# Examining Strategies and Supportive Moves in Requestive Speech Acts: A Comparative Study of 'Top Notch' and 'Summit' English Series

Mohamad Reza Farangi[1*]  iD
Zahra Kheradmand[2]  iD

[*1]Assistant professor of Applied Linguistics, Department of Applied Humanities, Kashmar Higher Education Institute, Kashmar, Iran
[2]Ph.D. Candidate in Neuroscience, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

**ABSTRACT**

This study investigated the discourse features of requestive speech acts in 10 textbooks from the Top Notch and Summit series to assess their potential for developing learners' pragmatic competence. Requests were analyzed in terms of directness strategies, head acts, and supportive discourse moves, drawing on the frameworks of Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) and Farch and Kasper (1989). The findings revealed a bias towards direct request strategies in both series, likely influenced by their utilitarian discourse structure. While Top Notch provided a wider range of directness levels, Summit, designed for advanced learners, offered limited exposure to diverse request strategies. Internal supportive moves, particularly the use of questions, were more prevalent than external moves in both series. These findings suggest that while the series contribute to language learning, they may not fully equip learners with the pragmatic competence necessary for effective intercultural communication. Further research is needed to explore the impact of explicit instruction and implicit learning on the acquisition of request strategies.

**KEYWORDS:** Textbook evaluation; Requestive speech acts; Supportive discourse moves; Request strategies; Directness level

## 1.  Introduction

In teaching English, incorporating the study of speech acts and their governing principles in classroom instruction offers opportunities, benefits, and difficulties. Teachers need adequate expertise to introduce these concepts and help students grasp their pragmatic dimensions while acknowledging that they can be both advantageous and demanding (Darong, 2024; Sarbandi et al., 2017). Students with limited proficiency or minimal real-world exposure to the language might find speech acts challenging. Additionally, since conventions vary significantly across languages, cultures, and social groups—even within the same group—learners must adapt to new, culturally specific forms in a foreign language (Farangi & Nejadghanbar, 2024). When interpreting meaning in a second language, learners often draw on their own cultural and linguistic experiences (Christison, 2018). To fully comprehend speech acts, one must move beyond mere fluency and explore how utterances function and how speakers use patterns to interact effectively. Thus, understanding the socio-cultural norms surrounding language use and the ways speakers convey meaning is both beneficial and essential for effective communication.

Searle (1969) categorized illocutionary acts into five types: representatives, directives, expressives, commissives, and declarations. Among these, *requests* fall under the category of directives and are considered face-threatening acts. Brown and Levinson (1987) describe requests as "*an attempt to get [the] hearer to do an act which [the] speaker wants [the] hearer to do, and*

*which it is not obvious that [the] hearer will do in the normal course of events or of [the] hearer's own accord*" (p. 66). Thus, requests inherently challenge the interpersonal equilibrium between speakers and hearers, necessitating careful attention to levels of directness and politeness. As Blum-Kulka (1991) observes, requests are a representative way of speaking within a specific culture, reflecting broader social norms and conventions. Effective communication requires learners to understand not only the linguistic forms but also the sociocultural nuances that govern the use of requests. These include levels of directness, politeness strategies, the force of the requests, and methods for mitigating their illocutionary impact.

Reviewing various theoretical models that have been proposed to discuss request strategies and supportive moves, the current study aimed to conduct a thorough analysis of the content of the *Top Notch* and *Summit* series, which are widely used textbooks in Iranian EFL contexts. These textbooks play a significant role in shaping learners' pragmatic competence, particularly in areas such as making requests, which are essential for effective communication (Rashidi & Meihami, 2016). The primary objective of this study was to investigate the main request strategies and supportive moves presented in the requests used throughout these materials. By doing so, the study sought to determine whether these textbooks adequately expose learners to a diverse range of strategies and discourse moves for expressing requests. This examination is crucial to assess if the textbooks possess the potential to equip learners with the necessary skills to navigate different social and cultural contexts when making requests, thereby enhancing their communicative competence. Furthermore, the study aimed to identify any gaps or limitations in the presentation of request strategies, providing insights for material developers and educators to improve the pedagogical effectiveness of these resources.

This research is particularly significant given the increasing emphasis on the integration of pragmatic competence in language instruction. Incorporating the teaching of speech acts in EFL classrooms is crucial as it provides teachers with effective methods to strengthen students' conversational abilities and refine instructional techniques (Darong, 2024). By embedding speech acts into classroom activities, learners are encouraged to engage more actively and communicate with one another through realistic dialogues, such as making polite requests, giving compliments, or offering apologies (Pérez-Hernández, 2020). This method not only aids in understanding the nuances of language use but also boosts student engagement and motivation. Through structured conversational practice, students develop stronger pragmatic skills, allowing them to use English more appropriately and naturally in various contexts. Overall, focusing on speech acts in EFL instruction enriches the learning experience by combining language practice with cultural awareness, leading to more competent and meaningful communication (Bataineh et al., 2017). Requests, as a key directive speech act, are integral to achieving communicative goals in various social and professional settings. Therefore, equipping learners with the ability to navigate the nuances of requests, including appropriate strategies and mitigating discourse moves, is essential for their overall communicative success. The *Top Notch* and *Summit* series, as widely used instructional materials, have the potential to shape learners' pragmatic awareness and communicative skills, making their content worthy of detailed examination.

The choice of the *Top Notch* and *Summit* series for analysis is justified by their widespread adoption and influence in English language education globally, making them key instruments in shaping learners' pragmatic awareness and communicative competence. These textbooks are designed for intermediate to advanced learners and are frequently used in both academic and professional settings, where the development of effective communication skills is critical. As such, their content plays a significant role in how learners perceive and practice speech acts, including requests, apologies, and other pragmatic functions. A detailed examination of these materials is therefore essential to ensure that they adequately prepare learners for real-world interactions by providing comprehensive coverage of pragmatic strategies and cultural nuances (Rattanawong & Thongrin, 2022).

Moreover, the *Top Notch* and *Summit* series are notable for their integration of authentic materials and task-based activities, which aim to bridge the gap between classroom learning and practical application. However, given the complexity of pragmatic competence, it is important to evaluate whether these textbooks effectively address the diversity of request strategies and supportive moves necessary for successful communication across cultures. By scrutinizing the presentation of requestive speech acts in these widely-used materials, we can assess their adequacy in fostering learners' ability to navigate varying social and cultural contexts (Farangi & Zabbah, 2023). This analysis not only highlights areas for improvement but also contributes to the broader goal of enhancing pedagogical practices in language education (Farangi & Naami, 2024; Zhang & Su, 2021). Thus, the selection of these textbooks serves as a critical case study for understanding how instructional materials influence pragmatic development.

## 2. Literature review

Given the focus of this study on the *Top Notch* and *Summit* series, a review of prior research examining these textbooks' different dimensions is pertinent. Several studies have explored the linguistic and pragmatic elements of these series, offering insights into their strengths and limitations. Soozandefar and Sahragard (2011) investigated the pragmatic aspects of conversations in *Top Notch* by analyzing language functions and speech acts. They applied Halliday's framework for language functions and Searle's taxonomy of speech acts to conversations from the *Top Notch Fundamental* textbooks. Their findings indicated an unequal distribution of language functions—such as instrumental, interactional, and imaginative—and speech acts, including representatives, directives, and expressives. The researchers concluded that the conversations were pragmatically inadequate for fostering real-life communication due to their limited representation of essential functions and acts. Kafi et al. (2013) examined the impact of *Top Notch* and *Interchange* series on Iranian EFL learners' cultural attitudes. They found that these series were effective in influencing learners' perspectives on cultural issues. Notably, learners with higher English proficiency exhibited greater cultural shifts compared to those with lower proficiency levels, suggesting that advanced learners were more susceptible to the cultural content embedded in these textbooks.

Tavakol and Sayadian (2014) compared *Top Notch* and *Introductory Interchange* in terms of their potential to enhance communicative and pragmatic competence. While both series were praised for fostering speaking and writing skills through authentic materials, *Top Notch* stood out for its superior audio-visual aids and its emphasis on listening, pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm. However, *Interchange* was noted for incorporating more collaborative activities, such as pair and group work, to enhance learners' speaking abilities. Despite their differences, both series were recommended for their contributions to communicative competence. Askaripour (2014) evaluated the learning objectives of the *Top Notch* series using Bloom's revised taxonomy. The analysis revealed an unequal distribution of objectives, with a predominant focus on lower-order thinking skills (understanding, applying, and remembering) at the expense of higher-order skills (analyzing, evaluating, and creating). This imbalance underscored the need for textbooks to promote metacognitive and critical thinking skills, especially as learners' progress to higher proficiency levels.

Ahmadi Safa et al. (2015) explored EFL teachers' and learners' attitudes towards the potential of *Top Notch* to foster intercultural awareness and competence. Their study assessed dimensions such as cultural knowledge, intercultural skills, and cross-cultural understanding. While both groups appreciated the series' cultural content, teachers—due to their greater experience and language proficiency—expressed higher expectations for the series to comprehensively address intercultural competence. Homayounzadeh and Sahragard (2015) assessed the ability of *Top Notch* and *Summit* to foster intercultural communicative competence through an analysis of sociocultural identities (cultural, ethnic, gender, and personal). Their findings highlighted the strengths of *Top Notch* in representing diverse global cultures, while *Summit* emphasized American and European cultural norms to acquaint advanced learners with Western communicative practices. Both series displayed a Utilitarian discourse structure, characterized by solidarity and deference, though *Summit* also incorporated elements of individualism to reflect Western ideologies.

Regarding international studies, Boxer and Pickering (1995) examined seven ELT textbooks structured around the teaching of language functions to identify issues in how they present speech acts. The analysis centers on the specific sequence of complaining and commiserating to illustrate the disparity between spontaneous, naturally occurring speech and the contrived examples created by textbook developers based on their native-speaker intuition. One key issue highlighted is that the intuitive assumptions about how speech acts are realized often diverge significantly from actual patterns found in natural speech. Additionally, the study points out that crucial information regarding the underlying social strategies of speech acts is frequently neglected. To highlight this contrast, a sample lesson on complaining and commiserating based on authentic, spontaneous speech is provided, which serves to underscore the differences between the lessons presented in the surveyed textbooks and those grounded in real-world communication.

Kawashima (2022) explored how ELT textbooks provide learners with opportunities to develop pragmatic knowledge, specifically focusing on common speech acts like giving advice, making offers, extending invitations, and making requests. To analyze how these speech acts are presented, the study examined five international beginner-level textbooks and seven Japanese high school ELT textbooks. The results showed that international textbooks typically incorporate these speech acts to simulate everyday conversational interactions. In contrast, Japanese high school textbooks primarily use them to explain grammar rules or, in some cases, to practice strategies for softening language. Both types of textbooks, however, share limitations, such as a restricted variety of situational contexts and insufficient pragmatic options for learners. Based on these findings, the study emphasizes the importance of teachers adapting textbook materials by modifying their internal features to better align with pragmatic teaching goals.

Pramono and Kurniawan (2020) investigated the frequency of pragmatic content related to the speech acts of thanking and apologizing in two Indonesian ELT textbooks: one prescribed by the Ministry of National Education and one commercially published. The analysis of the pragmatic content in the textbooks, titled *When English Rings the Bell* and *English on Sky*, was conducted using Martinez's Framework for the speech acts of thanking and apologizing. The findings revealed that both the prescribed and commercial textbooks adequately covered instances of these speech acts. However, despite the existence of multiple strategies for performing thanking and apologizing, neither textbook included a diverse range of these strategies. As a result, it is recommended that language teachers incorporate additional authentic language materials to better develop learners' pragmatic competence.

In a 2023 study by Wilson, an examination of the speech acts targeted for instruction in ELT (English Language Teaching) textbooks commonly used in Hong Kong was conducted through relational content analysis. The goal was to identify which speech acts are frequently featured or entirely absent in these materials, allowing for comparison with findings from similar studies conducted in other regions. This is significant from a pedagogical standpoint, as teachers must ensure that textbooks equip students with the ability to use a broad spectrum of speech acts effectively. Additionally, textbooks should provide clear examples and explanations to help learners understand the appropriate contexts and methods for using these speech acts. In this research, the presentation of speech acts was analyzed to assess the inclusion of pragmalinguistic (e.g., indirect speech acts) and sociopragmatic (e.g., handling high social distance) information. The results indicated a tendency to prioritize certain speech acts over others, with some being completely omitted. Furthermore, there was a notable deficiency in the provision of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic details. These findings suggest that both textbook authors and educators should reconsider how such materials are developed and selected, highlighting areas for potential improvement. Overall, this study offers valuable insights into the portrayal of speech acts in Hong Kong ELT textbooks, with important implications for textbook design and pragmatic instruction in English language teaching.

A study conducted by Ren and Han (2016) revealed that ELT textbooks used in China inadequately represented pragmatic content. The researchers noted a scarcity of contextual information, with the presentation of speech acts often relying on the intuition of the textbook writers rather than empirical data. They suggested that these materials could benefit from additional metapragmatic information, reasoning, and details about intralingual variation. Following this research, subsequent studies by Pérez-Hernández

(2019) and Ton Nu and Murray (2020) also identified a consistent lack of pragmatic information in ELT textbooks. These findings highlight a broader trend of insufficient coverage of pragmatic aspects, underscoring the need for improvement in how such content is addressed in language teaching materials.

Despite these extensive evaluations, the pragmatic aspects of requestive speech acts in *Top Notch* and *Summit* remain unexplored. Building on frameworks proposed by Blum-Kulka, Farch, and Kasper (1989), and House and Kasper (1989), this study aimed to address this gap by analyzing request strategies and supportive moves in these textbooks. Specifically, the study examined the following:

1. The distribution of request strategies in the *Top Notch* and *Summit* series.

2. The distribution of internal and external supportive moves in requestive speech acts within these textbooks.

3. The co-occurrence matrix of internal and external supportive moves with each request strategy.

The analysis focuses on the textbooks' potential to familiarize learners with various strategies and discourse moves for expressing requests. By addressing these questions, the study seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of the pragmatic content of these widely used textbooks and their role in enhancing learners' communicative competence. Therefore, this study attempted to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What is the distribution of request strategies in Top Notch and Summit series?

2. What is the distribution of internal and external supportive moves used in requestive speech acts in Top Notch and Summit series?

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Theoretical framework

Building on this foundation, Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) conceptualized requests as speech acts consisting of obligatory *head acts*—the core of the request—and optional elements known as *supportive moves*. Supportive moves are designed to modify and mitigate the illocutionary force of the head acts. Farch and Kasper (1989) classify supportive moves into two categories: (a) internal supportive moves and (b) external supportive moves.

Internal supportive moves involve lexical and syntactic modifications applied directly within the request head acts to soften the degree of directness. Lexical modifications include mitigators, such as hedging expressions, and mental verbs, which temper the assertiveness of the request. Syntactic modifications involve structural adjustments, such as the use of conditional statements or interrogative forms, to render requests less imposing. External supportive moves, by contrast, are articulated in separate utterances, either preceding or following the head act. These include strategies such as providing reasons, using preparatory statements, offering disarming remarks, presenting alternatives, employing precursors, and integrating positive politeness strategies. For example, a preparatory statement might signal the forthcoming request, while a disarming remark could alleviate potential resistance. Understanding and applying these strategies are critical for learners aiming to achieve pragmatic competence. Table 1 (not included here but suggested for inclusion in the full text) could provide illustrative examples of both internal and external supportive moves, enhancing learners' awareness of how requests are formulated and mitigated in different contexts. This framework underscores the importance of embedding pragmatic instruction within textbook content to ensure learners acquire not only linguistic knowledge but also the sociopragmatic skills necessary for effective interaction in a second language.

**Table 1.** Examples of both internal and external supportive moves

| A. **Internal Supportive Moves** |
| --- |
| 1. Lexical |
|    a) Use of mitigators: E.g., would you please open the window? |
|    b) Use of mental verbs: E.g., I think proofreading my article would take you less than half an hour. |
| 2. Syntactic |
|    a) Use of Conditionals: E.g., if you are free now, please go to the post office and send the letter for me. |
|    b) Use of Questions: E.g., Could you wash the dishes? |
| B. **External Supportive Moves** |
| 1. Providing Reasons: E.g., because I do not have enough money I cannot buy it now. Can you keep it for me till tomorrow? |
| 2. Use of preparators: E.g., you know that our company is very careful about the quality of the materials. The rice that was imported this week was not good enough and we returned it back. Can you give us one week extension so that we provide you with the best-quality rice? |
| 3. Use of disarmers: E.g., I have heard that you are so knowledgeable and proficient. Would you please take a look at my project and give me your comments? |
| 4. Use of precursors/alerters: E.g., excuse me sir! May you show me the post office? |

5. Suggesting alternatives: E.g., I am so sorry John, I have forgotten my wallet. You pay for me now, tomorrow I will pay for you. Agree?
6. Use of positive politeness strategies: E.g., here, we have a notebook in which our visitors write their names and their emails in order to keep in touch with them. However, it is up to you, do as you wish.

Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) classified requests based on different levels of directness to direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect requests. The illocutionary force in direct requests is perceived directly thorough linguistic elements. In Conventionally indirect requests, the utterance's meaning is indicated through linguistic norms already used in a specific context. In non-conventionally indirect requests, the force of the utterance is calculated based on the interactions between the actions and contextual references. Different categories of request strategies along with their examples are presented below.

### 3.1.1. Direct level

1. Mood derivable: An Utterance in which the grammatical structure or a specific manner which is used indicate the most direct requests (E.g., Hand in your homework.).

2. Performatives: An utterances in which the illocution is clearly stated (E.g., I tell you to clean your room before noon.)

3. Hedged performatives: An utterance in which the force of the utterance is mitigated by hedges (E.g., Would you please send the file to me?).

4. Obligations: An utterance in which the hearer is forced to do an act (E.g., You should tell the manager about your project.)

5. Want statements: An utterance in which the speaker's desires and wants are stated (E.g., I want you to call me as soon as possible.).

### 3.1.2. Conventionally indirect level

6. Suggestory: An utterance in which the illocution is stated through a clear suggestion (E.g., Why not trying the new program?)

7. Query-preparatory: An utterance in which both the preliminary conditions such as, ability and eagerness, and the real requests are stated (E.g., Would you mind collecting the papers?).

### 3.1.3. Non-conventionally indirect level

8. Strong hints: An utterance in which the indirect request contains some reference to the elements of the act and is considered an implicit suggestion (E.g., It is very hot in this room.).

9. Mild hints: An utterance in which there is no reference to the request's elements and the request needs to be interpreted within the context (E.g., She has called you five times, but you have been busy.)

## 3.2. Materials

The investigation of strategies and discourse moves in requestive speech acts was carried out using textbooks selected from the *Top Notch* and *Summit* series, designed by Saslow et al. (2011). The *Top Notch* series comprises six textbooks, each tailored to different proficiency levels, aiming to engage learners in English interactions and communications effectively. Each textbook follows a uniform structure, including the following sections:

1. Topic Preview – An introduction to the theme of the unit.

2. Conversation Practice – Dialogues designed for practicing natural language use.

3. Grammar Practice – Conversations focusing on grammatical structures.

4. Vocabulary Section – Key vocabulary items for the unit.

5. Reading Comprehension – A passage aimed at improving reading skills.

6. Listening and Pronunciation Activities – Exercises targeting auditory and phonological skills.

The *Summit* series, 3rd Edition, is a two-level course designed for high-intermediate to advanced learners, focusing on communication skills. It prepares confident, culturally-aware individuals to manage social, travel, and professional situations in English. This course can be used after completing the intermediate level of any communicative series, such as Top Notch. It comprises 4 textbooks each containing new design features updated content aimed at enhancing language skills through various engaging resources. Conversation Activator videos are designed to improve communicative competence, while Discussion Activator videos encourage both the quality and quantity of expression. Additionally, the Test-taking Skills Booster, along with extra challenge exercises, supports students in mastering the reading and listening sections of standardized tests. There is also a

significant increase in practice opportunities for grammar, reading, listening, and writing. Each unit in the *Summit* textbooks begins with Topic Preview and Sound Bites, where learners discuss real-life issues and practice natural conversations. This is followed by:

1. Conversation Snapshot – Introducing idiomatic expressions.

2. Grammar Snapshot – Presenting advanced grammatical structures.

3. Reading and Writing Sections – Activities aimed at improving literacy skills.

4. Listening and Pronunciation Activities – Integrated exercises to enhance auditory comprehension and phonological awareness.

Notably, the *Summit* textbooks place a greater emphasis on listening and writing skills compared to the *Top Notch* series, aligning with the needs of advanced learners. Both series are corpus-based, developed using the Longman Corpus Network, which incorporates data from the Longman Spoken Corpus and the Learners' Corpus of Common Learner Errors. This foundation ensures that the materials reflect authentic language use and address frequent learner errors, making them pedagogically robust.

In summary, the *Top Notch* and *Summit* series are designed to provide comprehensive language learning experiences, with a clear progression from beginner to advanced levels. Their structure and content are instrumental in facilitating the investigation of requestive speech acts, offering rich material for analyzing strategies and discourse moves in pragmatic contexts.

## 3.3. Data collection and analysis procedures

The primary objective of this content analysis of the *Top Notch* and *Summit* series was to evaluate these textbooks' potential for familiarizing EFL learners with the request speech act and equipping them with diverse strategies to perform it effectively. Given the centrality of pragmatic competence in communicative language teaching, this study aimed to assess how well these series address the complex nature of requests and their associated strategies. The findings are critical in determining the extent to which these materials provide learners with tools to navigate real-world communication, where the ability to formulate and interpret requests is essential for maintaining interpersonal relationships and achieving communicative goals. The analysis process involved systematically identifying and extracting all instances of requests embedded in the texts and compiling them into a dedicated dataset for further scrutiny. This systematic approach ensured a thorough examination of the materials while maintaining the integrity of the data. The analysis was conducted at two interrelated levels to provide a detailed understanding of the requestive speech acts and their pragmatic underpinnings.

To address the research questions evaluating the potential of the *Top Notch* and *Summit* series in introducing the request speech act to EFL learners, six *Top Notch* textbooks spanning six proficiency levels and four *Summit* textbooks designed for advanced learners were subjected to a detailed content analysis. In our analysis, we examined all instances of requestive moves across the entire scope of the textbooks, encompassing speaking, listening, reading, and writing tasks. This comprehensive approach allowed us to evaluate the various contexts in which requestive moves are presented and practiced, ensuring a well-rounded understanding of their usage and application throughout the materials. Since the series were designed for different proficiency levels, we focused on comparing books within comparable proficiency bands (e.g., beginner-to-intermediate or intermediate-to-advanced). For instance, if one series targeted beginners while the other targeted intermediates, we compared the higher-level books of the first series with the lower-level books of the second series. This alignment ensured that the comparison was made between materials intended for learners with similar linguistic capabilities.

Descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze the frequency and distribution of these elements across the series. The quantitative approach enabled a detailed comparison of the prevalence of various strategies and supportive moves, shedding light on the pragmatic emphasis—or lack thereof—in the instructional materials. To ensure the reliability and validity of our analysis, we employed a rigorous inter-coder reliability process. Two independent coders categorized all instances of requestive moves identified in the textbooks using the framework developed by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989). After the initial coding, discrepancies between the two coders were discussed and resolved through consensus, ensuring alignment with the established categories of direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect strategies. The inter-coder agreement was calculated using Cohen's Kappa coefficient, which measures the level of agreement beyond chance. The resulting Kappa value was 0.85, indicating a high level of reliability.

## 4. Results

The findings are presented in two sections: first, the analysis of the *Top Notch* series, followed by the *Summit* series. As shown in Table 2, the *Top Notch* series contained a total of 153 instances of requests across the six textbooks. A breakdown of the requests by levels of directness revealed that direct requests were the most frequent, comprising 89 instances (58.2%). Non-conventionally indirect requests were the second most prevalent category, accounting for 55 instances (35.9%). In contrast, conventionally indirect requests constituted only 9 instances (5.9%), representing a notably smaller proportion of the total requests.

This unequal distribution suggests that the textbooks prioritize introducing learners to direct forms of requests over more nuanced or indirect forms. While direct requests can facilitate learners' initial understanding of pragmatic functions, the limited representation of conventionally indirect requests may hinder the development of more contextually appropriate and

culturally sensitive communication skills, especially in formal or high-stakes situations where indirectness is often preferred. In contrast to the *Top Notch* series, the *Summit* series included significantly fewer instances of requests, with a total of only 20 examples across the four textbooks. Among these, direct requests were again the most common, accounting for 13 instances (65%). Conventionally indirect requests appeared 6 times (30%), while non-conventionally indirect requests were represented by just a single instance (5%).

The smaller corpus of requests in the *Summit* series, coupled with the predominance of direct strategies, suggests a similar emphasis on straightforward communication. Despite the advanced proficiency level of the intended learners, the textbooks do not appear to provide a balanced exposure to the full range of pragmatic strategies needed for making requests in diverse social contexts.

**Table 1.** Frequency of requests in each level of directness in Top Notch and Summit series

| Level of directness | Top Notch F | Summit F |
|---|---|---|
| Direct | 89 | 13 |
| Conventionally indirect | 9 | 6 |
| Non-conventionally indirect | 55 | 1 |
| Total | 153 | 20 |

While it is true that the *Top Notch* series included two additional books compared to the *Summit* series in our analysis, the descriptive data clearly indicates a substantial discrepancy in the frequency of request speech acts between the two series (*Top Notch* : 153 instances vs. *Summit* : 20 instances). This significant difference cannot be attributed solely to the disparity in the number of books within each series. Instead, it reflects a more fundamental distinction in how the authors of each series approach the treatment of this pragmatic speech act. This is further supported by the fact that our analysis carefully compared books from both series that were closely matched in terms of learners' proficiency levels, as outlined in the methodology section. Despite this alignment, the frequency and variety of request strategies presented in the *Top Notch* series far exceed those in the *Summit* series. This suggests that the authors of *Top Notch* place greater emphasis on the development of pragmatic competence through the explicit instruction of request strategies and supportive moves, whereas the *Summit* series appears to allocate less attention to this aspect of communicative ability. Given the rigorous matching of proficiency levels and the striking contrast in the presentation of request speech acts, we argue that these comparisons are valid and reliable.

The findings reveal that the request speech act is underrepresented across the four levels of the *Summit* series, indicating a significant gap in the content designed for advanced learners. This omission limits the learners' opportunities to practice and refine their understanding of request strategies at advanced levels, which is crucial for developing nuanced pragmatic competence. However, this approach does not adequately address the diverse learning pathways of students. Many learners may transition to the *Summit* series after studying elementary and intermediate levels using different textbooks. For these students, a lack of content on request speech acts in the *Summit* series means missing an essential opportunity to develop this skill. Furthermore, even for learners who have studied the *Top Notch* series, regular practice and reinforcement of request strategies are essential at advanced levels. Advanced learners are expected to navigate more complex and context-sensitive social interactions, which require a deeper understanding and mastery of indirect and nuanced request strategies.

On the other hand, as shown in table 3, within the *Top Notch* series, there was an imbalanced use of direct strategies. Hedges were overrepresented, appearing far more frequently than other strategies. Conversely, obligations and performatives were underrepresented, with only a limited number of instances provided. This lack of balance restricts learners' exposure to the variety of direct strategies available for making requests, which may impede their ability to choose appropriate strategies in different contexts. The representation of conventionally indirect strategies was notably insufficient. Only two examples were identified: one **suggory** and one **query-preparatory**. This minimal exposure is inadequate to familiarize learners with these important pragmatic strategies, which are often crucial in polite and formal interactions. Such limited representation fails to equip learners with the tools needed to perform conventionally indirect requests effectively.

For non-conventionally indirect strategies, the books demonstrated some efficiency in incorporating strong hints, which were the most frequently used strategy in this category. However, the inclusion of mild hints was inadequate, providing learners with insufficient examples to understand the subtleties of using mild hints for indirect requests. As previously mentioned, the *Summit* series lacks sufficient content on request speech acts. Many strategies, such as performatives, obligations, want statements, and mild hints, were entirely absent. This omission not only limits the pragmatic richness of the textbooks but also fails to address the increasing complexity of language use required at advanced proficiency levels. Advanced learners must be able to adjust their language use to a variety of social and cultural contexts, making the absence of such content a notable shortcoming.

The findings highlight a significant need for the *Summit* series to include more comprehensive coverage of request speech acts, with a balanced representation of direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect strategies. Advanced learners require exposure to nuanced language use, including indirectness and politeness strategies, to navigate a wider range of communicative situations effectively. Addressing these gaps would ensure that learners who transition to the *Summit* series—whether or not they have used the *Top Notch* series—receive adequate instruction and practice in request speech acts.

Moreover, even for learners familiar with requests at the lower levels, advanced-level textbooks must provide opportunities for review and expansion of these skills, tailored to the learners' increasing proficiency and communicative needs.

**Table 3.** Frequency of different request strategies used in each degree of directness in Top Notch and Summit series

| Direct level | Top Notch F | Summit F |
|---|---|---|
| Mood derivable | 15 | 8 |
| Performatives | 0 | 0 |
| Hedged performatives | 61 | 5 |
| Obligations | 1 | 0 |
| Want statement | 12 | 0 |
| Total | 89 | 13 |
| **Conventionally indirect level** | **F** | **F** |
| Suggestory | 6 | 1 |
| Query-preparatory | 3 | 5 |
| Total | 9 | 6 |
| **Non-conventionally indirect level** | **F** | **F** |
| Strong hints | 52 | 1 |
| Mild hints | 3 | 0 |
| Total | 55 | 1 |

In addition to the request strategies used for expressing head acts, internal and external supportive moves play a crucial role in mitigating the illocutionary force of these head acts. As shown in Table 4, the overall frequency of supportive moves in the *Top Notch* series was considerably higher than that in the *Summit* series, primarily due to the greater number of requests identified in the *Top Notch* books compared to the *Summit* series. Overall, internal supportive moves were employed more frequently than external ones to modify and reduce the illocutionary force of the head acts. However, within the *Top Notch* series, the distribution of internal supportive moves was uneven across different request types. As indicated in Table 4, expressing requests in the form of questions was the most commonly used internal move. This trend was also observed in the *Summit* series, where questions predominated among the supportive moves employed. Regarding external supportive moves, *preparators* emerged as the most frequently used strategy to soften the illocutionary force of requests. These findings suggest a consistent preference for specific internal and external strategies in both series, though their overall distribution and frequency varied significantly between the two.

**Table 4.** Frequency of different internal and external supportive moves in requestive speech acts found in Top Notch and Summit series

| Internal Supportive Moves | Top Notch F | Summit F |
|---|---|---|
| Lexical (use of mitigators) | 34 | 5 |
| Lexical (use of mental verbs) | 13 | 0 |
| Syntactic (questions) | 60 | 15 |
| Syntactic (conditionals) | 18 | 0 |
| Total | 125 | 20 |
| **External Supportive Moves** | **F** | **F** |
| Providing reasons | 6 | 5 |
| Use of preparators | 5 | 0 |
| Use of disarmers | 1 | 0 |
| Use of precursors/alerters | 6 | 0 |
| Suggesting alternatives | 0 | 1 |
| Use of positive politeness strategies | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 18 | 7 |

In addition to investigating the frequency of request strategies and supportive moves separately, this study investigated the co-occurrence of different supportive moves with different strategies, the results of which are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Frequency of internal and external supportive moves used with each request strategy

| Supportive Moves \ Strategies | Mood derivable | Performatives | Hedged Performatives | Obligations | Want statement | suggestory | Query-preparatory | Strong hints | Mild hints |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lexical (use of mitigators) | 11 | - | 4 | - | 1 | - | - | 21 | - |
| Lexical (use of mental verbs) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 12 | - |
| Syntactic (questions) | - | - | 28 | - | - | 5 | 4 | 12 | 1 |
| Syntactic (conditionals) | - | - | 3 | - | - | - | 1 | - | - |
| Providing reasons | - | - | 6 | - | - | - | 1 | - | - |
| Use of preparators | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| Use of disarmers | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Use of precursors/alerters | - | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | - | 4 | - |
| Suggesting alternatives | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Use of positive politeness strategies | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - |

As shown in Table 5, requests in the form of hedge performatives mitigated by questions occurred most frequently, with a total of 28 instances. Following this, strong hints combined with mitigators were the second most common group of requests, appearing 21 times. Strong hints were also equally mitigated by mental verbs and questions, with each combination occurring 12 times. Additionally, the illocutionary force of requests expressed through mood derivables was primarily softened by the use of mitigators, with this combination occurring 11 times. However, it is important to note that some requests were made solely using request strategies, without the inclusion of any internal or external moves.

## 5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the pragmatic aspects of requestive speech acts in the Top Notch and Summit series, two widely used ELT textbooks. Specifically, the research sought to analyze the distribution of request strategies and supportive moves within these textbooks to determine their potential to familiarize learners with various strategies and discourse moves for expressing requests. Drawing on frameworks proposed by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), the study addressed three key questions: (1) What is the distribution of request strategies in the Top Notch and Summit series? (2) What is the distribution of internal and external supportive moves used in requestive speech acts? By answering these questions, the study aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of the pragmatic content of these textbooks and their role in enhancing learners' communicative competence.

The findings revealed significant disparities in the representation of request strategies across the Top Notch and Summit series. In the Top Notch series, a total of 153 instances of requests were identified, with direct requests being the most frequent (89 instances, 58.2%), followed by non-conventionally indirect requests (55 instances, 35.9%), and conventionally indirect requests (9 instances, 5.9%). In contrast, the Summit series included only 20 instances of requests, with direct requests again dominating (13 instances, 65%), followed by conventionally indirect requests (6 instances, 30%) and a single instance of non-conventionally indirect requests (5%). This unequal distribution suggests that both series prioritize direct forms of requests over more nuanced or indirect forms, potentially limiting learners' exposure to culturally sensitive communication strategies. Additionally, the Summit series lacked comprehensive coverage of request speech acts, particularly for advanced learners who require nuanced language skills. The analysis of internal and external supportive moves further highlighted an uneven distribution, with questions being the most frequently used internal move and preparators being the predominant external move.

Similar to the results of this study, Soozandefar and Sahragard (2011) found an unequal distribution of language functions and speech acts in the Top-Notch series, emphasizing its pragmatic inadequacy for real-life communication. Similarly, our analysis revealed a significant imbalance in the representation of request strategies across the Top Notch and Summit series. The higher the level of the books, the lower the distribution of speech acts were. Direct requests dominated, comprising 58.2% of instances in the Top-Notch series and 65% in the Summit series. Conventionally indirect and non-conventionally indirect requests were underrepresented, accounting for only 5.9% and 35.9%, respectively, in the Top-Notch series and even less so in the Summit series (30% and 5%, respectively). This skewed focus on direct requests may hinder learners' ability to develop nuanced communication skills necessary for navigating diverse social contexts, echoing Soozandefar and Sahragard's critique of the series' limited pragmatic scope.

Ren and Han (2016), Pérez-Hernández (2019), and Ton Nu and Murray (2020) further underscored the insufficient coverage of pragmatic aspects in ELT textbooks globally. The minimal inclusion of conventionally indirect requests in the studied textbooks reflects this broader trend, suggesting that these materials fail to provide learners with adequate exposure to culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate language use. However, Homayounzadeh and Sahragard (2015) identified the Utilitarian discourse system as a defining feature of both the Top Notch and Summit series. This system prioritizes egalitarian relationships, free expression, and straightforward communication, minimizing hierarchical social structures. Our findings confirm this influence, as characters in the textbooks are predominantly portrayed as having equal social power, leading to the predominance

of direct requests. While such an approach fosters clarity and equality, it neglects the complexities of real-world interactions where indirectness and politeness strategies are often required. This limitation resonates with Boxer and Pickering's (1995) observation that textbook examples frequently diverge from authentic, spontaneous speech patterns, failing to capture the underlying social strategies of speech acts.

Moreover, Kafi, Ashraf, and Motallebzadeh (2013) noted that advanced learners are more susceptible to cultural content embedded in textbooks, highlighting the importance of addressing their specific needs. However, the Summit series, designed for advanced learners, included significantly fewer instances of requests compared to the Top-Notch series (20 vs. 153). Furthermore, many essential strategies—such as performatives, obligations, want statements, and mild hints—were entirely absent. This omission limits opportunities for advanced learners to refine their understanding of request strategies, despite their increasing need for nuanced language use in complex communicative situations. In addition, Askaripour (2014) criticized the Top Notch series for focusing predominantly on lower-order thinking skills at the expense of higher-order ones. Similarly, the lack of comprehensive coverage of request strategies in the Summit series suggests a failure to promote critical thinking and metacognitive awareness among advanced learners. Addressing this gap would ensure that learners can analyze, evaluate, and adapt their language use to suit varying social and cultural contexts.

On the other hand, Tavakol and Sayadian (2014) praised the Top Notch series for its emphasis on listening, pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm but noted areas for improvement in fostering pragmatic competence. Our findings reveal that internal supportive moves, particularly questions, were employed more frequently than external ones to mitigate the illocutionary force of requests. While this preference for specific strategies provides some consistency, the uneven distribution of supportive moves across different request types restricts learners' exposure to the full range of pragmatic tools available. For instance, preparators emerged as the most frequently used external move, yet other strategies like disarmers and precursors/alerters were rarely or never employed. This imbalance mirrors the overall pattern of underrepresentation observed in the textbooks' pragmatic content. Besides, Kawashima (2022) compared international and Japanese high school ELT textbooks, finding that both types shared limitations in situational variety and pragmatic options. The Top Notch and Summit series similarly exhibit restricted contextual diversity, offering learners limited opportunities to practice request strategies in varied settings. Wilson's (2023) study of Hong Kong ELT textbooks highlighted deficiencies in pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic details, reinforcing the need for textbooks to provide clear explanations and examples of speech act usage. The co-occurrence matrix of internal and external supportive moves with request strategies in our study underscores the importance of addressing these gaps to enhance learners' pragmatic competence effectively.

The findings suggest that while the Top Notch and Summit series introduce learners to basic request strategies, they fall short in preparing them for real-world communicative demands. In line with recommendations from previous studies, instructors should supplement these materials with authentic language resources and activities to bridge the gap between textbook content and practical application. Additionally, future editions of these textbooks could incorporate a balanced representation of direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect requests, along with diverse supportive moves, to better equip learners with the skills needed for effective communication.

## 6. Conclusion

This study investigated the presentation of requestive speech acts in the *Top Notch* and *Summit* English language learning series. By analyzing the frequency and types of request strategies employed, as well as the use of supportive discourse moves, we sought to assess the extent to which these series equip learners with the necessary pragmatic competence to engage in effective intercultural communication. Our findings indicate that while both series offer valuable exposure to English language use, they exhibit certain limitations in their treatment of requestive speech acts. *Top Notch*, designed for lower-level learners, provides more opportunities for request practice, particularly through the use of direct requests. However, it could benefit from a more balanced approach, incorporating a wider range of strategies, including indirect requests and politeness markers. *Summit*, aimed at advanced learners, presents fewer opportunities for request practice, potentially neglecting the development of pragmatic competence in this area. In conclusion, the present study contributes to the growing body of research on the pragmatic content of ELT textbooks by providing a detailed analysis of request strategies and supportive moves in the Top Notch and Summit series. By linking these findings to existing literature, we emphasize the urgent need for improvements in how textbooks address pragmatic aspects of language learning, particularly for advanced learners requiring nuanced and context-sensitive communication skills.

To enhance the pedagogical effectiveness of language learning series like Top Notch and Summit, material developers should consider several key strategies. First, diversifying request strategies by incorporating direct, indirect, and conventionally indirect requests can better cater to various social and cultural contexts (Farangi & Khojastemehr, 2024). Emphasizing supportive moves such as hedges, softeners, and politeness markers is crucial for mitigating face-threatening acts and fostering positive interactions. Additionally, integrating contextual factors like power relations, social distance, and cultural norms into the curriculum can help learners understand the nuances of appropriate communication. Explicit instruction on these strategies, supported by clear explanations, examples, and practice exercises, is essential. Moreover, encouraging learner production through ample opportunities to practice written and spoken requests in diverse scenarios will solidify their understanding and application.

Despite the valuable insights provided by this study, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The corpus used may not fully represent the breadth of request strategies and supportive moves within these series, and the analysis was conducted from a Western cultural perspective, potentially overlooking cultural variations. Furthermore, the focus on explicit instruction

might neglect the role of implicit learning through ]authentic language exposure. To address these limitations, future research could explore longitudinal studies tracking learners' development over time, examine learner perceptions of request strategies, and conduct cross-cultural comparisons of language learning materials. Investigating the role of input enhancement techniques and technology-enhanced learning tools, such as CALL and VR, could also provide new avenues for improving pragmatic competence (Farangi et al., 2024). By addressing these gaps, we can enhance our understanding of requestive speech act acquisition and refine language learning materials and practices accordingly.

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