Exploring the potential of graphic novels for L2 pragmatic teaching and learning – focus on young learners

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ABSTRACT
To date very little research is available that focuses on L2 pragmatics and young learners [cf. Schauer, G.A. 2022a. Teaching pragmatics to young learners: a review study. *Applied Pragmatics*. DOI:10.1075/ap.00006.sch]. Recent studies have shown that textbooks for young learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) vary considerably regarding their pragmatic content and frequently do not provide varied and consistent input of key speech acts and formulaic expressions. Graphic novels could be a rich source of pragmatic input for L2 learners as they tend to contain a considerable amount of direct speech that could be used in a variety of different ways in the L2 classroom. In this paper, I will examine four graphic novels (2 suitable for beginner level and 2 suitable for intermediate level EFL learners) concerning their potential to provide young L2 learners with pragmatic input of their respective level. The study provides an overview of the number of speech act occurrences of eight speech acts (greetings, leave-takings, requests, responses to requests, expressions of gratitude, responses to expressions of gratitude, apologies, responses to apologies), as well as a more detailed analysis of individual speech act expressions and formulaic routines of six of the eight speech acts.

KEYWORDS
Interlanguage pragmatics; graphic novels; TEYL; young L2 learners; diversity in ELT; literature in language education

Introduction
The idea that authentic literature written in the target language could be usefully employed for teaching a second or foreign language (henceforth L2) is not new (cf. e.g. Bland 2015; Bloemert et al. 2019; Carter 2007; Paran 2008). However, an area that has not received much attention to date within the field of literature in L2 language education is that of pragmatics. This is regrettable, since numerous studies have shown that textbooks and other teaching materials frequently do not provide varied and sufficient pragmatic input for L2 learners (e.g. Bardovi-Harlig et al. 1991; Barron 2016; Glaser 2020; Jakupčević and Čavar Portolan 2021; Limberg 2015; Schauer 2019, 2020; Schauer and Adolphs 2006). In addition, further studies have revealed that although L2 teachers tend to consider the teaching of appropriate language to achieve specific language functions (such as the speech acts of greetings, leave takings, requests and apologies) to be important, not all teachers feel that they have the necessary background knowledge to teach pragmatics (Cohen 2018; Savvidou and Economidou-Kogetsidis 2019; Schauer 2022b). Consequently, many L2 teachers may not feel sufficiently comfortable or confident to develop their own pragmatics-focused materials.
If key communicative functions, such as the above-mentioned speech acts, need to be taught because they are the building blocks of conversations and interactions but are not adequately covered in many teaching materials, then the question arises how else they can be taught. Over the last decades, different approaches and materials have been suggested, such as employing TV programmes (e.g. Alcón Soler and Guzman Pitarch 2010; Khazdouzian, Celaya, and Barón 2021), films (e.g. Martinez-Flor 2007; Rose 2001; Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor 2021; Zhao and Liu 2019), computer-animated programmes (e.g. Halenko 2021) or interactions with robots (e.g. Alemi and Haeri 2020). Surprisingly, the potential of written literary works, such as picturebooks or graphic novels for L2 pragmatic teaching has not been widely explored and thus only a small number of studies are available that examine literature and L2 pragmatics (e.g, Ishihara 2013; Ishihara and Chiba 2014; Schauer 2019).

The present article aims to increase the number of studies investigating the potential of literature for L2 pragmatic teaching by focusing on a particular group of L2 learners that also have received relatively little attention in L2 pragmatics to date – young learners. In contrast to adult learners, young learners – especially those in primary school – are likely to encounter literary works in their L2 lessons, since picturebooks in particular are frequently used in primary school (e.g. Schauer 2019). Thus, EFL teachers working in primary or secondary educational institutions are likely to be familiar with the use of literary works in the classrooms, even though they may not have considered teaching aspects of pragmatic when utilising picturebooks, short stories, or graphic novels.

Before continuing, it is necessary to address which age group is covered by the term ‘young learners’. Considerable differences in opinion exist regarding this term with ages ranging from 3 to 18 years. For example, Nunan (2011) refers to 3–15-year-olds, Cameron (2001) and Garton and Copland (2018) write about 5–12-year-olds, Pinter (2017) refers to 5-14-year-olds, while Ellis (2014) points out that it could apply to anyone under the age of 18.

In the present article, I analyse four graphic novels two of which – Baloney and Friends by Greg Pizzoli (2020) and Smell My Foot by Cece Bell (2019) – feature content and language appropriate to the second and third year of learning L2 English in primary school for L2 learners under the age of 10, while the other two – Allergic by Megan Wagner Lloyd and Michelle Mee Nutter (2021) and Heartstopper by Alice Oseman (2018) – include content and language appropriate to teenage learners aged 13–16. A detailed discussion of the selection criteria for the graphic novels can be found in the methodology.

I focus on eight speech acts (greetings, leave takings, requests, responses to requests, expressions of gratitude, responses to expressions of gratitude, apologies, responses to apologies) that form part of my ‘Survival English’ concept (Schauer 2019) and investigate the following research questions:

(1) Are the eight speech acts included in the four graphic novels? And if so, how many instances of the speech acts are featured?
(2) Which expressions or conventional routines are included in the four graphic novels to perform the speech acts of greetings, leave takings, expressions of gratitude, responses to expressions of gratitude, apologies, responses to apologies?

Background

Studies on the potential of written literature in L2 pragmatics teaching for young learners

Although scholars have written about literature for L2 language teaching purposes for several decades, the number of empirical studies in this area is still relatively small (Carter 2007; Paran 2008). In addition, as Jones (2019: 2) notes ‘of the studies that do exist, even fewer have sought to investigate the effectiveness of literature either as a tool for developing awareness of spoken language or as a tool for developing speaking skills’. This then also explains why only few studies have investigated the potential of literature for L2 pragmatics instruction so far (cf. Schauer 2022a).
Ishihara (2013) and Ishihara and Chiba (2014) conducted small-scale studies that were part of a larger research project investigating how young L2 learners’ pragmatic competence was affected by pragmatic instruction with children’s books. The instruction focused on requests, pragmatic formulae and politeness and was based on three picture books: Martha Speaks by Susan Meddaugh (1992), What Do You Say, Dear? by Sesyle Joslin (1958), and Forget their Manners by Stan and Jan Berenstain (1985). The participants in both studies were young Japanese learners of English of different ages and in different learning contexts: three 9-year-old boys in Japan (Ishihara 2013); three girls (aged 12 and 7) and two boys (aged 9) in Hong Kong (Ishihara and Chiba 2014).

The participant groups were not homogenous regarding their prior English instruction. While two of the boys in Japan had attended English lessons from the age of one, the third had only attended school lessons. Similarly, while one of the 12-year-old girls in Hong Kong had only received English lessons for 6 months, the 7-year-old girl had studied English for 2 years. In addition, the input the children received for the respective studies differed: six sessions resulting in a total of 120 min in Japan; three sessions resulting in a total of 180 min in Hong Kong.

The results of the studies differed considerably. Ishihara (2013: 143) noted that while ‘the learners demonstrated their metapragmatic judgment by indicating relative levels of formality or politeness of target formulae and were able to use ‘please in appropriate contexts [they] were unable to recall more complex and newly learned requests (e.g. Could I have … ? Could you pass me … ?)’. Ishihara contributes this result to her learners’ low proficiency level, the limited L2 pragmatic input the children received and their limited opportunities to engage in authentic target language interactions. In contrast, Ishihara and Chiba (2014: 100) found that ‘[s]uccessful pragmatic production of the target English requests was demonstrated at the conclusion of the instruction by all learners in the classroom discourse as well as in 17 out of 20 written DCT responses and four out of four [student generated visual] DCT-elicited requests’.

Since the Japanese learners in Hong Kong had ample opportunity to be exposed to the L2 in their everyday life, the different results of the two studies may indicate the effect of the learning environment on L2 learners’ pragmatic development. Other factors that could have contributed to the different results are the length and overall time of the instruction as well as factors related to the instructor and individual learner differences.

Focusing on Jordanian EFL learners in the 9th year of the 10-year compulsory basic level of education in Jordan, Bataineh (2014) investigated the pragmatic performance of two groups of young learners, an experimental and a control group. The experimental group received pragmatic instruction with literary texts included in a supplementary book called ‘Introduction to Literature’ which featured excerpts from novels, short stories, poetry etc, while the control group received instruction based on the Way Ahead textbook. Prior to instruction, pre-tests were administered which were followed-up with post-tests after the end of the three-month long instruction period. The tests examined a number of issues, such as speech acts, formality and politeness. The pre-test performance of the two groups was very similar. The results of the post-test, however, showed that the learners in the experimental group performed considerably better than the control group. This suggests that the use of literary texts that promotes exposure to pragmatic content can increase L2 learners’ pragmatic competence more than the use of traditional textbooks.

Focusing on the speech act content provided in picturebooks that either were used in EFL classrooms or were associated with teacher training programmes in Germany, Schauer (2019) investigated 22 picturebooks published between 1963 and 2014. The study concentrated on 10 speech acts that were part of Schauer’s Survival English concept: requests – responses to requests, greetings, leave-takings, expressions of gratitude – responses to expressions of gratitude, apologies, suggestions – responses to suggestions, expressions of physical and mental states. The results revealed that none of the picture books examined contained all ten speech acts. Instead, the highest number of speech acts included was six in Azzi in Between by Sarah Garland (2012), a book that includes features associated with graphic novels, such as speech bubbles and could therefore also
be classified as such (cf. Bergner 2016; see also Bland 2015; Burwitz-Melzer 2013, regarding differentiating picturebooks and graphic novels).

Of the remaining 21 books, two did not contain any of the speech acts investigated, three contained one speech act category, nine featured 2 speech act categories, four featured 3, two included 4 and one 5 different categories. While these findings could be interpreted to suggest that picturebooks do not offer much for L2 pragmatic instruction due to the limited number of speech acts categories featured in them, I would argue that this is too bleak a view to take. Instead, I think that we ought to consider picturebooks, graphic novels and short stories that may not (yet) be part of the canon of literary works typically recommended for EFL classrooms and see what they could offer for L2 pragmatic teaching. The present article aims to encourage further research in this field by examining a type of literature that may not yet be widely used in L2 young learner classrooms but could provide helpful target language input – graphic novels, which I introduce in more detail in the following.

**Graphic novels and L2 teaching**

Burwitz-Melzer (2013: 60–51) describes graphic novels as follows:

Graphic novels like comic books and comic strips all belong to the family of comics, that is to the family of sequential arts (Eisner, […]). Usually, a graphic novel is a collection of comics that offers some form of continuity: it may be a single story, yet it may also be a collection of only loosely related comic strips.

Graphic novels tend to have distinct features that distinguish them from picture books. In contrast to picturebooks in which illustrations may cover one or two pages and the text is set apart in a convenient place where it does not obstruct the visual imagery, graphic novels ‘typically include’ a patterned sequence of boxes or frames with speech bubbles’ (Paran and Robinson 2016: 148). These boxes or frames are also called panels, and the space between individual panels is referred to as gutters (Bland 2019). This enables learners and teachers to refer to individual parts of the graphic novel, e.g. one panel or a set of panels, for discussion and analysis.

In contrast to picturebooks which may not contain much direct speech (cf. Schauer 2019), most graphic novels tend to feature a considerable amount of direct speech, thus potentially including a wealth of dialogue input for L2 learners. Another advantage of graphic novels is that readers can obtain insights into how individual characters react to spoken language, since interlocutors’ facial reactions or body language tends to be shown either in the same or in consecutive frame(s). Furthermore, some graphic novels contain more than one type of bubble or balloon containing speech: the above-mentioned speech bubble or balloon (typically shown with a round uninterrupted line) representing direct speech, as well as thought bubbles representing non-verbally expressed thoughts of the characters (typically differentiated from the speech bubbles with a different line structure). These thought bubbles can be particularly useful to discern how utterances are perceived by the individual characters and whether the characters’ spoken words match their feelings on the matter or not. Consequently, they are very helpful for L2 pragmatic instruction.

Bland (2019) argues that graphic novels are suitable for L2 learners of all ages and proficiency levels and quotes (McTaggart 2008: 32, original emphasis) who noted that ‘teachers use graphic novels because they enable the struggling reader, motivate the reluctant one, and challenge the high-level learner’. Although still a relatively new literary form – compared to picturebooks – graphic novels could constitute a useful addition to the L2 classrooms and ought to receive more research attention regarding their potential for L2 pragmatics instruction.

**Formulaic language and L2 pragmatics**

As Siyanova-Chanturia and Pellicer-Sánchez (2018, 1) point out ‘[f]ormulaicity and lexical patterning pervade language (e.g. Erman and Warren 2000; Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992) […] with some
estimates suggesting that up to 50% of language [in L1 discourse] may be formulaic in nature (e.g. Erman and Warren 2000). The high percentage of what may be called formulaic language, formulaic sequences, conventional expressions, chunks or routines in English, means that L2 learners need to be able to produce and comprehend these formulaic expressions in order to achieve their communicative aims. Schmitt and Carter (2004: 10) argue that the appropriate use of formulaic sequences is important since ‘interlocutors expect them, and they are the preferred choice. Thus, formulaic sequences are not only useful for efficient language usage; they are essential for appropriate language use’. While formulaic sequences have been studied in a number of different fields (cf. e.g. Siyanova-Chanturia and Pellicer-Sánchez 2018), they have also received attention in L2 pragmatics in recent years (cf., Bardovi-Harlig 2012; Schauer and Adolphs 2006). Concerning their relevance for pragmatics, Bardovi-Harlig (2018: 99) writes:

Formulas in pragmatics are (a) multiword expressions; (b) related to context; (c) characteristic of a speech community; and (d) illocutionarily transparent (Blum-Kulka, 1989; Reiter, Rainey, and Fulcher, 2005). Coulmas’s (1981) definition of routine formula emphasizes the social aspect of pragmatic formulas, describing them as “tacit agreements, which the members of a community presume to be shared by every reasonable co-member. In embodying societal knowledge, they are essential in the handling of day-to-day situations (p.4)”.

Formulaic expressions are thus also relevant for young learners, since they constitute frequently occurring parts of the target language. In addition, formulaic expressions can also be learned as a chunk or unit and can thus be easily used in situations, in which conventional language frequently occurs, such as greetings. As Bardovi-Harlig (2016) notes interlocutors will immediately recognise that a person is being greeted, when the expression ‘nice to meet you’ is used, while ‘you’re welcome’ or ‘no problem’ are easily recognisable as responses to expressions of gratitude. This is why I also focus on these formulaic expressions in addition to individual lexical items that can also be used to perform a speech act, e.g. ‘sorry’ as an apology or ‘hello’ as a greeting, in the present study.

Materials and methods

Data

Table 1 presents information on the four graphic novels that were chosen for the present investigation.

The two books suitable for young learners in primary school were selected based on the following criteria:

1. since many curricula for primary schools state that animals should feature in the L2 instruction, the graphic novels needed to include animals;
2. the vocabulary items should be relatively easy and basic, as well as useful for L2 learners aged between seven and 10 years;
3. the storylines and content should be useful for young learners addressing issues that are relevant to them;
4. the book should have been published relatively recently to ensure that they are still available for purchase.

The two books selected were chosen out of about 10 graphic novels considered for this age range. The criteria for the selection of the books for the secondary school learners were:

1. they ought to cover real-life topics and contexts (i.e. no fantasy or science-fiction) relevant to young learners in that age group;
2. vocabulary and grammar ought to reflect authentic language use by age peers of the L2 learners;
3. the novel should represent different geographical regions and thus different varieties of English, since this tends to be mentioned in curricular for secondary school EFL learners;
(4) the books should represent different aspects of the lived experience of young male and female characters thereby addressing diversity in ELT;
(5) the book should have been published relatively recently to ensure that they are still available for purchase.

The two books selected were chosen out of about 15 graphic novels considered for this age range.

Analytical framework

The present investigation provides a quantitative overview analysis of the eight different speech acts by analysing how frequently they occur in the four graphic novels. In addition, individual expressions and pragmatic routines that are used to perform the speech acts are analysed for six of the eight speech acts. Due to word count constraints, the description of the individual speech acts will be kept at a minimum here focusing on the issues most relevant for the present data. For a more detailed description of the respective speech acts see for example Schauer (2019).

Greetings

I focus on four components of a greeting: greets, introductions, introduction questions, expressing pleasure. According to Edmondson and House (1981: 188):

… in performing a Greet, the speaker ritually recognises the presence of the hearer, and salutes him [them] as a fellow social member. There is practically no alternative to returning a Greet, safe by avoiding the contact altogether, ‘snubbing’, in fact.

This is why it is very important for L2 learners to recognise greetings as such and to be able to reciprocate them. The authors also state that the same expressions are frequently used by both interlocutors in a greeting in English, e.g. A: ‘Good morning’, B: ‘Good morning’.

When making an introduction, '[a] speaker or writer provides his or her own name […] [This category] also includes instances of a speaker introducing someone else, such as a friend the interlocutor has not met’ (Schauer 2019: 106). An introduction question is a question asked to obtain
information on who the interlocutor is, e.g. ‘What’s your name?’. The category of expressing pleasure (cf. Edmondson and House’s 1981 category of initiating welcomes) features utterances in which a speaker conveys to their interlocutor(s) that they have positive feelings about meeting them (Schauer 2019). The typical example is ‘Nice to meet you’. Quite often greetings will also include a how are you question referred to as How-Are-Yous in Edmondson and House (1981: 189), which is used ‘in order to express a ritual interest in [the interlocutor’s] welfare’.

**Leave-takings**
Based on Edmondson and House’s (1981) framework, I distinguish two components of the closing of the conversation: a *leave take*, and a *wish well*. The *leave take* is a conventional expression that is employed to end the interaction with the interlocutor, e.g. ‘Goodbye’ or ‘See you’. The *wish well* expresses some positive wishes for the interlocutor, e.g. ‘Have a nice day’.

**Requests**
Requests can be made for goods, information, services and assistance, etc. As stated above, I will only concentrate on specific formulaic request expressions in this paper.

**Responses to requests**
Readers may be more familiar with different categories of reactions to requests, such as refusals as a speech act category. Following Schauer (2019), all utterances that follow a request and are indicating that the interlocutor is reacting to the request are defined as responses to requests in this paper. Those responses can be (a) an answer to a request for information, (b) a refusal or (c) granting a request. Utterances that are produced following a request that do not refer to the request but are instead changing the topic and/or ignoring the request are not counted as request responses but are instead coded as the speech act they are.

**Expression of gratitude**
According to Jautz (2013: 1–2) ‘thanking is considered a prime example of polite verbal behaviour and is thus often realised with the help of routine formulae’. Expressions of gratitude are reactive linguistic actions that can consist of individual lexical items (e.g. ‘thanks’, ‘ta’, ‘cheers’), or formulaic sequences and longer expressions, e.g. thanking + stating reason (e.g. ‘Thank you for …’) or thanking + complimenting interlocutor (e.g. ‘You are a lifesaver’) (cf. Schauer and Adolphs 2006).

**Response to an expression of gratitude**
Schneider (2005: 103) notes that ‘responses to thanks follow acts of thanking. [...] A response to thanks is a reactive interactional move which follows a reactive move, as the act of thanking also refers back to something else’. In English, a limited number of distinct formulaic expressions are typically used to respond to an expression of gratitude, e.g. ‘You’re welcome’ or ‘Anytime’ (cf. Schauer 2019).

**Apology**
According to Olshtain and Cohen (1983: 20) ‘the act of apologizing is called for when there is some behaviour which has violated social norms. [...] The act of apologizing requires an action or an utterance which is intended to “set things right”’. In English, apologies are frequently performed with utterances solely consisting of ‘Sorry’, longer formulae including ‘sorry’ or expressions featuring ‘I apologise’.

**Response to an apology**
Apology responses convey to the hearer that the apology is accepted, that they should not worry about their proceeding behaviour or that the apology is not accepted. To date, little research exists on apology responses.
Results

Overview of the occurrence of the speech acts investigated in the graphic novels

Figure 1 illustrates how many of the eight speech acts investigated can be found in the four graphic novels. It shows that the graphic novels for the secondary school L2 learners feature all eight speech acts, whereas the two books for primary school L2 learners include seven (Smell My Foot) and six (Baloney and Friends) respectively. This indicates that graphic novels include a higher amount of different speech act categories than picturebooks, since of the 22 picturebooks investigated by Schauer (2019) only one included six of the 10 speech acts investigated and another one featured five, while 11 included two or fewer. Thus, the graphic novels examined here – including those for the lower level L2 learners – provide more varied speech act input than most of the picturebooks previously studied.

Figure 2 shows how many instances of the eight speech acts investigated can be found in the four graphic novels. It is not surprising that requests are the speech act with the highest number of instances in the four books, since they (a) tend to occur very frequently in everyday conversations in a variety of contexts and (b) they were also the most frequently speech act in Schauer’s (2019) picturebook investigation. The speech act in second position is again not surprisingly, responses to requests – this speech act was also in second position in Schauer (2019).

The data show that even in literary works that are primarily focused on direct speech not all requests are followed by a request response. This had also been the case in Schauer (2019) in which 175 requests in the picturebooks were followed by only 54 request responses. There are number of different reasons for this difference in numbers: (1) a verbal request response may not be expected (e.g. in the case of interactions between teachers and classes), and/or (2) the request response may be body language/an action (e.g. rolling up one’s sleeve after being requested to do so by a medical professional, continuing to bully someone after being told to stop it). While in an exclusively word-based literary work, non-verbal request responses need to be described by the author, they can be shown with the help of the visual elements in graphic novels. This also provides L2 learners with useful information regarding non-verbal responses appropriate in the contexts covered in the graphic novel which is particularly helpful for learners.

Figure 1. Overview of speech acts in the four graphic novels. Notes: BaF = Baloney and Friends, Smf = Smell My Foot, Heart = Heartstopper, LT = Leave take, R-Response = Request response, R-Gratitude = Response to an expression of gratitude, R-Apology = Response to an apology.
whose native culture(s) differ from the target L2 culture in some aspects of non-verbal communication.

Like request responses, not all expressions of gratitude and apologies are followed by their respective responses. However, it needs to be noted that all graphic novels feature at least one expression of gratitude and one response to an expression of gratitude, as well as one apology, whereas only two include apology responses.

Although the amount of individual speech act input is certainly important – since more frequent input might lead to better acquisition of the speech acts – it is also important to consider which expressions or routines are featured in the input materials in order to see whether they provide varied input opportunities. This is explored in the following section.

**Expressions and conventional routines featured in the graphic novels**

Due to word count constraints, I primarily focus on greetings, leave takings expressions of gratitude, responses to expressions of gratitude, apologies and responses to apologies here, since an in-depth discussion of request and request responses is not possible.

**Greetings**

Table 2 presents the number of different greeting expressions and routines. It shows that the number of greets included in the graphic novels for primary learners is rather limited with two and three different options compared to five for each of the graphic novels for the older readers. However, given the different proficiency levels this is not necessarily a problem. The books for the primary school learners only feature more informal greets, which is age appropriate. Allergic and Heartstopper, in contrast, provide more variety and importantly also feature two greets that tend to be underrepresented in other materials (cf. Schauer 2019), namely *hey* and *all right*. The latter in particular may be problematic for more advanced young learners, since they may not know (a) that this is an expression that can be used for a greeting and (b) how to respond to it.

Interestingly, *Heartstopper* provides fewer introduction options than any of the other books – its high total number is mainly due to 13 instances of *hey* greets. In contrast, *Allergic* – while having a lower total number – includes a better variety of different options. Interestingly, introduction

![Figure 2. Overview of speech act instances in the four graphic novels](image)

Notes: BaF = Baloney and Friends, SmF = Smell My Foot, Heart = Heartstopper.
questions and expressing pleasure are only featured in one book each. What is noticeable is the absence of the how-are-you question that is typically associated with greetings in English. As Glaser (2020) pointed out, one of the problems with this question is that it may be used in foreign language classes to enquire about an interlocutor’s actual state of well-being resulting in cross-cultural pragmatic failure. Although I cannot comment on requests in detail, it ought to be mentioned here that three of the four graphic novels (Baloney and Friends, Allergic, Heartstopper) feature requests for information / disclosure that actually enquire about an interlocutor’s physical or mental state. The routines that are used in the three books are: [are] you okay? (Baloney and Friends, Allergic, Heartstopper), you feel okay? (Allergic), is everything alright? (Heartstopper). Thus, these three books expose L2 learners to pragmatic routines that are employed when enquiring about a person’s well-being. These routines could be used to contrast the functions of the ritual how-are-you question with an actual question about a person’s health.

Taking leave
Table 3 presents the leave-takes and wish-wells included in the data. Allergic contains the highest number of leave takes (10) but only includes four different leave takes, whereas Heartstopper, which only features three leave-takes, contains three different ones. This also indicates that it would be useful to introduce L2 learners to different graphic novels in order to increase their exposure to different formulaic expressions.

It is regrettable that the two books for the primary school L2 learners only provided very limited input, since leave-taking is one of the least frequently featured speech acts in some textbooks for EFL primary learners (cf. Schauer 2019). Also, as the number of greetings included in the four books is considerably higher than the number of leave-taking expressions, young L2 learners will rarely encounter complete conversations. This has been flagged as problematic in previous studies focusing on teaching materials (e.g. Bardovi-Harlig et al. 1991; Schauer 2019, 2020), since it means that L2 learners may not encounter a wide variety of different leave-taking expressions in their L2 instruction.

Expressing gratitude and responding to expressions of gratitude
Expressions of gratitude and gratitude responses are presented in Table 4. The results show that two of the books (Baloney and Friends and Allergic) primarily contain expressions that are based on the

| Table 2. Greetings | BaF | SmF | Allergic | Heart |
|--------------------|-----|-----|----------|-------|
| **Greets**         |     |     |          |       |
| Hello [, name]     | 2   | 5   | 0        | 0     |
| Hi [, name]        | 5   | 0   | 7        | 7     |
| Hey [, name]       | 1   | 1   | 5        | 13    |
| Welcome            | 0   | 0   | 1        | 0     |
| Dear [name]        | 0   | 0   | 1        | 0     |
| Good morning       | 0   | 0   | 1        | 0     |
| Morning            | 0   | 0   | 0        | 2     |
| Happy New Year     | 0   | 0   | 0        | 1     |
| All right          | 0   | 0   | 0        | 2     |
| **Introduction**   |     |     |          |       |
| I’m [name]         | 6   | 4   | 2        | 0     |
| This is/these are [name/relationship] | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Meet [name]        | 0   | 0   | 1        | 0     |
| [Name]             | 0   | 0   | 1        | 0     |
| My name is [name]  | 0   | 0   | 1        | 0     |
| **Introduction question** |     |     |          |       |
| What’s your name?  | 0   | 0   | 1        | 0     |
| **Expressing pleasure** |     |     |          |       |
| Nice to meet you   | 1   | 0   | 0        | 0     |
| **Total**          | 19  | 11  | 22       | 26    |
more informal thanks, whereas Smell My Foot only features expressions that are based on the somewhat more formal thank you. Other informal expressions, such as ta or cheers are not included in any of the books. Compared to the 22 picturebooks investigated by Schauer (2019), the graphic novels compare well regarding their expression of gratitude input, since only two of the picturebooks investigated in the 2019 study featured expressions of gratitude – with one containing five and one featuring one.

Concerning responses to expressions of gratitude, Table 4 again shows that a high number of occurrences of a particular speech act does not automatically translate into a wide variety of input options. For example, while Smell My Foot features seven responses to expressions of gratitude it only includes one routine you’re welcome. However, although the number of gratitude responses is relatively low, the four books together provide varied input for the individual age groups. While the younger learners will encounter anytime and you’re welcome, the older learners will at least encounter three different variations of an expression based on problem. This again suggests that exposing L2 learners to more than one graphic novel would be useful. It also needs to be noted that none of the picturebooks investigated in Schauer (2019) contained a response to an expression of gratitude, which means that all graphic novels provide better pragmatic input with regard to that speech act than the picturebooks.

**Apologies and responses to apologies**

Table 5 presents the findings regarding apologies and apology responses. Schauer’s (2019) investigation of eight primary school EFL textbooks had shown that apologies are not frequently included in primary textbooks. The study had further shown that only one of the picturebooks investigated included an instance that could be regarded as an apology. In contrast, Limberg (2015) found

### Table 3. Leave-takes and wish wells

| Leave-takes                  | BaF | SmF | Allergic | Heart |
|------------------------------|-----|-----|----------|-------|
| Goodbye [, name/relationship] | 0   | 2   | 3        | 0     |
| Bye [, name]'s               | 0   | 0   | 5        | 1     |
| See you                     | 0   | 0   | 1        | 0     |
| See you on [day]             | 0   | 0   | 0        | 1     |
| I’ll see you later           | 0   | 0   | 0        | 1     |
| Love                        | 0   | 0   | 1        | 0     |
| **Wish-wells**               |     |     |          |       |
| Have a nice day, [name]      | 0   | 1   | 0        | 0     |
| **Total**                    | 0   | 3   | 10       | 3     |

### Table 4. Expressions of gratitude and responses to expressions of gratitude

| Gratitude                    | BaF | SmF | Allergic | Heart |
|------------------------------|-----|-----|----------|-------|
| Thanks                       | 1   | 0   | 2        | 1     |
| Thanks + name / nick name / title | 2   | 0   | 2        | 0     |
| Thanks for                   | 0   | 0   | 2        | 1     |
| Thank you                    | 0   | 3   | 0        | 0     |
| Thank you + name / nick name / title | 0   | 1   | 0        | 0     |
| Thank you for                | 0   | 3   | 1        | 1     |
| You saved my life            | 0   | 1   | 0        | 0     |
| **Total**                    | 3   | 7   | 5        | 2     |

| Gratitude responses          | BaF | SmF | Allergic | Heart |
|------------------------------|-----|-----|----------|-------|
| Anytime                      | 1   | 0   | 0        | 0     |
| You’re welcome               | 0   | 7   | 0        | 0     |
| No problem                   | 0   | 0   | 1        | 0     |
| Not a problem                | 0   | 0   | 0        | 1     |
| No prob                      | 0   | 0   | 0        | 1     |
| **Total**                    | 1   | 7   | 1        | 2     |
that apologies are covered to different extents in three German EFL textbook series for the secondary school and that the apologies expression most frequently used in them was an expression featuring the word sorry. The analysis of graphic novels reveals that the books for the younger learners include one apology each, whereas the books for the older learners include 5 and 9 respectively. However, similar to Limberg’s findings, the variety of apology expressions is rather limited and tends to rely on utterances including sorry. Apology responses are only included in the books for the older learners and the number of instances is rather limited. Only Heartstopper offers some variety and also features a statement that conveys to the interlocutor that they are perhaps apologising too much. Thus, while the four graphic novels may not offer much variety regarding apologies, Heartstopper at least provides some varied input regarding apology responses.

**Table 5. Apologies and responses to apologies**

|                         | BaF | Smf | Allergic | Heart |
|-------------------------|-----|-----|----------|-------|
| **Apologies**           |     |     |          |       |
| Sorry                   | 1   | 0   | 3        | 6     |
| I’m sorry               | 0   | 0   | 2        | 1     |
| [I’m] sorry about [this/def. art.+ noun] | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Excuse me               | 0   | 1   | 0        | 0     |
| **Total**               | 1   | 1   | 5        | 9     |
| **Apology responses**   |     |     |          |       |
| It’s okay               | 0   | 0   | 1        | 0     |
| It’s fine               | 0   | 0   | 0        | 1     |
| You have nothing to be sorry about. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Statement regarding apology frequency | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| **Total**               | 0   | 0   | 1        | 3     |

Discussion

The analysis of the data has shown that compared to 22 picturebooks investigated by Schauer (2019), three of the four graphic novels contain a higher number of different speech acts than any of the picture books. This indicates that graphic novels could be usefully employed in L2 classrooms to expose young learners to speech acts. Based on the number of individual speech act instances in the graphic novels investigated, the speech act of greetings, in particular, could be focused on with the help of the four books.

Teachers of both levels could introduce hey as a greet, since this tends to not be frequently covered in textbooks (cf. Schauer 2019), and the word itself is multifunctional in both English and German. In both English and German, the word can be used to (a) show surprise, dismay or annoyance, (b) to obtain someone’s attention, or as (c) a greeting (Collins Online Dictionary, Duden Online, Merriam Webster Online). In addition, it can also be used in American English to ‘indicate that one is not bothered or troubled by something’ (Merriam Webster), ‘to show puzzlement or preface a remark’ (Collins Online Dictionary) and in South African English as ‘an exclamation used for emphasis at the end of a statement, or alone to seek repetition or confirmation of another person’s statement’ (Collins Online Dictionary). Especially in the graphic novels for the secondary school learners hey as a greeting tends to feature heavily in interactions involving young learners’ age peers. Since L2 learners in secondary education are also frequently expected to encounter different varieties of English, graphic novels representing those could be usefully employed for contrastive purposes.

In addition, Heartstopper could be used to show a variety of greeting expressions used by teenagers in the same situation, since on page 13 it features three different reciprocated greetings performed at the beginning of the school day: all right, morning and hey. This page could be used by teachers to commence a discussion about greetings and especially informal greetings between the young learners’ age peers. Teachers could point out that all right as a greeting can be used in
British English as an initiating greeting and replied to with the same expression all right. In addition, teachers could point out that the more formal greet good morning can be made somewhat more informal by using only morning.

Allergic lends itself to the teaching of different ways of introducing oneself, since it features five different options. Moreover, Allergic also illustrates that introductions may - but do not necessarily have to - occur straight after a greet. Instead, they can occur after some initial smalltalk (cf. Schneider 2008). Somewhat surprisingly none of the four graphic novels include a ritual how-are-you question that is often part of a greeting and tends to be replied to with a ritual answer that reciprocates the ritual question, e.g. 'Fine, thanks, how are you?'. In her detailed analysis of two sets of EFL teaching materials for German primary schools that focused on different materials than Schauer (2019), Glaser (2020) discussed the often problematic way in which how-are-you questions are presented in materials to elicit honest information about a person’s well-being or feelings by following the how-are-you question up with options such as ‘angry’, ‘excited’, ‘happy’ or ‘scared’.

The absence of the how-are-you question as part of the greeting could potentially be an advantage, since three of the four graphic novels include requests for information / disclosure that expose learners to formulaic routines that are used when enquiring about a person’s well-being, e.g. ‘Are you okay?’ or ‘Is everything all right?’. Although requests and request responses could not be discussed in detail due to word count constraints, it is important to note that both books for the older learners contain a considerable number of these speech acts that are useful in medical contexts and also when reacting to bullying. Therefore, Allergic and Heartstopper could also be used for content and language integrated learning (CLIL), e.g. in combination with biology or health studies, and citizenship or social studies classes, and to address issues regarding diversity.

Depending on the individual teaching context and learner population (e.g. primary or secondary, special needs/no special needs/advanced), teachers may wish to employ graphic novels in different ways. For example, in the case of special needs education, they may wish to refer to only one or two pages of a graphic novel and provide the learners with some varied speech act input, such as the different greetings between age peers mentioned above. In other settings, teachers may wish to use both books for the respective level contrastively and ask learners to find different expressions for taking leave and to also note down instances in which they would expect a leave-taking expression but none is included in the book.

The visual input provided can also be usefully addressed in mixed ability or inclusive classrooms. While learners of all abilities and ages will benefit from seeing the reaction of interlocutors following individual utterances, the visual imagery may be particularly useful for learners who find reading in the L2 difficult. Teachers could focus on individual or sequenced boxes / frames, read out the speech act included in the speech bubble and then ask the class what the interlocutors body language indicates and what that character could say if they were to verbalise their response.

Teachers – especially experienced teachers – will be able to develop tasks that suit their individual teaching contexts once they have easy access to studies like this that provide them with an overview and analysis of relevant pragmatic input available in a particular material type or literary work, such as graphic novels. As I mentioned at the beginning, previous studies have shown that L2 teachers see the importance of teaching appropriate expressions and utterances (i.e. speech acts) but may not always be able to do so due to lack of input in textbooks and other commercial L2 teaching materials. It is my firm belief that researchers in L2 pragmatics ought to focus more on helping L2 teachers teach pragmatics by finding alternative input options and by illustrating which speech acts could be taught with them.

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