Children's pragmatic competence: A case study of English speech acts performed by American children

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Abstract

This study attempts to demonstrate the "pragmatic competence" (cf. Bachman, 1990) of American elementary school children who speak English as their native/first language, through an analysis of spoken data provided by pupils (aged 8-10) in San Francisco, U.S.A., in March 2010. This research project, part of a grant awarded research scheme to investigate speech acts in two languages (English and Japanese) and to apply the results to language teaching[1], has been designed to (1) reveal native English speaking children's pragmatic ability to realize their intentions verbally in the form of "speech acts" (also known as *illocutionary acts*); (2) consider its significance in human language acquisition with regard to "pragmatic development"; and (3) apply the research results to ELT (English Language Teaching) in Japan, especially at an early stage. The present data consists of six English speech acts (viz. *Complimenting*, *Requesting*, *Thanking*, *Inviting*, *Apologizing*, *Comforting*) performed orally by the children in the role-play with puppets and then transcribed for the examination of their linguistic features in detail. The result of this research is expected to make a limited contribution to the above areas as a case study[2].

Key words : *speech acts, children, pragmatic competence, application to ELT*

1. Introduction

This particular study is part of a grant awarded research project for the compilation of speech acts corpora (henceforth SAC) in English and Japanese and these two languages used as interlanguage. This project has been attempting to address the following issues: (1) how speech acts are performed by native English speakers, native Japanese speakers, and learners of English and Japanese as interlanguage; (2) what similar or different linguistic features can be found in different types of speech acts; and (3) how to apply the research results to language teaching.

This special research section concerning children's speech acts has been designed to focus on the following issues. Regarding (1), the comparison between the adults'[3] and children's data may well allow us to understand their similarities and dissimilarities. Concerning (2), it is thought to be of value to study and reveal the linguistic strategies at the (i) lexical, (ii) grammatical, and (iii) discourse levels, along with (iv) embedded politeness strategies for the appropriate language use according to the context. In terms of (3), the research results are expected to contribute to TEFL (teaching English as a foreign language) in Japan especially at the primary stage, as it has been getting more common for Japanese children to experience communication with foreigners in English.

2. ELT in Japan at the elementary level

Since the introduction of ELT to the elementary level in Japan, there have been various discussions on which directions to take, i.e. what contents should

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[2]　This article is an extended version of the manuscript which has been submitted to the Proceedings of JACET 2010 Kusatsu Summer Seminar, with necessary revisions and new data analysis results.

[3]　In the presenter's current research project for the compilation of speech acts corpora (SAC), he has created a database of eleven American English speech acts for general use (cf. Suzuki, 2008; 2009a; 2009b; 2010).

be included and how their instructions should be implemented. The researcher claims, based on his teaching experience at a private primary school, that it is necessary to investigate what "pragmatic competence" (viz. the ability to manipulate language according to the context) the native counterparts in the equivalent age group possess in order to seek for what contents and methodologies should be incorporated and utilized for a successful CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) at the elementary level. This is because the "pragmatic development" is assumed to be no less important than the development in the lexical, syntactic, semantic, or phonological areas – especially for real life face-to-face communication.

Nowadays there are more opportunities for Japanese children to interact with English speakers in such programmes as "a homestay in the U.S.," "an English study tour in Australia," or "an English camp with English speakers," as the researcher himself has organized or coordinated while engaging in primary education. As a consequence it is necessary for those children participating in such programmes to "go beyond" the learning of vocabulary, structure, and information exchange. In face-to-face interactions they need to understand their partners' intentions correctly and to express their own appropriately, beyond mere conventional exchange. This means that the learning of speech acts and politeness should be incorporated (even) at this level. While admitting that it is certainly difficult in reality to apply the results of this research directly to elementary ELT classes in general (mainly for practical and technical reasons), the researcher assumes that there should be some reasonable ways to utilize them to enhance infant EFL/ESL learners' pragmatic ability for true communication in the following areas: vocabulary, formulaic expressions, sentence structures, prosody, and discourse management.

3. Research design

The current study examines the informants' pragmatic ability in the follow-

ing target speech acts:

1) Complimenting (FEA: *positive direction*)
2) Requesting (FTA: *negative direction*)
3) Thanking (FEA: *positive direction*)
4) Inviting (FEA/FTA: *positive/negative direction*)
5) Apologizing (FEA: *positive direction*)
6) Comforting (FEA: *positive direction*)

[N.B. FEA = face-enhancing act; FTA = face-threatening act]

The speech acts 1-5 above were chosen because they are thought to be performed commonly in daily life. The final speech act (6), *comforting*, was selected since it has turned out to be a composite of some (sub-)speech acts (or discourse components) in the author's previous study (Suzuki, 2010) and is not an easy act to be performed without sophisticated pragmatic strategies. The terms FEA, FTA, *positive/negative directions*, are all related to politeness aspects of these speech acts. An FEA is generally oriented towards the enhancement of the addressees' "face wants" (cf. Brown & Levinson, 1983), and is realized usually with *directness*, *clarity* (in meaning), and/or *intensification* (cf. Suzuki, 2007). An FTA (as defined by Brown & Levinson, ibid.), on the other hand, often contains "imposition" on the addressee, and is therefore accompanied by mitigation of some sort (e.g. *hedges*, *indirectness*), as has widely been known in the area of politeness studies. *Positive/Negative directions* are the terms to describe the two directions in the linguistic politeness framework established by Leech's *Grand Strategy of Politeness* (2003) summarized as follows:

> Grand Strategy of Politeness:
> In order to be polite, *s* (= the speaker) communicates meanings which
> 　(i)　place a high value on what pertains to *o* (= the other(s))
> 　(ii)　place a low value on what pertains to *s*
>
> (adapted from Leech, 2003: 108)

The *positive direction* can be defined by (i) above, whereas the *negative*

direction can be outlined by (ii). The *positive direction* is usually found in the
FEAs and the *negative* in the FTAs (or the speech acts that require the
speaker's self-effacement, such as responses to compliments in Japanese).

The data analysis is to be carried out focusing on politeness strategies
adopted by the informants, as well as the lexicogrammatical and discourse
management strategies that achieved them.

4. Data collection procedure

The data of the current study was collected by the procedure shown in
Table 4.

Table 4

1	Data elicitation method	Role-play with a doll (boy/girl)
2	Instructions for the informants	About the situations and the target speech acts
3	Recording tool	IC recorder (audio data)

As the informants were children aged 8-10, it was necessary for the
researcher to adopt a less demanding data collection method. Therefore,
instead of asking the children to interact with their peers or adults, the role-
play with a doll (as a mock friend) was chosen. They were instructed to
perform the target speech acts with a puppet, whether a boy (*Diego*) or a girl
(*Dora*), imagining him or her as an addressee. The imaginary situations (or
scenarios) and the target speech acts were instructed by the researcher, with
a hint on how to perform them when they had a problem in doing so. They
made utterances after the cues from the researcher and the spoken data
were recorded in an IC recorder. The children's personal information except
their age and gender were not collected in order to maintain their privacy.
Consent for data collection and its use was given from their parents (as
guardians) with their signatures on a consent form, prior to a research ses-
sion.

5. Informants' information

As mentioned in an earlier section, all the data for the current study were collected in San Francisco, U.S.A., in March 2010. The informants' detailed information is summarized in Table 5.

Table 5 *Informants' information*

No	Info ID	Age	Gender
1	SF1003CH01	10	male
2	SF1003CH02	8	female
3	SF1003CH03	9	male
4	SF1003CH04	10	male
5	SF1003CH05	10	male
6	SF1003CH06	10	female
	Avg. age	9.5	

These are the children who speak English as their first language, living in the suburban area of SF. Four of them attend the same Chinese immersion school to retain their identity as Chinese Americans. Two of them are from a family with a European background, going to the same immersion school for their special education.

6. Data analysis: informants' utterances to perform six speech acts

This section examines in detail how the informants performed the target speech acts. The utterance are analyzed at the lexical, grammatical, and discourse levels, along with linguistic features representing their polite intentions. The sentence patterns that emerged are shown to demonstrate the characteristics of the children's speech acts in this study, so that they can be utilized in ELT at Japanese elementary schools.

6.1 Compliment

Instruction: *Say something nice to make Dora/Diego happy.*

The summary of the findings about this speech act is in the following tables.

Table 6.1.1 *Informants' utterances*

No	Info ID	Utterance
1	SF1003CH01	You look good.
2	SF1003CH02	I like your hair.
3	SF1003CH03	I like your backpack, Diego.
4	SF1003CH04	You're hairy.
5	SF1003CH05	I like your shoes.
6	SF1003CH06	Dora, you have nice shorts.

Table 6.1.2 *Linguistic strategies observed*

Lexical	Adjectives with positive connotation (good, nice)
	Verb: like
Grammatical	Declarative
	S+V+O (*I like your … / You have …*)
	S+V+C (*You look … / You are …*)
Discourse/Politeness	*Positive direction*
	Clarity
	~~Intensification~~
	Show S's high evaluation of what belong(s) to H

Table 6.1.3 *Sentence patterns to be taught*

1	*You look* [adjective].
2	*You have* [(article) + adjective + noun].
3	*You are* [adjective].
4	*I like your* [noun].

Since this speech act belongs to the FEA (face-enhancing act) type (cf. Searle's EXPRESSIVE (1979) or Leech's CONVIVIAL (1983)), words and phrases connoting positive or good meaning are frequently observed. Such

"positive" words in these children's utterances are; *good*, *nice* (adjectives) and *like* (verb). The adjectives are combined with formulaic introductory phrases such as *You look…* or *You have….* With regard to the sentence structure, only the declarative form was confirmed. This is because the speaker (henceforth *S*) does not need to use hedges or indirectness by the use of the interrogative. Therefore, "ambiguity" was avoided and "clarity" was emphasized in the performance of this speech act. One notable feature, which is thought to be unique to these young informants, is the absence of intensifying devices. In the adults' data, the author has confirmed that intensifiers *really* and *very* are frequently used in his corpus analysis of the lexical items utilized in this speech act[4]. The reason for this absence has not yet been identified, but it is suspected that it was caused by either the children's immaturity in linguistic competence or the factors attached to this data collection method.

　　With regard to what should be included to teach this speech act, the sentence patterns in Table 6.1.3 and the vocabulary with positive meanings listed in Table 6.1.2 could be the ones to be included in a possible teaching material.

6.2　Request

Instruction: *Ask Dora/Diego to do something for you (e.g. help you with your homework).*

The summary of the findings about this speech act is in the following tables.

Table 6.2.1　*Informants' utterances*

No	Info ID	Utterance
1	SF1003CH01	Can you help me on my homework?

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(4)　The author reported about this research result in his presentation at the 23rd JACET Discourse-Pragmatics SIG Meeting (at Waseda University; Fri. 23rd Jan., 2009), entitled "What the corpus database of English speech acts suggests: its possibilities in the future ELT materials with the revised government course guidelines".

2	SF1003CH02	Can you help me with my homework?
3	SF1003CH03	Hey Diego, can you do my homework for me, please?
4	SF1003CH04	I want you to jump off the rooftop of our house.
5	SF1003CH05	Diego, can you do my homework for me, please?
6	SF1003CH06	Dora, may I see your bracelet?

Table 6.2.2 *Linguistic strategies observed*

Lexical	Addressing [(Interjection +) Vocative / Address terms]
	can / may
	please
	want
Grammatical	Interrogative
	V+S+O (*Can you … ? / May I … ?*)
	S+V+O+to V (*I want you to …*)
Discourse/Politeness	*Negative direction*
	Mitigation / Hedge / Indirectness
	Give H options
	Ask for H's permission

Table 6.2.3 Sentence patterns to be taught

1	[Addressing (with/without interjection)]
2	*Can you …?*
3	*May I …?*

As can be seen from the above, except for just one utterance[5], all the remarks are in the interrogative. This is a widely recognized strategy for the performance of this speech act, as a question provides the hearer (henceforth *H*) with options as to whether s/he can or will meet *S*'s request. *Requesting* belongs to Searle's DIRECTIVE (ibid.) and Leech's COMPETITIVE (ibid.) and is a type of an FTA as defined by B&L (ibid.). Therefore this speech act requires mitigation or softener when performed. Mitigation has been achieved

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(5) It is strongly suspected that this child (SF1003CH04) was jokingly performing the first two speech acts according to the researcher's observation. He later noticed the seriousness of this research and responded accordingly from the third speech act.

by such interrogative forms and the modal auxiliary asking about a pre-condition for the fulfilment of this speech act (*can*). These are supposed to be strategies for the *negative direction*, as *S* is trying to show tentativeness by the use of indirectness.

It is notable that SF1003CH06 used the phrase *May I* and showed a higher degree of politeness. Considering the fact that most of the others opted to use *Can you*, it is assumed that this girl was trying to show her good speaking manners. Indeed the phrase *May I* can frequently be found in the author's adult SAC and this fact may be suggesting that this formulaic expression is still surviving in this speech act for the realization of a polite linguistic attitude.

Although *Hey* was used by just one informant, the author has confirmed that this lexical item is very frequently used as a familiar *attention getter* in American English in his SAC. The items that could be included in a speech act teaching material are listed in Table 6.2.3.

6.3 Thank

Instruction: *Thank Dora/Diego for what s/he did for you.*

The summary of the findings about this speech act is in the following tables.

Table 6.3.1 *Informants' utterances*

No	Info ID	Utterance
1	SF1003CH01	Thank you.
2	SF1003CH02	Thank you for helping me.
3	SF1003CH03	Thanks, Diego.
4	SF1003CH04	Thanks for showing me.
5	SF1003CH05	Thank you Diego, for doing my homework.
6	SF1003CH06	Dora, your bracelet is nice. Thank you for showing me.

Table 6.3.2 *Linguistic strategies observed*

Lexical	Addressing [Address terms following the core phrase]
	thank / thanks
	for
Grammatical	Declarative
	V(+O) (*Thanks / Thank you*)
	for + Gerund (- *ing*)
Discourse/Politeness	*Positive direction*
	Clarity
	~~Intensification~~
	State what S thanks for
	Say something nice about H

Table 6.3.3 *Sentence patterns to be taught*

1	*Thanks* [Address term] [*for* …]
2	*Thank you* [Address term] [*for* …]
3	Say something nice about H (Compliment)

  This comparatively simple speech act is performed by head acts (or main strategies), *Thanks* and *Thank you* in most cases. Still, native English speakers do use several sub-strategies at the same time such as "specifying a reason for thanking" (e.g. *for helping me*), "positive evaluation of *S*'s help" (e.g. *you're a lifesaver*), "appreciation" (e.g. *I really appreciate it*), to name just a few[6]. It has been observed that the strategy "specifying a reason for thanking" was quite widely used (by four informants out of six), while other strategies were hardly found, except for "positive evaluation of *S*'s help" adopted by SF1003CH06. Once again it is uncertain whether this scarcity of sub-strategies is due to the level of these children's linguistic ability or the

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[6] The author reported about the research results on four speech acts (viz. *thanking*, *apologies*, *requests* and *offers*) in his presentation at IPrA 11th Conference (at Univ. of Melbourne, Australia; Tues.14th July, 2009), entitled "A Corpus-study of the English Speech Acts of Thanking, Apologies, Requests and Offers: American University Students' Lexicogrammatical and Discourse Strategies".

factors that surrounded this data collection session (e.g. (in)formality, the scenario, the addressee).

The absence of intensifying devices, which was also observed in *complimenting*, was confirmed in this act once again. Since *thanking* is another type of FEA, such intensifiers are commonly used to strengthen the polite intention of *S*. On the other hand, no indirect strategy was found in the children's data, which was also the case with the adults'. This indicates that these children performed this speech act with clarity in meaning as partial fulfilment of the *positive direction*.

What can be suggested for a possible teaching material are listed in Table 6.3.3. It is assumed better to instruct Japanese young EFL learners to combine the core parts (viz. *Thanks, Thank you*) with one or more sub-strategies described above (at least that of "specifying a reason for thanking").

6.4 Invite

Instruction: *Invite Dora/Diego to your birthday party.*

The summary of the findings about this speech act is in the following tables.

Table 6.4.1 *Informants' utterances*

No	Info ID	Utterance
1	SF1003CH01	Can you come to my birthday party?
2	SF1003CH02	Would you like to come to my birthday party?
3	SF1003CH03	Hey Diego, do you want to go to my birthday party?
4	SF1003CH04	Would you like to come to my birthday party?
5	SF1003CH05	Diego, will you come over to my birthday party today?
6	SF1003CH06	Dora, would you like to come to my birthday party?

Table 6.4.2 *Linguistic strategies observed*

Lexical	Addressing [(Interjection +) Vocative / Address terms]
	can / will / would
	like
	want
	come
	party
Grammatical	Interrogative
	V+S+O (*Can you / do you / will you / would you like …?*)
Discourse/Politeness	*Negative direction* (for directives): S focused on the "cost" to H
	Mitigation / Hedge / Indirectness
	Give H options

Table 6.4.3 Sentence patterns to be taught

1	[Addressing (with/without interjection)]
2	*Can you come to …?*
3	*Do you want to come to …?*
4	*Will you come to …?*
5	*Would you like to come to …?*

Invitations are basically a type of "offer" for the sake of *H*, and in this sense it is appropriate to categorize this act into the CONVIVIAL type (Leech, ibid.) and therefore thought to be a type of FEA. However, what is particular about this act is that the interrogative is very commonly utilized in its performance (cf. Suzuki, 2009b). This is presumably because this speech act often turns into COMPETITIVE when *S* takes it as a kind of *request* (viz. a request for *H*'s attendance or participation) and feels somehow a sense of "imposition" on *H*. Accordingly, the interrogative, or indirectness, is often adopted for a polite invitation. *S*s do mind such impositive aspect of this act and consequently politely ask *H*s for their attendance or participation. The same phenomenon (of the use of the interrogative) has been observed in such speech acts as *suggesting* and *offering* (cf. Suzuki, 2009a). These facts indicate that it is a general rule that *S* asks about *H*'s willingness (or ability, availability, etc.) to do something before *S* performs a speech act for the sake of *H* in

a polite way.

　　For the reasons above, mainly strategies for the *negative direction* have been found in the informants' data. We can see four types of auxiliaries (viz. *can*, *do*, *will*, *would*), and this fact indicates that native English speakers are equipped with the knowledge of when and how to use appropriate auxiliaries to express their intentions at such an early stage. Teaching how to express intentions or emotions with modality, tense, aspect, or voice is what is missing in the elementary or secondary TEFL in Japan, according to the researcher's observation. Therefore this finding can serve as one piece of evidence to facilitate learning or mastering how to express oneself utilizing such linguistic devices for "real" communication. However, at the same time, they should be taught with due caution because of their complexity and the difficulty in teaching them. One solution might be to let the learners study these phrases as sorts of idioms or chunks to be memorized as formulaic expressions for *inviting* their friends.

6.5　Apologize

> Instruction: *Apologize to Dora / Diego for not being able to attend her/his birthday party.*

The summary of the findings about this speech act is in the following tables.

Table 6.5.1　*Informants' utterances*

No	Info ID	Utterance
1	SF1003CH01	Sorry I can't come, 'cause I have a basketball practice.
2	SF1003CH02	I'm sorry, but I can't come.
3	SF1003CH03	Hey, um, sorry Diego, but I can't come to your birthday party because I got homework to do.
4	SF1003CH04	I'm sorry, but I have too much homework to do.
5	SF1003CH05	I'm sorry I couldn't come to your party, Diego.
6	SF1003CH06	Sorry Dora, I'm really busy.

Table 6.5.2 *Linguistic strategies observed*

Lexical	Addressing [Address terms following the core phrase]
	sorry
	but
	can't / couldn't
	busy / homework / practice
Grammatical	Declarative
	(S+V)+C (*Sorry / I'm sorry*)
	for + Gerund (ing)
Discourse/Politeness	*Positive direction*
	Clarity
	(Intensification)
	Specify the reason why S cannot come

Table 6.5.3 Sentence patterns to be taught

1	*Sorry*
2	*Sorry* [Address term] [*but* …] \<reason\>
3	*I'm sorry*
4	*I'm sorry* [Address term] [*but* …] \<reason\>

The children performed this speech act in a rather simple way, with the core phrases *Sorry* or *I'm sorry* with a limited number of sub-strategies, as they did in *thanking*. In the adults' data the researcher has found several major sub-strategies such as "acknowledgement of *S*'s fault," "denial of inten-tionality," "offer of compensation/help," or "specification of reason." These informants did not adopt them, except for just one, "specification of reason" and did not utilize any others to show polite intentions. Once again, this phe-nomenon may stem from the children's linguistic immaturity or the research design. Another possible reason might be the difference between what DCTs (discourse completion tests) and the role-play can elicit. According to Beebe & Cummings (1996), DCTs "are a highly effective research tool as a means of … ascertaining the **canonical shape of speech acts** in the minds of speakers of that language" (emphasis by the author). It is therefore assumable that these young informants had already been equipped with such sub-strategies

but they did not appear because of the data collection method. It should be of value to employ another research tool that can reveal what are in store for children for the performance of speech acts, e.g. by asking them to say as much as they can to perform the speech act.

This speech act is carried out for the sake of *H* and therefore an FEA. Thus the *positive direction* has been pursued with meaning clarity. Intensifiers have been found in this speech act (i.e. *too much*, *really*), unlike the other FEA type acts. Nevertheless, the intensifiers were used in the sub-parts, not in the core parts, which is different from the patterns in the adults' data. In the adults' SAC, intensifying devices such as *really*, *so*, *very* are usually attached to the core word *sorry* to modify it (i.e. *I'm really/so/very sorry*). While the origin of the difference is still hard to be identified, it is interesting that some of the children did try to use an intensifying strategy, which is a typical feature of an FEA.

Based on the linguistic features observed as above, the author would suggest that we teach Japanese EFL learning children the lexical items and discourse strategies listed in the Tables above. Again it seems necessary to combine one or more sub-strategies with the main strategy for more successful performance of this speech act.

6.6 Comfort

Instruction: *Dora / Diego is very sad because no one can attend his/her party. Say something to make her/him feel better.*

The summary of the findings about this speech act is in the following tables.

Table 6.6.1 *Informants' utterances*

No	Info ID	Utterance
1	SF1003CH01	Next year people could come.
2	SF1003CH02	I'm sorry, maybe some other friends can come.
3	SF1003CH03	It's ok Diego, not everyone can come to your birthday party.
4	SF1003CH04	Sorry, but, but, maybe next time. I'll be sure to come next time.

| 5 | SF1003CH05 | That's ok, Diego. You can invite me and my friends over to your party. |
| 6 | SF1003CH06 | Sorry Dora, but I have a present for you. |

Table 6.6.2 *Discourse components*

1	Apologizing (e.g. "Sorry")
2	Encouragement 1 (e.g. "Next year people will come")
3	Encouragement 2 (e.g. "You can …")
4	Offer of something (as compensation) (e.g. "I have a present for you")
5	Soothing (e.g. "It's okay"; "Not everyone can come")

As described earlier, this speech act is a composite of several speech acts (or strategies). Hence it is more meaningful to analyse the remarks regarding what types of discourse components are used, according to their functions.

This particular age group attempted to comfort their conversation partners by (1) *apologizing*, (2) *encouraging*, (3) *offering something*, and (4) *soothing*. Comparing these strategies with those adopted by American university students (Table 6.6.3), it can be confirmed that the young informants used a rather limited strategies to perform the speech act of *comforting*. Again, it is suspected that the different frameworks for data collection have affected the results here again. Hence it is desired that the researcher's future study investigate the true reasons for the dissimilarities between the children's and adults' data.

Table 6.6.3 *Discourse components observed in the adults' SAC*

No	Strategy classification	Freq	No	Strategy classification	Freq
1	soother	91	7	praise of H	15
2	encouragement	73	8	criticism of H's opponent	10
3	sympathy	60	9	wish for betterment	9
4	advice	53	10	enquiry about H's need	7
5	offer of support	51	11	suggestion	7
6	enquiry about situation	37			

(The components that appeared more than 5 times in the data)

One strategy that did not appear in the adults' data is *apologizing*, as can be seen in the Tables 6.6.2 and 6.6.3. This is obviously due to the scenario used this time: the informant is the one that has caused a problem to H and s/he must comfort H under such circumstances. The word *sorry* was found frequently in the university students' data as well, but its meaning was that expressing *regret*, not *apology*. The two meanings of *sorry* should be taught to EFL learners properly so that they can use this word appropriately according to the situation and the function. Apart from such basic lexical strategies, it seems better not to incorporate this speech act in the teaching material because of its complexity.

7. A tentative conclusion and future directions

The current case study has examined the six different English speech acts performed by American children through a qualitative approach. Nonetheless, the data analysis results have provided the researcher with some significant quantitative insights into the linguistic features or strategies that might sketch out the children's pragmatic competence at the elementary level.

It has been confirmed that the *positive direction* strategies were commonly adopted in the FEAs (viz. *apologizing*, *complimenting*, *thanking*) and *negative direction* strategies dominated in the FTAs (viz. *inviting* (as a Directive), *requesting*). These features are commonly found in adults' data as well, and this fact may be indicating that people at different ages are following general rules for performing speech acts. Similar linguistic characteristics have been observed in the researcher's earlier work on Japanese politeness (Suzuki, 2007). It should be of importance to seek for more common elements in the performance of speech acts and in politeness strategies across the two languages in order to have a better idea on what "universality" in language can be observed.

On the other hand, some differences have been confirmed between the children's and adults' data – e.g. the absence of intensifiers in the FEAs, and

the less number of strategies employed by the children. If it is confirmed that
this is related to the levels of the pragmatic competence development, it will
certainly contribute to the discussion of what should be taught for the culti-
vation of pragmatic ability of young EFL learners. A larger scale survey with
several different research methodologies are certainly necessary to step for-
ward to the next stage in this research area.

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