



## **A SOCIOLINGUISTIC EVALUATION OF ENGLISH FILE: PRAGMATIC REPRESENTATIONS OF LANGUAGE VARIATION IN EFL TEXTBOOKS**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to evaluate the representation of sociolinguistic variation and pragmatic strategies in English File Intermediate (Third Edition), a widely used textbook for teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). Although textbooks play a crucial role in shaping learners' awareness of language use, few studies have critically examined how such materials portray linguistic diversity and pragmatic competence. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, this study conducted content analysis of dialogues, communicative exercises, and reading texts across selected units of the textbook. The findings reveal that while the textbook presents communicative tasks embedded in everyday contexts, its representation of language variation remains largely restricted to standardized British English. Dialectal diversity, social registers, and broader cultural contexts are underrepresented. Pragmatic strategies, such as indirect speech acts and politeness, are present but insufficiently contextualized to foster learners' pragmatic awareness. These results highlight the need for more reflective and intercultural approaches in EFL materials to support not only linguistic competence but also pragmatic and intercultural competence in cross-cultural communication.

**Keywords:** Sociolinguistics, Pragmatics, Textbook Evaluation, Intercultural Competence, EFL Pedagogy.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) aims not only to equip learners with grammatical structure and vocabulary, but also with pragmatic competence and adequate sociolinguistic understanding. This competency is important so that learners are able to use language appropriately in various social, cultural, and institutional contexts. In the context of learning, EFL textbooks have a central role as the main medium in presenting linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic inputs. Therefore, evaluation of the representation of language variations and communication strategies in textbooks is important to ensure the relevance and suitability of the material to real-world communication needs (Cunningsworth, 2003; Tomlinson, 2012).

One of the important aspects of the evaluation is the representation of sociolinguistic variations, which include differences in dialects, registers, accents, as well as variations in language use based on social status, age, gender, and cultural background. This representation plays a major role in shaping learners' perceptions of language norms and socio-linguistic conformity in certain situations (Byram, 2021). If textbooks fail to present such diversity authentically and contextually, then learners have the potential to develop pragmatic competence that is limited or even mistaken in using the target language.

In addition, from a pragmatic point of view, interactions in textbooks often do not reflect the complexity of communication strategies used in real life, such as politeness, indirect speech, and strategies for managing power inequality in conversation (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Overly "neutral" or artificial representations of communication in textbooks can overlook important aspects of cross-cultural interaction, such as differences in norms of politeness and subtle ways of expressing disagreement

(Ishihara & Cohen, 2014).

The English File (Third Edition) book is one of the most widely used English textbook series globally, especially in the EFL learning environment. This book is claimed to present authentic and diverse communication materials, including daily dialogues, interviews, and interactive exercises. However, the extent to which this book represents sociolinguistic variation and pragmatic strategies accurately and contextually has not been systematically researched. A critical evaluation of these representations is necessary to assess whether the material in the English File provides EFL learners with sufficient access to socially and culturally relevant interaction models.

This study examines how sociolinguistic variation and pragmatic strategies are represented in the English File Intermediate (Third Edition) book through an evaluative-critical approach based on relational pragmatic theory and sociolinguistic analysis. The focus of the research is on the form of formal-informal register variation, the use of polite speech, and the way of depicting social relations in texts and dialogues. Thus, this article contributes to an understanding of the adequacy and relevance of textbook material in shaping cross-cultural pragmatic competencies in EFL classrooms.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a content analysis method to evaluate the representation of sociolinguistic variation and pragmatic strategies in the English File Intermediate (Third Edition) textbook by Latham-Koenig, Oxenden, and Hudson (2021). The main focus of the research is on how language variations; including dialects, registers, and forms of speech—are presented in dialogue, text, and communication exercises in the book. This analysis is carried out systematically through data categorization techniques based on predetermined sociolinguistic and pragmatic indicators.

The research procedure began with the selection of data sources in the form of the English File Intermediate (Third Edition) Workbook with Key, as the main material. Next, data were collected by selecting text units that contained conversations, dialogue exercises, and thematic readings that reflected forms of social interaction. The data was then analyzed using indicators compiled based on the theory of language variation (Holmes, 2013), Politeness Theory Brown et al. (1987), as well as a pragmatic relational approach (Haugh, 2015).

The textbook evaluation criteria refer to the framework of the Cunningsworth (2003) and Tomlinson (2012), which emphasizes the importance of contextual authenticity, social diversity, and the suitability of language functions. In addition, the framework for classifying speech acts is based on Searle (1975) used to identify the types of speech and politeness strategies that appear in the book material. The validity of the findings was strengthened through the investigator triangulation technique, by involving two other researchers to re-check the results of categorization and interpretation of the data.

This research also adopts the pragmatic-textbook evaluation principle (Nassaji, 2015), that is, examines not only the existence of certain linguistic forms, but also their functions in social and interactional contexts. Thus, the analysis is not only descriptive, but also evaluative-critical of the functionality of textbook material in shaping the pragmatic competence of EFL learners.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before presenting the results of sociolinguistic evaluation and pragmatic analysis in the book English File Intermediate (Third Edition), this section presents a summary of the contents of the book as the basis for understanding the structure, themes, and scope of the material that is the source of research data. This synopsis is important to show the context of the content and presentation of the English material to be analyzed from the perspective of social variation and communication strategies. The following is the synopsis;

The English File Intermediate (Third Edition) book compiled by Christina Latham-Koenig, Clive Oxenden, and Jane Hudson is one of a series of English textbooks developed by Oxford University Press and aimed at learners at intermediate level (B1–B2 CEFR). This book is designed to improve English communication skills in an integrated manner through context-based approaches, language functions, and communicative learning activities.

The structure of the book consists of several learning units that each include two main lessons (lessons A and B), as well as Practical English sessions that focus on language skills for real-life situations, such as

interacting in restaurants, talking to strangers, and dealing with unexpected social situations. Each unit is equipped with vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, and reading components, as well as various activities that require the functional use of language in certain social contexts.

One of the hallmarks of this book is the presentation of material based on the theme of daily life, such as food, family, work, money, transportation, and social relationships. These themes are packaged through dialogue and texts that reflect the social interaction between English speakers from different cultural backgrounds. In the pragmatic aspect, this book presents various examples of politeness strategies, the use of speech actions such as requests, suggestions, invitations, and indirect rejection.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this book touches on the variety of formal and informal registers, and provides exposure to a variety of accents and speaking styles through audio recordings provided on digital platforms that accompany the book (iTutor and iChecker). Nevertheless, most of the language representations in this book use the standard model of British English, with some inclusions of elements from American English, albeit limited.

An analysis of the English File Intermediate (Third Edition) book reveals that although this book was developed with a communicative orientation and based on real context, the representation of sociolinguistic variation presented is still relatively limited and tends to focus on standard language models. The book uses British English as the primary norm, with little insertion of American English elements in certain vocabulary or structures, such as the use of "apartment" instead of "flat", or "cell phone" instead of "mobile phone". However, there has been no systematic exploration of non-standard dialects, such as regional variants of English, Australian, African, or multicultural urban dialects. In fact, in the context of globalization and migration, EFL learners are often dealing with different types of English variants. Thus, this book still presents a representation of languages that tend to be monolithic and do not reflect the global sociolinguistic diversity as suggested by Holmes (2013), which emphasizes the importance of inclusivity in cultural and linguistic representation.

From the aspect of register, this book explicitly distinguishes between the use of formal and informal language through several thematic units such as "Social English", "Phone Language", and "Business Communication". Examples of dialogue such as the formal greeting in public service "Good morning, how can I help you?" compared to the informal form between friends "Hey, what's up?" provide a good starting point for introducing register variations. However, these variations are more superficial and are not always followed by an explicit explanation of when and why they are appropriate in a particular social context. This is contrary to the principles of functional pragmatic learning suggested by Ishihara & Cohen (2014), where learners need to understand both the form and the social function of a language expression.

In the context of pragmatic strategies, especially those related to speech and politeness, this book shows that there is an effort to present a variety of forms of cross-social communication. For example, in the unit that deals with requests, the book presents a distinction between "Can I borrow your pen?" and "Would you mind if I borrowed your pen?", which indicates different levels of politeness. Similarly, in response to praise and rejection of invitations, there are several examples of indirect strategies that are in accordance with the principle of politeness Brown et al. (1987), such as the use of mitigations ("I'm not sure that's a good idea...") or delayed responses. Nonetheless, these strategies often emerge without an exploration of the sociocultural context underlying their use, such as differences in norms of decency between Western and Eastern cultures, or between hierarchical and egalitarian relations. As a result, although the form of pragmatic strategy appears textually, its pragmatic meaning is not optimally developed to build the learner's pragmatic awareness.

Pedagogically, this book emphasizes real communication-based exercises, such as roleplay, listening comprehension, and speaking tasks, which are positive approaches in building communicative competence. However, such instruction or exercises rarely facilitate reflective exploration of the social meanings of speech, such as why indirect strategies are more appropriate in certain situations, or how power relations affect language choices. There is no exercise that encourages critical analysis of language use in intercultural contexts, such as comparing how requests or refusals are expressed in other cultures. In fact, according to Kasper & Rose (2002), the integration between language production exercises and pragmatic awareness is essential for the development of effective cross-cultural communication skills.

Furthermore, of the 12 units analyzed, it was found that most dialogues involve interactions between individuals from socially homogeneous middle-urban contexts, such as conversations between colleagues,

friends, or family members in everyday situations in Western metropolitan cities. Representation of professions, social status, and ethnic variations is very minimal or even almost non-existent. Situations such as interactions between waiters and customers, bosses and staff, or locals and tourists, which potentially present more complex social dynamics and power gaps, are less explored. This has the potential to create a limited perception of the variety of social interactions in English, and ignore the sociopragmatic factors that are important in real communication.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of sociolinguistic and pragmatic analysis of English File Intermediate (Third Edition), it can be concluded that this book generally succeeds in presenting English learning materials that are communicative, contextual, and in accordance with the functional needs of EFL learners. An integrative learning structure and the existence of real-situation-based dialogue are the main strengths of this book in building applicable language skills.

However, in terms of representation of sociolinguistic variations, it was found that this book still tends to feature a standard language model that is homogeneous, with the dominance of British English accents and the lack of exploration of dialects, ethnic diversity, and more diverse social contexts. Representations of formal and informal register variations do appear in some units, but have not been developed in depth in complex and layered social contexts. As a result, learners do not fully gain an understanding of the appropriate use of language in different social relationships, both from aspects of power, social closeness, and cultural norms.

In the pragmatic aspect, this book shows the existence of politeness strategies, indirect speech actions, and variations in the forms of requests, suggestions, and rejections. However, these forms are generally presented without an explicit explanation of the sociocultural context that influences the choice of communication strategy. This has an impact on the limited opportunities for learners to develop a whole, reflective pragmatic awareness. In addition, learning activities tend to be performative, without instructions for critical analysis of the social meaning of the language form learned.

Thus, it can be concluded that although English File Intermediate is effective in equipping learners with communicative basic language skills, it still needs to be supplemented with additional teaching interventions or supplemental material that focuses on sociolinguistic and pragmatic awareness. This research emphasizes the importance of critical evaluation of English textbooks, so that the material presented not only forms linguistic competence, but also adequate pragmatic and intercultural competencies for learners in a diverse global world.

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