7 textbooks, though its presence was substantially less in other grades and as little as 3.22% in grade 12.

Other speech act types were less consistently represented. Leave-takings, for example, were represented on 5.89% of pages in grade 7 textbooks. However, this figure dropped substantially in other grades, ranging from 1.59% in grade 12 to 2.19% in grade 10. Similarly, instances of thanks appeared on 5.56% of pages in textbooks used in grade 9 but as few as 0.92% in grade 12. Apologies and refusals followed a similar pattern, with the lowest percentages observed in grade 12 (1.86% and 1.42%, respectively). In other grades, apologies ranged from 2.09% (grade 9) to 4.82% (grade 11) while refusals ranged from 1.58% (grade 10) to 5.01% (grade 8). Several speech act types—invitations, congratulations, promises, well-wishes, expressions of empathy, warnings, and welcomes—appeared on fewer than 2.5% of textbook pages at every grade level.

The data indicate that the secondary grade textbooks contained a broad variety of speech act types. There were only three instances of a speech act type not appearing in any of a grade level's textbooks; congratulations did not appear in any grade 7 textbook and there were no instances of compliments or welcomes in any of the textbooks used for grade 12. As was the case with the primary school level data, it is important to note that many speech act types were present on less than 1% of pages in several grade levels, indicating that these speech act types may have appeared in only some of the textbook used at a given grade level, and these

speech act types may have had a presence limited to only one to two pages of textbooks in which they were present.

Teacher interviews

All participants from both primary and secondary levels generally found that the textbooks they used contain a variety of speech acts that were adequate for their students' needs. While they observed that the textbooks placed a stronger emphasis on the speech act of requests than other types of speech acts, they considered this focus to be essential, as making requests is a fundamental communicative function in everyday interactions. All participants appreciated the breadth of types of speech acts being covered. However, both secondary teacher participants noted that while textbooks provide a basic framework for introducing a variety of speech acts through scenarios commonly encountered in everyday life, a wider range of situations should be included. The participants argued that incorporating a wider range of situations would allow students to learn the nuances of speech act expressions in various settings. They also emphasized the need for providing a greater variety of speech act expressions. This would not only enhance students' understanding of the functions of different expressions but also allow for extensive practice in utilizing different linguistic forms.

In terms of authenticity, all participants found that the language used in the conversations within textbooks is both authentic and natural. They reported that the dialogues and expressions closely resemble the way people speak in real-life situations. Additionally, participants highlighted that the contexts of these conversations are well-aligned with the interests of students at different grade levels. For example, grade 10 students are more interested in entertainment, while grade 12 students are drawn to topics that are more complex or academically oriented. The textbooks effectively tailor the content to these varying interests, ensuring that the material resonates with students and engages them in meaningful learning experiences.

Two participants teaching secondary-level students identified a significant shortcoming in the textbooks related to inadequate explanations of speech acts. They observed that the provided explanations are often minimal or limited, sometimes presented under headings such as "Giving Advice" or "Apologizing" without elaboration. As a result, teachers frequently need to supplement the textbooks with their own explanations during lessons. This inconsistency means that students may not receive uniform instruction across different classes, potentially leading to variations in their understanding and application of the speech acts. However, the primary teacher participants reported that this problem does not occur with younger learners at the primary level, as the speech acts they learn are generally less complex and do not require as detailed an explanation.

In response to questions about textbook selection, all participants reported that they do not use a set criterion or rubric for this process; rather, the selection is based on ensuring that the textbooks align with the standards set by the Thai MOE. Although the teachers and schools do not set these standards themselves, they agreed that the established standards comprehensively cover the learning objectives necessary for each educational level. A primary teacher participant also noted that besides adhering to the MOE standards, she considers

pictures crucial; if pictures effectively illustrate the situations relating to the target language, students can understand the content more easily. Additionally, she highlighted that textbooks incorporating songs to teach speech acts, with repeated target phrases or expressions, can be particularly engaging for young learners.

DISCUSSION

The extent of speech act presentation

Although speech acts were present in the textbook used at every primary and secondary grade level in Thai schools, there were notable differences between grade levels and textbook series. In terms of differences between grade levels, it might be expected there would be more speech acts included in textbooks as students gain proficiency and advance in grade level. This is because younger students generally have more limited linguistic resources, and therefore, textbooks for early primary grades might focus more on presenting basic vocabulary and grammar structures before engaging in the more complex interactions and language use required for speech acts. However, an overview of the data across all 12 grade levels (Tables 4 and 5) revealed no upward (or downward) trend in the average number of pages containing a speech act. Instead, the representation of speech acts in textbooks appeared to be the greatest in the early secondary grades (grades 7–9), with the average number of pages containing a speech act at greater than 30% for all three grade levels, while grade 12 emerged as the most pronounced outlier—its figure of 18.82% was notably lower than the other grades. This might be explained in part by a shift in the textbooks' focus to reading and grammar skills in grade 12, perhaps with the aim of preparing students for exams required for university admissions and university coursework rather than general communication and social transactions. In their grade 12 textbooks, three textbook series—*Flash on English*, *New World*, and *Success*—featured fewer dialogues depicting scenes of spoken communication in favor of more short reading passages. This interpretation is supported by the view of one interview participant with experience teaching grades 10–12, who noted a general shift in focus toward more test-oriented learning materials in grade 12 compared to the previous two grade levels.

The variations between textbook series (Tables 2 and 3) observed in this study are consistent with previous studies that observed significant variations in the quantity of pragmatic content between textbook series (Jakupčević & Portolan, 2021; Schauer, 2019). Variations between textbook series are an additional factor that may explain the differences between early and later secondary grades. Unlike primary school grades, in which every textbook series covered all six grades, only one series, *New World*, covered all secondary grades. This means that most of the textbooks used in grades 7–9 were of a different series than textbooks used in grades 10–12. The variation between secondary grade textbook series seen in Table 3 illustrates how textbook series can vary greatly. Therefore, to some extent, the variation between the early and later secondary grades in the average number of pages containing speech acts may be attributed to differences in textbook series.

The distribution of speech act types

The findings showed that three speech act types—requests/commands, suggestions/advice, and greetings—were consistently more represented in the surveyed textbooks when compared to other speech act types. Other speech act types were less consistently represented across grade levels or scarcely represented at all grade levels. These findings support the observation of previous studies that textbooks focus heavily on requests (Schauer, 2019) while limiting the presentation of other speech act types, such as offers and promises (Ahmed et al., 2021; Wilson, 2023).

Research suggests that L2 learners' pragmatic competence typically expands as their proficiency in the target language increases (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Schauer, 2022). Additionally, recent research by Savić and Myrset (2022) indicated that older school-aged L2 learners not only possess more developed linguistic resources but also exhibit heightened metapragmatic awareness, enabling them to engage in more nuanced and abstract discussions about speech acts than younger L2 learners. Building on these insights, one plausible expectation is that textbooks at higher grade levels may include a greater variety of pragmatic content and a broader range of speech act types to align with older learners' increased capacity for pragmatic understanding. However, the findings reveal a notable inconsistency: learners in Grade 12, who are developmentally ready for complex pragmatic instruction, may not receive the necessary instructional support. Instead of being exposed to a broader distribution of more nuanced and pragmatically demanding speech acts, their textbooks, as discussed above, appear to prioritize reading and grammar, perhaps in response to contextual factors in countries like Thailand, where the pragmatic aspect of language is not the primary focus of university admission examination preparation, thus perhaps influencing textbook developers to focus more on grammar and reading skills.

Another consideration that supports an expectation of greater speech act variety in higher grade levels, based on the researcher's own observations, is that the amount of text and the length of social interactions represented in the textbooks also tended to increase with grade level, potentially facilitating a broader range of speech act types to naturally emerge. Indeed, there appeared to be a trend of increasing variety and representation of individual speech act types as grade levels advanced. The early grades of primary school contained the fewest number of speech act types. The quantity of representations of individual speech act types also appeared to be generally higher in secondary grades when compared to primary grades. Leave-takings, apologies, thanks, congratulations, and promises were consistently more present in secondary grades than in primary grades. However, this upward trend was less pronounced or absent for some speech act types. Notably, the most common speech act type at all grade levels, requests/commands, appeared somewhat consistently across most grade levels.

It is interesting to note that while no broad upward or downward trend was observed in the average number of pages containing a speech act across grade levels, the variety of speech act types and the proportion of textbook pages containing several types of speech acts tended to increase with grade level. This might be explained by the differences in the format in which speech acts appeared in the primary and secondary textbooks. Primary school textbooks

tended to include more repetition in their presentation, often through songs and brief depictions of simple interactions. For example, speech acts of greeting, such as “Hi,” “Hello,” and “Good morning,” followed by the interlocutor’s name, appeared repeatedly throughout the books. This repetition aligns with young learners’ natural language acquisition processes, as frequent exposure to a narrow range of words and expressions facilitates vocabulary building (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). This also reflects the audio-lingual method, a pedagogical approach that emphasizes repetitive drills and pattern practice (Larsen-Freeman, 2015). The approach of teaching speech acts to young learners through repetition was also noted by one primary school teacher interview participant. Secondary school textbooks, on the other hand, tended to present more complex and realistic scenes of communication between characters, often with depictions of characters performing a variety of speech act types within a single dialogue.

Thai EFL teacher perspectives

Although the participants identified several shortcomings of EFL textbooks as tools to teach speech acts, they were also generally satisfied in several key areas. The participants viewed the range of speech acts as adequate to meet their students’ needs. However, both secondary school teacher participants felt that a wider range of situations would benefit students. All participants also expressed satisfaction with the authenticity of the speech acts presented, with some noting both the context and language forms presented resembled what would be expected in real-life interactions. This contrasts with the observations of several previous studies that report that the presentation of speech acts in EFL textbooks often lacks realistic context (Ren & Han, 2016) and does not adequately present authentic language use (Bui & Nguyen, 2023; Glaser, 2020; Schauer, 2019, as cited in Schauer, 2022). One notable shortcoming identified by the present study’s participants that aligns with the findings of previous studies is that textbooks tend to lack sufficient explanation when presenting speech acts (Ren & Han, 2015; Ton Nu & Murray, 2020). According to the secondary school teacher participants, the lack of explicit information in textbook presentations of speech acts creates the need for teachers to supplement their lessons with their own prepared material. However, this was not the case for the primary school teachers participating in this study, as they felt that the learning needs of younger students do not require the same level of explicit explanation as those of older students.

When asked about how they select textbooks from the approved list, the participants explained that while all textbooks under consideration had been approved by the Thai MOE, teachers did not conduct any additional formal evaluation to decide which textbooks among those approved to select for use in their classrooms. An in-depth assessment of content—such as, for the pragmatic aspect, the types of speech acts, the range of speech act types, and the inclusion of metapragmatic explanations—is absent at the selection stage. Instead, teachers select books based on their personal judgment, considering factors such as layout, themes, sequence of activities, colorfulness, and the inclusion of pictures. The participants believed that these factors would enhance both student engagement and comprehension because a clear and organized layout helps students and teachers to navigate the material more easily. These insights align with Hoshangabadwala’s (2015) findings that students preferred textbooks with clear, colorful designs and well-organized layouts, which they found more

readable and easier to navigate. Research has also observed that visually engaging materials significantly enhance learning outcomes. For instance, Chen et al. (2023) found that vivid colors and clear layouts in picture books boost student motivation and participation. While these textbook selection criteria such as layout, and visual appeal facilitate teaching and are valued by students, they do not prioritize the presence or quality of pragmatics-related material. This finding suggests that pragmatics receives little explicit attention or priority in the textbook selection process. In the Thai EFL context, where students' opportunities to engage with authentic English outside the classroom are limited and textbooks often serve as the main source of pragmatic input, this omission is significant, as it reflects a critical disconnect between the materials selected for classroom use and the broader instructional goal of developing learners' communicative proficiency.

This lack of a formal textbook evaluation process described by the participants is also consistent with findings from Wuttisrisiriporn et al. (2020), who surveyed Thai public-school teachers on textbook selection criteria and found that while factors such as price and MOE approval were taken into consideration, no systematic process was used to assess textbook content. The great variation in the quantity of speech act representation between textbooks series reported in the present study suggests that failing to consider these differences when selecting textbooks could have implications for the students' outcomes, particularly as they relate to the development of students' pragmatic competence. For instance, textbooks with limited or inconsistent representation of speech acts might fail to expose students to basic forms of pragmatic language use, which could hinder their ability to effectively navigate social interactions in the target language. This, in turn, could negatively impact their ability to develop pragmatic competence, as students might miss opportunities to learn how to appropriately perform and respond to various speech acts, such as requests, apologies, and compliments, in different social contexts. Such gaps in pragmatic development could leave students less prepared for real-world communication, particularly in intercultural or professional settings, where nuanced language use is often critical.

CONCLUSION

The principal aim of this study was to better understand the extent to which speech acts are represented in EFL textbooks used in Thai primary and secondary schools. The main finding is that speech acts were present in all textbooks. However, their representation varied greatly between series in terms of the proportion of pages that include a speech act as well as the distribution of various speech act types. Although variations in both of these respects were present when comparing across grade levels, the differences between textbook series appear to be more meaningful. These differences are particularly significant considering the absence of a formalized evaluation of textbook content when teachers select textbooks. Interview data revealed that while teachers were generally satisfied with the range and authenticity of speech act representation in textbooks, the lack of explicit explanation relating to speech acts limits the effectiveness of textbooks as tools for teaching speech acts.

This study highlights significant gaps in how EFL textbooks present speech acts, offering insights with implications for improving their design and selection. For textbook developers, the findings emphasize the need to provide balanced and systematic coverage of speech acts across grade levels, ensuring that students are exposed to a wide range of pragmatic functions. Although the selected textbooks at all grade levels meet the BECC's curricular guideline of developing learners' request-making skills, the only speech act explicitly mentioned, they fail to meet the BECC's broader, more important pedagogical goal of developing comprehensive communicative ability (Ministry of Education, 2008). Exposure to diverse speech acts in EFL textbooks enables learners to master various communicative functions beyond surface-level language use—the mere knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical rules. Without this exposure, students may develop limited communication skills focused solely on semantic meaning while missing the vital pragmatic aspects of language performance.

Importantly, the lack of explicit explanations in EFL textbooks regarding linguistic forms and their pragmatic functions, as revealed in teacher interviews, carries implications for students' ability to notice and internalize these features. According to Schmidt's (1990) noticing hypothesis, conscious awareness of language forms and their functions is essential for language acquisition. Including detailed explanations of linguistic forms and the social variables—such as formality, power dynamics, and social distance—that influence their appropriate use can help address this gap.

For school administrators, these findings underscore the importance of carefully evaluating textbooks for their coverage of speech acts and the clarity of their explanations. Selecting materials that provide explicit instruction and diverse examples can help standardize learning outcomes across classrooms, reducing variability caused by teachers' differing levels of expertise. Schools can adopt practical measures such as creating a checklist for speech act coverage and encouraging teacher collaboration to assess pragmatic content as well as supplementing textbooks with additional materials when gaps are identified. Additionally, teacher training in L2 pragmatic instruction could help to support Thai teachers by raising their awareness of English pragmatic norms and equipping them with practical strategies to promote learners' pragmatic development through explicit instruction and engaging activities. Ultimately, the study serves as a framework for guiding both the development and selection of textbooks, ensuring that learners receive the comprehensive and contextually relevant instruction necessary for real-world communication.

Due to the exploratory nature of this study and the size of the corpus of 57 textbooks, the scope was limited mainly to surveying and analyzing the quantity of speech act representation in textbooks. Although interviews with EFL teachers who use these textbooks in Thai primary and secondary schools were included to add a degree of qualitative perspective, this survey of textbooks did not evaluate the quality of speech act representations. Further research into issues relating to quality, such as authenticity, variety of linguistic forms, effectiveness of textbook-guided activities, and the inclusion of metapragmatic information, could provide further insight into the overall effectiveness of textbooks as tools to develop students' abilities in L2 speech act realization.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was supported and funded by the Department of Foreign Languages at Kasetsart University, and the author is grateful for their financial assistance.

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