

## Describing Speech Acts – Linking Research & Pedagogy

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- Natural conversation can be complex – with overlaps, co-construction of meaning, and repairs woven in the frequent turn taking.
- So authentic speech acts may not show up as neatly packaged interchanges – rather as disjointed interventions over a series of turns.
- Nonetheless, empirical research in pragmatics has utilized various means of data elicitation to come up with material providing an idealized description of the more common speech acts.
- These descriptions include examples of the language structures used and the norms for pragmatic behavior in a range of speech communities where the target language is used.

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### Website for Teachers, Curriculum Writers, & Learners

- With funding from the Office of International Education to the National Language Resource Center at CARLA.
- A pragmatics website for teachers, curriculum writers, and learners (1997) with detailed information and teaching materials for 6 speech acts in up to 10 languages: <http://www.carla.umn.edu/speechacts>.
  - The website was in response to an irate curriculum writer who complained at the 17th TESOL Sociolinguistic Colloquium in 1996 that researchers reported the results of various studies without providing any guidelines for the writing of materials.

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### Descriptions of Speech Acts

<http://www.carla.umn.edu/speechacts/descriptions.html>

- These lists were originally developed with the intention of supporting teachers and curriculum writers in their efforts to share this information with learners, as well as providing learners self-access to such information.
- Available on the website: six speech acts – *apologies, complaints, compliments and responses to compliments, requests, refusals, and thanks* – with examples from various languages (e.g., English, Spanish, German, Chinese, Japanese, and Hebrew).

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### Compliments and Responses to Compliments

- Functions of compliments in American English, Arabic, Spanish, Japanese, & Chinese
- Topics of compliments
- Syntactic categories for compliments
- Semantic formulas (strategies) for responses to compliments
- Gender differences in complimenting

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### Refusals

- Functions of refusing (e.g., of requests, invitations, offers, & suggestions) in American English, Arabic, British English, Chinese, German, Japanese, & Spanish
- Direct and indirect refusals in Arabic, Chinese, and Spanish
- Adjuncts to refusals in Japanese and Spanish

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## Apologies

- Functions of apologies in American English and Hebrew
- Semantic formulae (strategies) for apologizing:
  - expression of apology
  - acknowledgement of responsibility
  - explanation or account
  - offer of repair
  - promise of non-recurrence
- Modifications of apologies
- Intensifiers

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## Requests

- Functions of requests in Argentinian Spanish, Australian English, Canadian French, German, Hebrew, & Japanese
- Request segments
- Request mitigators/upgraders
- Supportive moves
- Request perspectives
- Conventionally indirect substrategies
- Non-conventionally indirect strategies (hints)
- Social/situational variability of requests

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## Website for Learners of Japanese (2003)

- A self-access website for learners of Japanese with instructional units for five speech acts: requests, refusals, compliments, thanks, and apologies (see Cohen & Ishihara, 2005; Ishihara, 2007).
- Either on a stand-alone basis or as a supplement to an intermediate course in Japanese: <http://www.iles.umn.edu/IntroToSpeechActs/>.
- Strategies deemed supportive for the learning and performance of speech acts, and especially for speech acts in Japanese, were identified and built into the curriculum (see Ishihara, 2007).
- The website materials included unscripted, audio-recorded pragmatic performance of native speakers to assist students in becoming more pragmatically adept at receptive skills. The appropriateness of the dialogues was evaluated by native speakers.



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## Website for Learners of Spanish (2006)

- *Dancing with Words* – Spanish pragmatics website developed over 11 months and launched last August ([http://www.carla.umn.edu/speechacts/sp\\_pragmatics/home.html](http://www.carla.umn.edu/speechacts/sp_pragmatics/home.html)):
  - 1) empirically-based speech act material from naturalistic and elicited sources,
  - 2) efforts to accommodate conversational dynamics in the presentation of the material,
  - 3) attention to directness/indirectness and relative politeness, and
  - 4) guidelines for enhancing strategies for learning and performing speech acts.(Sykes & Cohen, in press)

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## An Activity with the Database

- This activity, “**Exploring Research-Based Descriptions of Speech Acts,**” will give you an opportunity to explore the speech act of your choice, drawing on the CARLA Pragmatics website.
- If you understand the “anatomy” of a given speech act, you can do a more effective job of sharing that information with learners.

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## References

- Cohen, A. D. & Ishihara, N. (2005). A web-based approach to strategic learning of speech acts. Minneapolis, MN: Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA), University of Minnesota, 57 pp. <http://www.carla.umn.edu/speechacts/Japanese%20Speech%20Act%20Report%20Rev.%20June05.pdf>
- Ishihara, N. (2007). Web-based curriculum for pragmatics instruction in Japanese as a foreign language: An explicit awareness-raising approach. *Language Awareness*, 16(1), 21-40.
- Sykes, J. M. & Cohen, A. D. (In press). Observed learner behavior, reported use, and evaluation of a website for learning Spanish pragmatics. In M. Bowles, R. Foote, & S. Perpiñán (Eds.), *Second language acquisition and research: Focus on form and function. Selected proceedings of the 2007 Second Language Research Forum*. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.

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