

Teaching Speech Acts

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Abstract

In this paper I argue that pragmatic ability must become part of what we teach in the classroom if we are to realize the goals of communicative competence for our students. I review the research on pragmatics, especially those articles that point to the effectiveness of teaching pragmatics in an explicit manner, and those that posit methods for teaching. I also note two areas of scholarship that address classroom needs—the use of authentic data and appropriate assessment tools. The essay concludes with a summary of my own experience teaching speech acts in an advanced-level Portuguese class.

Introduction

Since as early as 1975, scholars of the less commonly taught languages (LCTL's) have advocated for the integration of social behavior and conventions, along with intercultural communication and understanding, into our LCTL curricula. These elements are at the heart of successful second language (L2) competence although they are rarely addressed explicitly in the curricula of language or culture courses. Walker (1989) makes a strong case for the link between language and behavior in Chinese. He states that “culture is the framework within which linguistic behavior is deemed appropriate, or even acceptable. Negotiating relationships requires broader skills than negotiating cab rides, hotel rooms, or even contracts” (p.121). He argues for both the practice of behavioral culture and the discourse that supports it, and for the analysis of anthropological, sociological, and linguistic cultural phenomena. He believes that culture presents a complexity that is greater than the linguistic code, and he calls for a learning environment and pedagogy that help students perform actual roles as if they were in the target culture. Walton made similar argu-

ments about the importance of teaching and evaluating pragmatics, a term he defined as the linguistic code in social contexts (1991, p.167). He identifies the Western European orientation of our liberal arts tradition and the pedagogical practices of the proficiency movement as having contributed to coursework that is unworkable and inappropriate for LCTLs like Chinese and Japanese. Because Walton saw the important relationship between language and culture in Japanese and Chinese he concluded that they must have their own curricula.

This essay follows in the footsteps of the groundbreaking work of those LCTL scholars by focusing on the scholarship and the teaching of pragmatics. My argument agrees with the positions of Walton (1991) and Walker (1989), along with those of LoCastro (2003) and Hinkel (2001), who have written on the topic more recently. Simply stated, I argue that pragmatic ability must become part of what we teach in the classroom if we are to realize the goals of communicative competence for our students.

The Importance of Speech Acts in SLA

Let me begin with a definition of terms. What is pragmatics? LoCastro (2003) presents the following definition: “Pragmatics is the study of speaker and hearer meaning created in their joint actions that include both linguistic and nonlinguistic signals in the context of socio-culturally organized activities” (p. 15). Within the broad area of study that linguists call pragmatics is the body of language and cultural performances known as speech acts. Cohen (2006) offered this definition at a summer workshop: Speech acts are often (but not always) patterned, routinized utterances that speakers use to perform language functions, such as thanking, complimenting, requesting, refusing, apologizing, and complaining. In many scholarly and classroom contexts, the terms pragmatics and speech acts are used interchangeably.

Speech acts are an important marker of the communicative competence of our students because they represent key moments of linguistic and non-verbal expression when the speaker’s intention must be communicated properly within a cultural context. Pragmatic failure in intercultural communication may result in embarrassment, laughter, misunderstandings, or even outrage. The good news is that

speech acts are now being presented explicitly in many of the textbooks of dominant languages like English and Spanish. Workshops and several web sites provide tips for teachers, as well as pedagogical materials and videotaped examples that can serve as resources. Within the LCTL community, scholars and teachers of Japanese have figured prominently in curriculum development for teaching speech acts, as for example, in the work of Tatsuki (2005).

Scholarly work on the theory of pragmatics is at least twenty years old, although the majority of studies in this area have been published more recently. In addition to the scholarly works mentioned in this essay, instructors of LCTLs may wish to examine several key studies by recognized authorities in the field. Thomas (1995), for instance, has a helpful introduction to the field of pragmatics. Rose and Kasper (2001, 2002) have edited two books with essays focused on second language education and pragmatics. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1997, 2005) have contributed two collections of essays on second language education and interlanguage pragmatics, respectively. There also are numerous essays on a specific speech act, most commonly either compliments or apologies in an L2, that have been published in journals such as *Language Learning*, *Journal of Pragmatics*, *Applied Linguistics*, and *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*.

The attention to pragmatics that occurred in scholarship took place at the same time as the growth of the proficiency movement in foreign language teaching. Proficiency in an L2 was evaluated not only through grammatical skills but also in the performance of culturally appropriate language usage and discourse. More recently the five “C’s” of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (1999), made specific reference to competence in the understanding of L2 within its cultural context and in comparison to the speaker’s own. Thus, the groundwork that supports the inclusion of speech acts in the LCTL language curriculum now has been established in theory and in philosophy. The task at hand, then, is to examine the research available on teaching pragmatics so that classroom practices appropriate to LCTL’s can be developed.

Research into L2 Speech Acts

We know that without specific input, language learners are slow to comprehend speech acts. They are slow to perceive how to respond to cultural differences because just as they transfer L1 language patterns into learning L2, they also transfer pragmatic understanding from L1 into L2. Tanaka (1997) has noted that it is difficult to acquire pragmatic competence and that even advanced-level L2 learners are prone to pragmatic failures. Pragmatic errors are often less tolerated by native speakers than grammatical errors (Wolfson 1983). There can be negative consequences of pragmatic failure: for example native speakers may read a violation of socio-cultural rules in speaking as bad manners, rather than as a linguistic limitation (Tanaka 1997). In addition, L2 speakers may depend on preconceived notions about pragmatic norms and wrongly apply them. They may draw on stereotypes, or on simplistic presentations in textbooks or other materials they have seen or read. Learners may also apply the standards that exist in the first language communities where they were socialized to the L2 they are learning (Hinkel 2001). As a result, even though learners can become competent in speaking an L2, they are first-culture bound. In his review of the research Ellis (1994) concluded that pragmatic competence may take many years to achieve and that some speakers may never reach that goal.

We know that teachers can intervene in the process of learning pragmatics and can hasten their students' comprehension and performance of speech acts. That is to say that the explicit teaching of speech acts to L2 learners can have a positive impact. Two studies by Ishihara (2004, 2007) document the results of formal instruction of compliments to learners of English, and of an awareness-raising web program for Japanese learners, respectively. In the first study (Ishihara 2004), learners of English received 200 minutes of explicit instruction in four sessions. Ishihara's initial inventory of the students' awareness of compliments revealed that they were concerned about what to say when giving and responding to compliments in English as well as how to interpret what English-speakers meant when giving compliments to them. The measures taken at the end of instruction and one year later demonstrated that learners performed longer dialogues with a wider range of syntactic categories and more

with a greater variety of responses to compliments. Another positive impact of instruction that Ishihara's work records is the increased level of comfort that her students reported feeling when giving and responding to compliments.

In her second study, Ishihara (2007) reports on a one-month on-line course on speech acts that was designed to instill a sense of appropriate language use in the university students of Japanese who volunteered to participate. The data consisted of journal entries produced by the students as they completed each of the five speech act units. The comments from students confirmed that the explicit teaching of pragmatic features and the cultural ideologies that underlie them did result in a heightened awareness. In addition, practicing the language forms in varying contexts generated greater competence. Of particular note to the present essay is the finding that the students taking the on-line course felt that the teaching of speech acts should be integrated into the curriculum.

What pedagogical approaches can best orient our classroom practice? Meier (2003) argues for a teaching goal that includes three areas: pragmatic competence and intercultural competence, with strategic competence playing the mediating role. What does Meier mean? First, she means that we must raise the awareness of our students to the connection between language and the cultural context in which it is spoken. Second, we must work to develop intercultural sensitivity in our students by helping them to assume an insider's perspective. Third, our students must learn to differentiate between the variables that govern communication, such as gender, status, age, and education. Fourth, our students must develop their strategic competence; that is, the ability to recover from a communication breakdown.

Judd (1999) recommends a scaffolding approach to the teaching of speech acts. The steps he outlines can be summarized as follows: 1) teacher analysis of speech acts, 2) cognitive awareness skills, 3) receptive/integrative skills, 4) controlled productive skills, and finally 5) free, integrated practice. Judd develops the study of speech acts from awareness and understanding of what they are, to structured rehearsal of speech acts, and finally to skits or other more authentic environments for speech act production.

Cohen (2005) makes a detailed presentation on how to apply learner styles and strategies to the acquisition and performance of

speech acts. He outlines practical steps for gaining information through data collection and observation, cross-cultural analysis, modeling from native speakers, and the reading of published materials. In terms of speech act use strategies, Cohen recommends memory aids, speech act practice with fellow learners and native speakers, and requests for feedback from native speakers. In addition, Cohen introduces two particularly innovative ideas—the adjustment of speech act learning to students’ learning style preferences, and the use of strategies to recover from misunderstanding or non-comprehension in a conversation.

Two elements of classroom instruction that appear regularly in the research are (a) the importance of collecting and using examples of authentic speech act data, and (b) the need to develop appropriate protocols to assess students’ comprehension and performance of speech acts.

Ishihara (2007) favors the noticing hypothesis presented by Schmidt (1993) as the basis for organizing the Japanese on-line course. This hypothesis proposes that for learners to convert the input of speech acts into actual production, they must notice and understand both the linguistic forms and the contextual features. Ishihara activated students’ noticing with samples of speech acts, the contexts in which they were used, and the linguistic components that characterized each one.

The process called “noticing” also has been referred to as the learner-as-researcher approach by Tanaka (1997). Hinkel (2001), Judd (1999), Washburn (2001), and Tanaka suggest that using authentic speech act data collected from real situations or from movies or television programming provides students with a wealth of information that can be analyzed for content, variables, variation, and socio-cultural features of speaking and behaving. Other methods of gathering data from native speakers are to administer surveys and questionnaires, or conduct interviews. The need for data from different authentic sources rests on the fact that textbooks and teachers are not always reliable sources of speech acts and that native speakers often do not behave as they say they do. Another reason to use authentic data is to help students recognize repeated actions that signal socio-culturally accepted forms from idiosyncratic ones (Hinkel 2001).

A second area of research on teaching that has attracted at-

tention is the development of appropriate protocols to assess students' comprehension and performance of speech acts. To evaluate students' comprehension or awareness of speech acts, they can be asked to rate responses in speech act situations by declaring them acceptable, more or less acceptable or unacceptable. When instructors want to assess the students' ability to produce speech acts, there are both written and oral methods. The most common written assessment is the discourse completion task (DCT), which provides situations and then a dialogue in which lines are missing. Students provide the missing information in several turns, thus requiring understanding of the situation. Actual performance of speech acts, such as skits and role-plays, are more difficult to evaluate, since the level of students' skills in acting, pronunciation, and authentic behavior can have an impact on the acceptability of the role-play. The assessment of students' pragmalinguistic skills (i.e. knowledge of what to say in a given situation) may be complicated by students' sociopragmatic competence (i.e. their willingness to perform in accordance with target-language norms); that is, some students may wish to adopt native-like behavior, while others may want to deviate. Thus, both production and comprehension assessment may be necessary. Rubrics have been developed and tested that evaluate the speaker's intentions in a speech act, the speaker's linguistic skills, the speaker's socio-cultural skills or a combination of all three of these elements. Involving students in the assessment of their peers can help learners identify how their words and actions are being understood, and if they fit within the range of acceptability. This kind of activity helps students understand the consequences of their decision to follow, or not, the target language pragmatic norms.

Theory into Practice

I would like to outline briefly my two experiences teaching speech acts in an advanced-level Portuguese language course. The course design was based on the work posted by Cohen and Ishihara on the CARLA site at the University of Minnesota (<http://www.iles.umn.edu/introtospeechacts>). Although at the time I was not familiar with Judd's (1999) model for teaching speech acts, I did follow his scaffolding approach and some of his recommended

steps. First, I asked students about their opinions and knowledge of the interactions between culture and language. They received a questionnaire asking about their understanding of culture and their beliefs regarding its importance to Portuguese-language speakers. Here are the questions:

1. How would you define culture?
2. What are some examples of culture?
3. Does culture (or the definition of culture) change over time? Why?
4. How might a definition of culture be different depending on the age, race, gender, social class, or education of the individual defining it?
5. Is it important to Portuguese language learners to understand the culture of Brazil (or other Portuguese-speaking countries)? Why or why not?
6. Which is more important: to speak Portuguese well, or to act appropriately in Brazil? Why?
7. What have you learned in your Portuguese classes about Brazilian culture?

The answers to question number 6, “Which is more important: to speak Portuguese well, or to act appropriately in Brazil? Why?” revealed the students’ awareness of behaving appropriately even though the class had not yet directly discussed this point. The majority of students reported that it was more important to act appropriately. Here are some of their explanations: “If you act well, people will overlook your grammar mistakes.” “It is more offensive to violate social norms than to pronounce a word incorrectly.” “If you act appropriately people will be more open to you as a foreigner.” “The right response is carried through the body.” One minority view echoed what has been commonly accepted by language teachers and textbook writers for many years—“One must have good knowledge and understanding of language, then you can learn to act properly.”

Next, I adapted a handout from the CARLA site titled “Speech Acts” that I used to introduce the topic to the class (Appendix A). The handout defined speech acts, presented an argument for

why they should be taught, gave an example of a compliment in American culture, and then described the specific speech acts to be studied in the course. The key points were that speech acts such as compliments, apologies, requests, thanks, and complaints are intimately tied to the cultural context in which they are used. The correct or incorrect use of speech acts can create difficult moments for L2 learners. Students were notified that it was their choice to “act like a native” in their decision to use or not the speech acts taught in the course, but that either way they would be responsible for the consequences of their choices when they interacted with native speakers.

My students had several sources of authentic materials to observe and analyze as data collectors. They watched filmed scenes and reviewed their transcripts for each of the six different speech acts studied during the semester. The scenes were improvisations by three Brazilians, two teaching assistants and a visiting family member. In addition, the students asked native informants questions about the vocabulary, context, and use of those same speech acts by e-mails or during in-class interviews. The class also read books about Brazilian culture and communication in order to understand the cultural context that shapes how speech acts are performed.

The students practiced speech acts by writing, performing, and filming their own skits of speech act situations (Appendix B). Together with our native speaker informants, the students reviewed and critiqued their own work. In some cases there was enough class time for the students to improvise scenes before they wrote and filmed them. When there was not enough time to improvise, students were developing their receptive/integrative skills at the same time they were required to produce their skits. Thus, according to Judd’s (1999) model, steps 3, 4, and 5 were not always adequately supported by my class design. Although the students were required to have our native informants review their skits for language use and non-verbal communication before they performed them, they did not always have enough time to rehearse those skills before filming their scenes. During the analysis of the films the students could see problems with non-verbal behavior. In addition, they did become more adept at finding and repeating acceptable language choices and strategies. Thus, the students improved from one speech act assignment to the

next one, since many of the non-verbal behaviors were similar while the specific vocabulary and usage changed.

One of the areas that Judd does not mention, the integration of speech acts into their cultural context, received greater attention the second time I taught the course. The worksheets that the students completed guided them to analyze not only the linguistic forms and pragmatic strategies, but also the cultural values that speech acts represent (Appendix C). Students learned anthropological terms like high-context, low-context and collective vs. individualistic societies from reading assignments in English. Through consultation with native speakers, they also developed their own Portuguese vocabulary of terms that linked speech acts to cultural values—such as *digressão* ‘digression,’ *amenizar* ‘to soothe or appease,’ and *agradar* ‘to please.’ All of these terms apply to behaviors that Brazilians use when performing speech acts to minimize conflict and bad feelings and in support of maintaining in-group relationships.

Based on Meier’s (2003) goals of pragmatic, intercultural and strategic competence, my students did gain an awareness of the connection between language and cultural context. They attempted to put themselves into the shoes of Brazilians, by watching, speaking to, and trying to behave like them in their own speech act skits. Unfortunately, only a few of the situations they performed drew attention to the contextual variables of status, class, gender, and so forth. In addition, the students did not have to experience pragmatic failure, since they scripted their scenes and discussed the pragmatic goals ahead of time. In the future, it would be helpful to have examples of failed communication, followed by opportunities to figure out how to recover from those failures. The students often asked our invited Brazilian informants questions that anticipated pragmatic failure, but I did not record any of those exchanges for future reference.

In terms of the strategies recommended by Cohen (2005), my course utilized only two—the observation of what native speakers do and the reading of published research and web sites on culture and communication. From the standpoint of use, the course employed only one of Cohen’s strategies--the use of native speakers to gain feedback.

Given the limitations of a one semester course, it would have been difficult to employ all of the strategies, but Cohen’s suggestions

provide more ways of exploiting the knowledge of the native speakers who volunteered to help provide feedback to the students.

Based on the research of Judd (1999), Cohen (2005), and Ishihara (2004, 2007), among others, my speech acts classes demonstrated two weaknesses. First, the Brazilian social contexts modeled in the native speaker scenes and dramatized in the students' own scripts were limited by the participants' similarity in age, educational background, and social class as well as by the informality of the situations selected for them to perform. There were several skit situations between older and younger people, one between a boss and an employee, and one between a customer and a service manager. In the future, I need to provide a greater range of examples so that the variables, such as age and social status, which shape how speech acts are performed, can be understood and practiced.

Second, I did not have adequate assessment tools to verify if my students could actually produce the needed responses in the appropriate contexts. I also lacked sufficient tools to help my students evaluate each other. The rubric that I developed for my evaluation of their skits contained the following categories: vocabulary, strategies used, interest in the other person, touching the person for a reason, expression of emotion, and physical distance between speakers. While these were categories that we had discussed in class, I used a numeric grading system. This system did not provide me with the descriptions necessary to be able to distinguish that some students actually were performing better than others. The students evaluated each other's skits based on pronunciation of the specific sounds we were practicing, appropriate vocabulary use, and body language. The numeric criteria I used—3 (excellent), 2 (good job), and 1 (could be better) — could easily be adapted. Rather than assessing if students were giving good performances, it would be more meaningful to use terms like— *acceptable*, *more or less acceptable*, and *unacceptable*— to help students determine if the events portrayed in the skits were within cultural limits. The final exam did ask students to demonstrate and document with specific examples their understanding of the relationship between speech acts and Brazilian socio-cultural values. It did not, however, ask them to provide examples of appropriate language and/or behavior in a dialog or situation. Therefore, the final exam

did not entirely reflect the manner in which the speech acts were taught.

To conclude, the existing research and my two experiments with the explicit instruction of speech acts have convinced me that they must be integrated into our LCTL curriculum. Although my students and I believe in the value of teaching speech acts, we all agreed that it would be better to have them taught in all of the language classes, rather than condense them into just one advanced language class. The students often remarked that they felt rushed and found it difficult to integrate the linguistic, strategic, and socio-cultural information of one speech act before the class moved on to the next. In fact, most students need more time to understand and process the variables involved in speech acts, so they can feel confident in both their linguistic competence and their performances. The scaffolding that Judd (1999) develops for an individual class could be applied to the language curriculum. For example, one could start by building awareness of speech acts and putting them into a comparative framework with the students' own culture(s) in the introductory language courses. At the intermediate level linguistic and behavioral elements could be added to the existing repertoire of speech acts that were introduced in the beginning course. Last, at the advanced levels one could introduce the variables of social class, gender, social distance, time, age, and purpose. Another approach to enriching the curriculum with speech acts would be to use Cohen's (2005) strategies for learning in the beginning language classes in order to build awareness of speech acts and interaction with native speakers. Instructors could then apply the learning use strategies to the intermediate and advanced level classes in which role-plays and interactions as well as communication strategies might be more readily applied and practiced.

Building awareness of speech acts can begin in the earliest days of language learning when students are performing greetings and leave-takings, introductions, thank-you, and other simple social skills. At this point it can be noted that these actions are imbued with cultural content that determines how, when, where and with whom these terms are employed. As language learning materials become more complex, instructors can teach the speech acts that require greater language abilities and cultural awareness, such as complaints,

requests, refusals, and apologies. Teaching speech acts provides an opportunity to integrate language learning into a meaningful cultural context from the first day of class throughout the remainder of the language curriculum. The integration of speech acts into the LCTL curriculum means that we can prepare our students to demonstrate real communicative competence by developing both their linguistic and pragmatic skills.

Web Sites

On-line teacher's book by Bardovi-Harlig, K. and R. Mahan-Taylor, (2003) eds. *Teaching Pragmatics*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. State Department on-line:

<http://exchanges.state.gov/education/engteaching/pragmatics.htm>

CARLA Speech Acts,

<http://www.iles.umn.edu/introtospeechacts>

CARLA Speech Acts for Spanish,

http://www.carla.umn.edu/speechacts/sp_pragmatics/home.html

Indiana University *Discourse Pragmatics*,

<http://www.indiana.edu/~discprag>

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Appendix A

Speech Acts

I. What are Speech Acts?

A **speech act** is an utterance that serves some function in communication. It might contain just one word, as in "Sorry!" to perform an apology, or several words or sentences: "I'm sorry I forgot your birthday. It just slipped my mind." Speech acts include real-life interactions and require not only knowledge of the language, but also knowledge about how to use that language appropriately in a given situation within that culture. Speech acts are often difficult to perform in a foreign language because they are so closely tied to the culture. An utterance that works in English may not convey the same meaning when translated into the second language.

When performing speech acts, there are two key questions that the speaker must attempt to understand and answer.

1. Who is the person I am addressing? That is, what is the age, social class/status, familiarity, role being played in this situation, and gender of the person to whom I am talking?
2. What is the context? That is, where are we (at work, school, home, in public), who is present (family, friends, acquaintances, strangers), and what are we doing (eating, socializing, working, casual or formal)?

The notion of what "correct" means with regard to sociolinguistic behavior

The truth is that in dealing with language in a social context, there is always variation, even among natives – given their personality, their level of schooling, their cultural background, and so forth. For this reason, many times there is no one best way to say something. Rather, there are preferred approaches.

Degree of nativeness

Should you be expected to deliver a speech act the way a native does? In many cases, your delivery will be accepted even if you violate certain rules. If people recognize that you are a non-native speaker, they will be less likely to take offense at any awkward speech acts you may deliver. In other cases, it may be accepted but would still be inappropriate. In still other cases, it may not be acceptable at all.

The interactive nature of speech acts

One of the truly attractive features of speech act work is that it calls for looking at language in context. Sometimes in language class, there is a tendency to study and to learn language out of context or at least in a non-interactive way. In order to apologize or complain, it implies that there is someone else who is being apologized or complained to and this person's response is not necessarily predictable. It is not necessarily clear just where the interaction will lead. So in order for you to fine-tune your ability to perform speech acts, you need partners and practice.

II. Why Should Speech Acts be Taught?

Learners of all languages tend to have difficulty understanding the intended meaning communicated by a speech act, or producing a speech act using appropriate language and manner in the language being learned. Research has found that classroom instruction in speech acts can help learners to improve their performance of speech acts and thus their interactions with native speakers.

Speech acts have been taught in some second language classrooms, yet most materials have been written based on the intuition of the textbook writers. There seems to exist a shared belief that native English speakers just know intuitively how to interact in their language and should be able to explain the social use of the language to the learners. However, this commonly shared belief is not necessarily true; in fact, a native speaker's intuition is sometimes unreliable. For example, a textbook writer for English as a Second Language (ESL) might have a teenager greeting his friend at the airport with, "Hello,

Justin. How was the flight? I see you got a new bag," when he might actually say something like, "Hey, man — what's happening? I like your bag. It's awesome!" Often the use of the language is unconscious and speakers of the language may be able to explain what one "should say," but are unlikely to have an accurate, comprehensive, or objective picture of how people actually interact. For example, in ESL textbooks, speakers typically accept a compliment modestly and with grace:

A: What a beautiful dress!

B: Thank you. I'm glad you like it.

However, in real life, when someone compliments us, we may reply:

A: That's a cute dress you're wearing.

B: Really? This old rag? I got it at the Salvation Army for \$2.00!

or

B: You're the third person today who's complimented me on it.
I must have done something right!

Research has shown that native speakers of American English accept a compliment only about one third of the time, which would suggest that what ESL learners are learning from textbooks may be grammatically correct, but inauthentic in terms of real language and real interactions with native speakers.

III. Descriptions of Speech Acts

- **Requests**

In the requesting situation, the speaker is asking the hearer to take some action for the benefit of the speaker. Normally, such an action does not profit the hearer. Therefore, the speaker uses various strategies to minimize such an imposition on the hearer. For example, in English, the speaker makes the request seem smaller than it

really is (e.g., *Can I **just** take a peek at your homework **for a second**?*), or the speaker may acknowledge the imposition by making it sound bigger than it really is (e.g., *I know I'm asking you a **huge** favor, but ...*).

- **Apologies**

In apologizing, the speaker recognizes the infraction or offense caused through his/her fault and attempts to repair the relationship with the hearer. The situation may be fairly tense if the infraction is large or if the hearer is in a more powerful position on the social scale than you are.

- **Compliments**

A compliment in English often functions as a “social lubricant,” helping the social relationships to go smoothly. As in performing other speech acts, using an appropriate level of politeness is an important strategy in giving and responding to compliments. Using appropriate adjectives/adverbs, as well as selecting appropriate complimenting topics, is also key to giving compliments.

- **Refusals**

A refusal can be a response to a request, an invitation, an offer, or a suggestion addressed to the speaker. What is common to most refusals is the fact that the speaker is communicating a potentially undesirable message as far as the hearer is concerned. Unlike accepting an invitation or complying with a request, refusing one is usually not a pleasant speech act to perform.

- **Thanks**

In the thanking situation, there usually is an imbalance in the relationship between the speaker and the hearer. The speaker owes a favor to the hearer, as the hearer is doing or has done something for the benefit of the speaker. By thanking, the speaker expresses his/her feelings of indebtedness as well as those of thanks.

- **Complaints**

These are expressions of displeasure, disapproval, anger, or pain that are designed to evoke a response in the hearer. The speaker

feels a need to change the existing situation either by addressing the responsible person or by speaking about the offense to a third party in order to solicit solidarity.

IV. To Speak or not to Speak like the Natives

Even if you are aware of differences in cultural norms between native and target language speakers, you still may bring in first language norms in performing speech acts in a second (or third) language. This may sometimes be an unconscious slip of tongue, but in other cases it may simply be **your preferred way of expression** regardless of what language you are speaking. Your interlocutors in the target language may interpret your language as your way of expressing yourself and may not mind if you do not speak like natives. Some others, however, may perceive it differently from the way you intend it to be. We will show you some typical ways native speakers of Portuguese use the language. Although we use native speakers' language as a model, we do not expect you to adopt it at all times. Language and the consequences of what is said belong to the speakers after all! (These materials were adapted from the following web site: www.iles.umn.edu/IntroToSpeechActs)

Questions

(Use the back if necessary to complete these questions)

1. Using your own words, write how you would explain to a friend what speech acts are?
2. Using your own words in your native language, create a short dialog between you and a friend that demonstrates one of the speech acts mentioned in this handout.
3. What is the argument in favor of teaching Speech Acts? Do you agree or not? Why?

Appendix B

Situations for Speech Act Performances

I. Requests

1. Last week, you were sick and missed two class lectures for your history course. Since the exam is drawing near, you need to get the class notes from a classmate. Who do you chose and what do you say?

2. You are about to enter a music concert hall for a performance with a good friend. Just before buying a ticket, you realize that you are a bit short of money and you ask your friend to help you buy the ticket.

II. Apologies

1. You have stayed out late with some friends. As soon as you return to the apartment, you realize that you have left your keys in your room and are locked out. You will have to wake up your roommate in order to get in. You ring the doorbell several times and finally she answers. What do you say?

2. The bus is very crowded and as you attempt to get off you step on several people's feet and bump into others. What do you say?

3. You call to a friend's house late at night and his mother answers the phone. How do you tell her you are sorry for waking her up?

III. Compliments

1. A close friend of yours, Augusto, is wearing a new T-shirt he just brought back from his trip to New York during summer vacation. You notice it immediately. What do you say? (Can you ask where he bought it? Can you ask how much he paid for it?)

2. Imagine an informal dinner party that a married couple is having at their home. Supposing that the wife prepared the meal, how would the husband and the guests compliment her on the wonderful meal? What do guests say? What does the husband say?

3. When you visit your friend at his apartment, he shows you the new computer he has just bought. It's the newest model and very fast. You are impressed. What do you say?

IV. Refusals

1. Last week, the instructor for your seminar invited the class to an informal party to be held two weeks later. A week later she runs into you on campus, she asks you if you will be able to join them. You have another party invitation that you have already accepted. What do you say?

2. You've just begun to work part-time. Your boss asks if you can cover for a co-worker tomorrow who just called in sick with the flu. In fact, you have a date scheduled for the first time in three weeks. Will your boy/girlfriend understand? Can you avoid working tomorrow? What do you say?

3. Several good friends of yours are treating you to dinner for your birthday. They offer to order you even more food and drink, but you've already had enough. What do you say?

V. *Thanks*

1. Now imagine that you are a student and a part-time teacher. This is the end of the semester and you have three important final exams and a long term paper to write this week. Due to your bad planning, you feel swamped. Ask your close friend and fellow teacher if he can teach for you this week. Your friend is sympathetic about your situation and accepts your request. You are really relieved to hear his response and thank him.

2. You and a friend travel to Rio de Janeiro and stay with your friend's uncle. He is a retired man who hosts you, feeds you, and shows you around during your entire stay. As you leave, what would you say? A month later, the uncle comes to your town and you see him at your friend's house. How might you thank him again for his previous kindness?

3. You borrowed class notes from a classmate. As you return them, you thank him/her. Now imagine you are the classmate accepting the returned notes and the thanks. What would you say?

VI. *Complaints (Also can be Requests)*

1. Can you return defective merchandise to a store? If so, what do you say? What can you expect to receive in return, money or a new item?

2. The bus driver on your route is especially careless today. He is running red lights, stopping too quickly and not letting passengers get off the bus safely. What can you do?

3. The food you have been served in an elegant restaurant is cold. Who do you talk to? What should you say?

Appendix C SAMPLE

Report on Speech Acts
Apologies (Pedidos de desculpa)

Name _____

<p>Exemplos: palavras mostrando sinceridade, exclamações. (Give examples of vocabulary used in apologies that demonstrate sincerity, or exclamations of regret.)</p>	<p>Estratégias: explicar, amenizar, oferecer concertar, aceitar a culpabilidade, repetição. (Explain the strategies used by your informants to carry out an apology- explaining, softening the situation, offering repair, accepting responsibility, repeating the apology.)</p>	<p>Hipótese: O que diz Novinger sobre a comunicação no Brasil ? Qual é a função dos pedidos na cultura brasileira? (Form an hypothesis about apologies based on the ideas developed in Novinger's book <i>Communicating with Brazilians: When Yes Means No</i>. What is the function of apologies in Brazilian culture?)</p>
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Você concorda ou discorda desta citação? Explique porque. “A desculpa ajuda amenizar a situação e amenizar a pessoa. São importantes porque podem facilitar a compreensão entre a pessoa ofendida e a pessoa que faz a desculpa.”
(Do you agree or disagree with this statement. Explain why. “The apology helps to soothe the situation and appease the person. They are important because they help facilitate understanding between the person offended and the person making the apology.)