



**PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF EFL TEXTBOOKS:  
THE EXPLICIT REPRESENTATION OF SPEECH ACTS  
IN SENIOR HIGH TEXTBOOKS IN CHINA**

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**Abstract:**

This article reports on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of a series of seven senior high English textbooks used in China with a particular focus on their representation of speech acts. The detailed analysis focused specifically on the extent to which speech acts are covered, the range and distribution of speech act, and whether adequate contextual and meta-pragmatic information is provided to facilitate the learning of speech acts. The findings show that speech acts are still under-represented in the seven books. The range of speech acts is rather limited, some highly-conventional speech acts are excluded, and the distribution of speech acts across textbooks is neither patterned nor justified. It seems that the authors contrived textbooks based on their native intuitions rather than research-informed data. Although apparent change takes place in the availability of a repertoire of linguistic structures for most speech acts, the way speech acts presented in the seven textbooks still falls short of ideal expectations. The textbooks attempt to simplify speech act instruction to lists of grammatical structures and obscure the complex context-dependent nature of speech act realization. Little or no information about the contextual variables is explicitly provided when a particular speech act is embedded in model dialogues, nor is there adequate meta-pragmatic explanation with respect to the appropriate realization or level of formality of different linguistic structures in various social contexts. The implications of these results for educational managers, textbook developers, and teachers will be mentioned.

**Keywords:** textbook analysis, speech acts, contextual information, meta-pragmatic knowledge, EFL textbooks

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## 1. Introduction

As a key component of communicative competence, pragmatic competence is the ability to produce and interpret contextually appropriate language in real communication. Empirically grounded evidence has shown that pragmatic competence does not develop naturally along with grammatical competence, even advanced learners with good grammatical competence still have difficulty producing language appropriately in different situations. In contrast to grammatical errors, it has been found that pragmatic errors are less likely to be tolerated and more often attributed to impoliteness or rudeness (Boxer and Pickering, 1995). The increasing awareness of the communicative value of language and the unsatisfactory results of second language (L2) learners' pragmatic competence has led researchers to consider what pragmatic inputs have been taught in textbooks. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, textbooks are often the primary and perhaps the only instructional material for students to acquire pragmatic knowledge. However, previous studies in the literature have shown that most existing English textbooks fail to provide sufficient and adequate inputs for the acquisition of pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harling, 1991; Boxer and Pickering, 1995; Cohen and Ishihara, 2013; Uso-Juan, 2008; Vellenga, 2004). Because there have been many calls to reduce the gap between what is presented in textbooks and what is informed from research-based data, this study aims to investigate whether there is any change in mainstream school textbooks in China regarding the representation of pragmatic elements.

Given the fact that pragmatics is such a broad domain encompassing a wide range of intersection areas, this study focuses specifically on its sub-category, speech acts, one of the most rigorously researched areas in pragmatics. The speech act deals with the functional units of utterance, people use language to perform certain social functions such as apologizing, complaining, making requests, or requesting. While speech acts are teachable and learnable empirical resources and they play an important role in social interaction (Cohen, 1996, 2010), there is a clear impetus to examine how speech acts are presented in school textbooks to facilitate the acquisition of pragmatic competence. In addition, the meta-analysis conducted on data suggested that explicit instruction might be generally more effective than implicit teaching of pragmatic knowledge (Kasper, 2001; Rose, 2005; Taguchi, 2015). Therefore, this study draws on texts and activities that explicitly presented speech acts.

With the increasing interest in the second language (L2) pragmatic instruction, the discrepancy between what is needed for students in EFL contexts and what recent English language teaching (ELT) textbooks can offer has been reported in several studies with a different focus (Boxer and Pickering, 1995; Limberg, 2016; Nguyen, 2011; Ren and Han, 2016; Vellenga, 2004). One example of research regarding the textbook treatment of speech acts is Vellenga (2004), who surveyed four popular English as a Second Language (ESL) textbooks and EFL textbooks intended for university-aged adult students. Another study was three levels of upper secondary textbooks series intended for Grade 10-12 students in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2011). These studies all reported a paucity of speech act coverage and the inadequate treatment of contextual and meta-pragmatic information in current EFL textbooks. Given the importance of textbooks in L2 pragmatic instruction, especially in EFL contexts, it is surprising how little pragmatic

research had been incorporated into textbook development and how little attention has been given in the literature to fostering speech-act ability in China. To fill this gap, this study aims to examine the exposure of speech acts in a textbook series designed for high schoolers in China. The results will contribute to an understanding of whether ELT textbooks in China serve as a pragmatically appropriate model for speech act learning, which might give indications as to how future textbook developers and teachers incorporate and complement course texts in terms of speech acts. In addition, this study will also shed light on similar situations in other EFL contexts where exam-oriented assessment dominates.

## 2. The Boundaries of Speech Acts

Speech acts, in their broad sense, refers to all the acts we perform through the medium of language. Regarding the boundary of speech act, it is an empirical question that has not been adequately addressed. Because of the problem in defining the boundaries of speech acts, this study refers to Hymes's (1972) useful proposal of distinction between speech situation, speech event, and speech act. According to Hymes, speech act was the minimal term along the hierarchy of speech situation/event/act. By referring to Hymes, Schmidt and Richard (1980) further commented that it might be more profitable to focus on isolated speech acts than to convert such a speech situation and speech event into part of a sociolinguistic description because such speech situations and speech events are not in themselves governed by coherent rules throughout. Individual speech acts, however, are the minimal unit of speech that has a single function such as making a promise, asking a question, or giving advice. In line with the existing research body, this study draws on individual speech act excluding speech act sequence or speech situations, or speech settings as the primary data.

However, the distinction of speech situation, speech act, and speech events present a vague description, it still falls short of clearly clarifying what individual speech acts are. Perhaps Searle's (1976) attempt was the clearest classification of grouping together illocutionary acts into basic types so far. According to Searle, speech acts can be classified into five major categories based on speakers' intention, namely assertives, commissives, declarations, directives, expressives. For Searle, assertives are to commit the speaker in varying degrees to make statements of how things are. The direction of fit is words-to-world, and assertives can be tested whether the words uttered match the world. Speech acts such as assert, claim, and say belong to this category. Commissives are illocutionary acts whose purpose is to commit speakers in varying degrees of certain future actions. The direction of fit is world-to-words, speech acts such as promises, and threats fall into this category. Declarations refer to speech acts whose performance will bring subsequent real changes in the world through its successful execution. The performance of this type will result in correspondence between the words uttered and the world, speech acts such as nomination, and appointment belongs to this type. Directives refer to the illocutionary acts of the speakers to get the hearers to do something. The direction of fit is world-to-words, speech acts such as suggest, request, and plead to belong to this class. Expressives are to express speakers' psychological feelings about something, there is no direction of fit as the psychological state of speakers is extremely variable. The speaker may

express personal feelings or show attitudes about states of affairs such as apologizing, regretting, and expressing gratitude. While the majority of speech acts can probably be analyzed in Searle's taxonomy, what has to be admitted is that some speech acts are outside the five basic act types. Greetings or farewells, for example, are not characterized as major types in Searle's taxonomy, but which are constitute a rather conventional daily act in human interaction. It is also noteworthy that some speech acts have mixed illocutionary forces such as refusal of a request, in most cases, it is tricky to classify utterances such as 'I'm sorry, but I cannot go today' into basic act types as it has a combining expressive and assertive illocutionary forces. Despite the aforementioned deficiencies, it is undoubtedly Searle's taxonomy constructed as the most practical paradigm in clarifying the boundaries of individual speech acts so far. Hence, this article will borrow Searle's terminology in characterizing the range of speech acts presented in textbooks.

### 3. The Textbooks Selected

The textbooks chosen for this study are a set of seven textbooks published by Pearson Education Asia Limited and Beijing Normal University Press in 2019. They are designed for general senior high schools in China aiming to provide in-depth general education for college entrance qualifications. EFL textbooks in China have to be officially approved by the Ministry of Education before they can be distributed on the market. The decision for a particular textbook series primarily lies with the school faculty, who usually decide on one that may best fit their learner groups. The target learners of the seven books (each accompanied by a teacher's manual) are designed for Grade 10, Grade 11, and Grade 12 students, who have been studying English for at least three years by the time they reach senior high school. Among the seven books, Textbook 1, 2, 3, and 4 are used in Grade 10, and the remaining three (Textbook 5, 6, 7) are intended for Grade 11. Students in Grade 12 will review the seven books through the preparation of College Entrance Exam in China.

The textbook set claimed to 'adopt a theme-based syllabus and to follow an activity-based approach and communicative approach with the central goal to cultivate students' English subject core competences (Teacher's Manual: Required Textbook 1, page 1). They share a similar structure and unit layout as illustrated in Table 1. The internal structure of each book consists of three sessions: Learning to learn, three thematic units, and self-learning resources. The module 'learning to learn' provides guidance on certain methodical competences (e.g. how to improve pronunciation) in English learning. Three thematic units are the core material for classroom teaching. Each thematic unit cover three sub-themes (three lessons) under man and self, man and society, and man and nature, which are to be learned throughout the whole senior high school period. Language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing) are introduced through different text types, followed by focused tasks and linguistic exercises to practice them. In addition, each unit introduces one grammatical structure (Focus on Language), coupled with a pragmatic focus (Focus on Function), constituting the linguistic progression for senior high school students. At the end of each book, self-learning resources such as grammar summaries

text notes, and vocabulary in the units are offered for overview. They're useful for students' independent work in occasions like revising skills or doing homework.

**Table 1:** General Structure of Each Textbook

Textbooks	Sections in the books	
Textbook 1-7 intended for senior high school students in China	1. Learning to learn	
	2. Three thematic units	Topic Talk
		Lesson 1: Reading & Focus on language
		Lesson 2: Listening, Skill Builder, Focus on Function
		Lesson 3: Reading, Skill Builder, Focus on Language
		Writing Workshop, Viewing Workshop, Reading Club
	Assessment: Check your progress, Unit Diary, Workbook	
3. Self-learning resources	Literature Spot, Projects, Grammar Summary, Notes on the Texts, Typescripts, Vocabulary in Each Unit, Word List, Name and Places, Irregular Verbs	

#### 4. Methodology

This study examines the seven selected textbooks in terms of how they provide speech act inputs to enhance students' pragmatic learning. Based on previous research bodies in this field, a discussion of texts and activities seeks to answer the following questions:

**RQ1:** To what extent are speech act information covered in EFL senior high school textbooks in China?

**RQ2:** What speech acts are explicitly presented and how are they distributed in the seven textbooks?

**RQ3:** To what extent is contextual and meta-pragmatic information provided to facilitate speech act learning in the seven books?

Research question 1 concerns the general coverage of speech acts in the textbooks' series through a general analysis, research question 2 deals with the range and distribution of speech acts across seven textbooks, and research question 3 examines the provision of contextual and meta-pragmatic information in speech act learning.

To explore the above research questions, three methodological steps are conducted in this study: 1) a pilot study of data sourcing; 2) data collection; 3) findings and discussions. A pilot study is conducted to first check the feasibility of evaluating the selected textbooks. The guiding principles, general structure, and unit layout, the feature of each section, particularly the target section included speech acts data, for example, such information on the selected textbooks and their corresponding teachers' manuals are identified and collected in a two-round informal analysis. The choice of which section is chosen as potential speech act data comes from the pilot study. Then target data for each research question will be collected by scrutinizing the potential data from previous pilot studies. Finally, the speech act inputs are overall assessed and some discussions are made for each research question respectively.

## 5. Data Collection

The analysis at hand focuses specifically on explicit speech act inputs. Inputs concerning speech acts are identified and collected in each textbook and its accompanying teachers' manual, the results can be seen in the tables below. Only three thematic units in each book were scanned for speech act inputs. This excludes the self-learning resources that each textbook offers at the end in which such referential notes as grammar summaries, vocabulary notes, and tape-scripts covered in the units are presented for overview. They are useful for students' independent work, such as when revising skills or doing homework. The main thrust of classroom teaching, however, concentrates on texts and activities within the thematic units, which is why the following analysis focuses on these parts.

The section to be chosen as target data should adhere to one of the following criteria: 1) they consist of explicit mention and instruction of speech acts; 2) they provide descriptive information of speech acts or language strategies to perform certain speech acts; 3) they provide students with activities or tasks for practicing speech acts. When examining the unit layout and the defining feature of each part in the unit, it is noticeable that speech acts are mainly provided through dialogues between textbook characters, visuals, language boxes (with useful phrases for language production), and some corresponding tasks. The section Focus on Function in each unit is the primary data source. It provides guided functional dialogue with a box of useful expressions to realize such functions, as well as corresponding tasks and exercises to practice speech, and acts introduced. Follow-up exercises for speech acts can be found in the section Check Your Progress and Workbook. As mentioned above, individual speech acts are the primary concern in this study. Thus, language functions occurred in Topic Talk section, such as 'talk about new school life', 'talk about nature', 'talk about closest relationship', are not collected as speech act data as they are too broad and do not have a clear boundary of which speech acts they belong to. Counts and descriptions of different types of explicit speech act inputs will be obtained by performing a three-round page-by-page analysis, then the first author checks the analysis to confirm its accuracy.

## 6. Findings and Discussions

This section presents and discusses the findings in relation to the research questions. We start with an analysis of the overall coverage of speech act inputs in the textbooks and continue with an analysis of the range and distribution of speech acts included. The section then examines the mention of contextual and meta-pragmatic information accompanied by speech acts.

### 6.1 General Coverage

This section presents the results of the first research question, which concerns the extent to which speech acts are covered in textbooks. The number of pages including speech acts is compared with the total pages of the book. The self-learning resource at the end of each book is excluded from the statistical data. Table 2 outlines the number and percentage of pages containing speech acts in each book.

The quantitative analysis shows that the coverage of the speech act is rather limited compared to other elements such as grammar and reading. Speech act accounts for a small portion of each book, with the range from 5.43 to 8.99 percent. On average, 7.84 percent of the textbook pages included some speech act information. The result is consistent with the discussion in the literature and previous studies indicating that pragmatics is often neglected or only marginally treated in most ELT textbooks. For example, the lack of pragmatic information was highlighted by Vellenga (2004) in her review of four ESL and EFL textbooks, in which pragmatic information accounted for an average of 26.5 percent in EFL textbooks and 24.5 percent in ESL textbooks. In a similar vein, Ren and Han (2016) reported an overall 17.09 percent coverage of pragmatic inputs among ten recent college textbooks in China. Note that the present study only investigates the explicit teaching of speech acts, which does not share the exact focus with previous research. However, the under-representation of speech acts in the textbook series implies a negative or even regressing trend in textbook pedagogy in China, as speech acts are marginally treated in all seven books with consistently low coverage, not to mention any opportunity for students to frequently notice or review various speech acts introduced.

**Table 2:** Overall coverage of speech acts information

Textbook	Pages with speech acts	Total number of pages	Percentage (%) of pages with speech acts
Textbook 1	8	89	8.99
Textbook 2	7	89	7.87
Textbook 3	7	92	7.61
Textbook 4	7	92	7.61
Textbook 5	8	92	8.70
Textbook 6	5	92	5.43
Textbook 7	8	92	8.70
<b>In Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>638</b>	<b>7.84</b>

It should be noted that the counted number of pages dedicated to speech acts is independent of the space given to them. In most cases, speech act information consists of only 1-2 phrases on a page. For example, a brief statement such as ‘Using Questions to Draw Attention: some speakers use questions from time to time to draw the audience’s attention. Then they provide answers to the questions. In this way, it helps the audience to understand the points they are making’ (Textbook 5, Unit 4, page 13). This statement is provided in a small text box to describe the function of the speech act ‘Elaborating with Examples’. Although it fails to define the contextual variables or strategies to perform such speech acts, the extract is counted as having provided some speech act information. The pages may differ regarding the size of texts, spaces occupied by pictures, and so on, such that the percentage of pages containing speech act information just contributes to an overall understanding of the extent to which speech acts are covered in each book. The percentage does not reveal the exact amount of the book dealing with speech act information, which is why the following specific analysis is needed to report more detailed information.

## 6.2 Range and Distribution

**Table 3:** Range and distribution of speech acts

Category	Speech acts	Textbook							All
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Assertive	1. Convincing					×			1
	2. Elaborating with examples					×			1
	3. Exchange opinions				×				1
	4. Maintaining a conversation		×						1
	5. Using vague language							×	1
Assertive / Directive	6. Clarifying				×				1
	7. Responding to enquiry					×			1
Commissive / Directive	8. Offering help		×						1
Directive	9. Asking for advice						×		1
	10. Asking for help		×						1
	11. Asking questions			×		×			2
	12. Ending a conversation		×						1
	13. Enquiring					×			1
	14. Requesting politely							×	1
	15. Interrupting a conversation		×						1
Directive / Expressive	16. Suggesting				×		×	×	3
	17. Showing interest			×	×				2
Expressive	18. Accepting suggestion				×				1
	19. Agreeing						×		1
	20. Congratulating	×							1
	21. Disagreeing						×		1
	22. Expressing certainty		×						1
	23. Expressing dislikes	×							1
	24. Expressing emotions	×		×					2
	25. Expressing likes	×							1
	26. Expressing uncertainty		×						1
--	27. Giving thanks	×							1
	28. Greeting	×							1
<b>Total Number of Speech Acts</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>33</b>

**Table 4:** Frequency of Speech Acts

Speech Acts	Book 1	Book 2	Book 3	Book 4	Book 5	Book 6	Book 7	In Total
Assertives	-	3	1	2	9	1	7	21
Commissives	-	2	-	-	1	-	-	2
Declarations	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Directives	-	12	9	9	15	7	-	65
Expressives	25	6	9	9	1	6	6	49

This section presents the results for the second question, which concerns the range of speech acts presented in the textbooks. It has to be pointed out that the speech act of 'advise' is the same as



'suggestion' (Searle, 1969; Banerjee & Carrell, 1988; Bardovi-Harling & Hartford, 1993; Jiang, 2005). Therefore, in this study, speech acts 'giving advice', 'making suggestion', and 'giving suggestion' are analyzed under the same category 'suggesting'.

Different Speech acts and their corresponding linguistic forms introduced are counted and classified into Searle's (1976) taxonomy of five major categories (assertive, commissive, declaration, directive, and expressive) to see whether the coverage of speech acts is comprehensive. It is noticeable to mention speech act 'greeting' are outside the five major categories. In addition, such speech acts as 'clarifying', are not classifiable in terms of a basic act type as they have mixed illocutionary forces: 'Did I make myself clearer?' = directive; 'In other words, the demographics have to be right' = assertive. These speech acts are marked with two act types. Table 3 and 4 (also see appendix 1) displays the distribution and frequency of speech acts across the seven textbooks.

As shown in Table 3, a total number of 33 speech acts are presented in the seven textbooks, ranging from basic conversational skills such as 'greeting', 'ending a conversation' to more challenging ones such as 'disagreeing', 'requesting politely'. The number of speech acts included in each textbook ranges from three to seven, with an average of 4.7 speech acts per book, indicating that the range of speech acts among the seven books is quite limited. The result is consistent with Vellenga's (2004) observation of four integrated skill EFL textbooks in which an average of 5.5 speech acts were explicitly presented per book. Four speech acts are recycled across the books, indicating the authors tend to provide target learners with opportunities to revise and consolidate such speech acts over years. The most frequently appearing speech act is 'suggesting', followed by 'asking questions', 'showing interest', and 'expressing emotions'. There are significant differences in the types of speech acts covered in the seven books, the distribution is neither balanced nor comprehensive. Textbook 1 presents merely expressive act types, Textbook 3 and Textbook 6 do not include assertive speech acts while Textbook 5 and Textbook 7 exclude expressive acts. Out of 28 speech acts, directives and expressives account for more than 19 speech act, in stark contrast to declarations and commissives. Scant or even no attention is paid to commissive and declaration acts. Undoubtedly, directive and expressive act types are the instructional emphasis in this series of textbooks, which is seemingly reasonable as most challenging face-threatening acts fall into categories of the directive and expressive. However, if students are not encountered with commissive and declaration speech acts through textbooks at all, they are not likely to be pragmatically competent in dealing with such communicative acts in real communication.

The major problem, however, is the distribution of speech acts does not seem to be patterned based on learners' language progression, since there is no systematic increase in percentage across books; nor is there sound justification regarding the selection or repetition of certain speech acts. For example, one would wonder what would make 'expressing emotions', 'showing interest' more challenging or important than 'disagreeing' and 'requesting politely' as the former speech acts were mentioned three times while the latter ones occurred merely once. It is surprising to see speech acts 'disagreeing', 'expressing dislikes', 'requesting politely' are not repeated, although empirical research had shown that such impositive face-threatening speech acts were more problematic for EFL learners in China and argued for pragmatic features in

textbooks should be presented according to their difficulty levels (Wang, 2011; Zheng and Huang, 2010; Li, Raja & Sazalie, 2015). Out of the 28 different speech acts in the seven textbooks, such highly-conventional speech acts as apologizing, making an introduction, and complimenting are not shown up in all seven textbooks. The speech act of apology is quite frequently realized in natural daily interaction and has been largely explored in the fields of interlanguage and cross-cultural pragmatics (Ogiermann, 2009; Limberg, 2015). Apparently, textbook authors are those who make decisions about which speech acts should be taught and repeated. There are some questions, however, as to how these decisions are made and whether they are informed by empirically grounded data when instructional resources are developed. The result of this study is consistent with existing discussions in the literature, in which complained that textbook developers tend to overly rely on their intuitions or anecdotal evidence of what should be taught rather than research-informed data when the textbook is developed (Bardovi-Harling, 2001; Boxer and Pickering, 1995; Cohen and Ishihara, 2013).

### 6.3 Contextual and Meta-pragmatic Information

This section presents the results of the third research question, which examines the extent to which contextual and meta-pragmatic information is represented in the seven textbooks. For the most part, speech acts are presented under the Focus on Function section in a special box, and several grammatical forms focused on particular speech acts are emphasized as language points. Students are required to complete the blanks with the given expressions that occurred in a short dialogue recording or match appropriate speech acts with certain linguistic forms, as illustrated in the following Extract 1 and 2.

#### Extract 1, Textbook 2

Focus on Function: Maintaining, interrupting and ending a conversation (Unit 5, page 35)
Listen and imitate. Decide whether the phrases in italics are uses to: - maintain(M), - interrupt (I), or end (E) a conversation. Write the correct letter in the brackets.  1. <i>Excuse me</i> , Mr Wang, but can I interrupt you there? ( ) 2. <i>Ok</i> , if I'm outdoors, ... ( ) 3. <i>Sorry</i> , <i>but</i> my advice is to... ( ) 4. <i>Sorry for interrupting again</i> ... ( ) 5. Well, I'd love to know more, <i>but</i> , <i>unfortunately</i> , we've run out of time. ( ) 6. <i>So</i> , <i>I'm very sorry</i> , but we'll have to finish there. ( )

Extract 2, Textbook 3

Focus on Function: Asking Questions (Unit 8, page 35)
Listen and imitate. Complete the Talk Builder.
1. _____: How did Ms Yi Jiefang work through her sadness after her son's death? 2. _____ the former and the current conditions in the desert? 3. I'm interested in what she is working on now. _____?
<i>Could you tell me more</i> <i>My question is</i> <i>Can you say something about</i>

As exemplified by the above extracts, speech acts are often introduced and modeled out of context through monotonous exercises. That is, there is a little explicit description of the relationship between speakers, status differences, or other contextual factors in which a particular speech act is embedded. Unfortunately, the accompanied teacher's manuals also do not provide any description or guidance on such contextual information either. Even when scarce contextual inputs are contained, the textbooks seem to offer little or no attempt to direct students' attention to how these contextual variables and language interact to convey the message directly and indirectly. In some cases, the relationship between the characters can be inferred from the audio recordings (e.g. customer and service assistant, father and son, presenter and interviewee). Nevertheless, in the absence of explicit introduction and formal instruction, this contextual information is more likely ignored by students. Speech act research has shown that performing a speech act is an intrinsically complex phenomenon that is highly context-dependent and interactive in nature (Koester, 2002). Obviously, the textbooks attempt to simplify pragmatic phenomena to lists of phrase-level options and instill a weakened awareness of contextually appropriate use of language. The problem with such lists of phrase-level options is that they lead to a misconception that speech act skills can be presumably easily picked up by acquiring lists of decontextualised linguistic forms. The lack of contextual information in this study confirmed the previous study that textbooks often serve as a poor model to cultivate learners' pragmatic competence (Uso-Juan, 2008).

In order to uncover a more detailed presentation of context information, analysis of tape-scripts is conducted to investigate the presentation of implicit contextual information. General information about contexts and contextual variables can be seen in Table 5 and Table 6 (also see appendix 2). From Table 5, it can be seen that 19 different contexts and 16 types of speakers' relationships are presented in the seven books. There seems to be evidence that the selected textbooks tend to provide various model dialogues with a diversity of topics and social roles. As mentioned above, the textbooks analyzed in this study adopt a theme-based syllabus that aims to provide thematic contexts for language learning. The General Senior High School Curriculum Standards (2017) in China has set guiding principles with three main thematic contexts ('man and self', 'man and society', and 'man and nature') as well as content requirements for institutional textbook makers. When looking more closely at the topics of dialogues, there

are fourteen topics of dialogues in the category of 'man and society', 3 topics in 'man and self', and 2 topics in 'man and nature'. Due to the fact that there are no authorized documents in China or clear consensus in previous studies regarding the optimum number of topics or contexts provided for students, it is difficult to conclude here whether 19 contexts with the majority topics focused on 'man and society' for pragmatic learning is a satisfactory number. Thus, future research can be conducted to explore this research gap.

By referring to Brown and Levinson's (1987) three dimensions of social variables (social distance, relevance of power, and degree of imposition), Table 6 outlines a more detailed exploration of contextual variables. From the table, it can be seen that most of the model dialogues are conversations taking place between people with high or low social distance, which means most of the characters are friends or complete strangers, they either know each other very well or do not know each other at all. And the equal and unequal relevance of power between the speakers in the model dialogue are evenly allocated, and this is consistent with data in Table 5, which reveals a diverse type of speakers' relationships. Finally, a sharp contrast is demonstrated by a comparison between high and low degree of imposition, with merely one model dialogue involving high imposition conversation. The finding of this part indicates that the textbooks analyzed attempt to provide a diversity of contextual variables in aspects of social distance and relevance of power, which is a positive trend in pragmatic instruction. However, with less diversity in contextual variables in imposition degree, learners may fail to acquire different language choices and strategies concerning how likely can one impose what one what's on the other.

**Table 5:** Coverage of contexts and speakers' relationship

Textbook	Number of contexts	Types of speakers' relationship
Textbook 1	3	2
Textbook 2	4	4
Textbook 3	2	2
Textbook 4	3	2
Textbook 5	2	2
Textbook 6	2	2
Textbook 7	3	2
<b>In Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>16</b>

**Table 6:** Coverage, range, and frequency of contextual variables in the textbooks

Distance	Number	Power	Number	Imposition	Number
High	8	Equal	10	High	1
Medium	2	Unequal	9	Low	18
Low	9	-	-	-	-
In total	19		19		19

Regardless of the way speech acts are presented, findings also suggest a paucity of meta-pragmatic knowledge relevant to their realization or performance. Speech acts are both language-specific and culture-specific (Cohen, 1996). The realization of speech acts is not only intricate but also variable, it does not obey mechanical form-function mapping, which is the

reason why meta-pragmatic knowledge should be commented on to assist speech act learning. The information which provides meta-pragmatic knowledge concerning the description, explanation, or discussion of language functions, strategies to perform a certain language function, or the use of appropriate linguistic resources in a particular situation and when and for what purpose it is appropriate to perform a certain communicative act are counted and collected in the textbook series. From Table 7, it can be seen that 8 pieces of pragmatic information are collected in total, which is much insufficient compared to 33 speech acts and 137 different expressions included in the seven books. For the majority of speech acts, there is no explicit meta-pragmatic discussion with respect to formality or appropriate context of use, nor is there any explicit discussion regarding register or social-cultural norms in language use. The lack and deficiencies above indicate that the textbooks seem to offer little attempt to draw students' attention to meta-pragmatic knowledge, although meta-pragmatic knowledge is required to be covered in textbook content as written in the Chinese General Senior High School Curriculum Standards (2017).

Though there is scant meta-pragmatic knowledge mentioned in textbooks and corresponding teacher's manuals, such as a brief explanation on the function of convincing: 'Explain to students that convincing causes someone to believe firmly in the truth of something. People use convincing to improve their arguments' (Teacher's manual for textbook 5 unit 5, page 62); or a hasty mention of the consequence of interrupting or ending a conversation impolitely: 'Explain that it can be seen as rude or disrespectful to interrupt or abruptly end a conversation' (Teacher's manual for textbook 2, page 70), it is rather cursorily treated and can only be taken at face value. In fact, even if students know the general function and norms of a certain speech act, they are still far from pragmatically competent to perform the speech act appropriately in a given circumstance. There is no instruction on when to perform a speech act and which speech act is expected or appropriate in a given socio-cultural context, nor is there any reasoning on variables influencing the appropriateness of various expressions, such as social distance, the relevance of power, and the degree of imposition (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Previous studies indicate that this knowledge has become a great barrier discouraging learners in China from communicating in English (Li, Raja & Szaliev, 2015). Without explicit mention of such meta-pragmatic knowledge, the learner is unlikely to equip with the ability to select different expressions to perform a certain communicative act according to its contextual variables in real communication.

**Table 7:** Meta-pragmatic knowledge in seven textbooks

Item	Speech acts	Meta-pragmatic knowledge
1	Textbook 2, Unit 4: Asking for and offering help	Pick out the expressions that are formal/ informal and explain why. <i>Explain to students that when talking to a family member, the conversation is more informal; when talking to someone you don't know, the conversation is formal.</i>
2	Textbook 2 Unit 5: Interrupting and ending a conversation	What are polite ways to interrupt and end a conversation? <i>Explain that it can be seen as rude or disrespectful to interrupt or abruptly end a conversation.</i>

3	Textbook 3 Unit 8: Asking questions	Are the questions in the interview formal or informal? why are the questions asked this way? <i>Formal as they are addressed in an interview.</i>
4	Textbook3 Unit 9: Showing interest	A meta-pragmatic discussion of using different formulaic expressions to show interest in a different context
5	Teacher's manual for Textbook 5 Unit 4: Elaborating with examples	<i>Explain to students that a definition without examples does not give full meaning to them. Without examples, the meaning is not relevant.</i>
6	Teacher's manual for Textbook 5 Unit 5: Convincing	<i>Explain to students that convincing causes someone to believe firmly in the truth of something. People use convincing to improve their arguments.</i>
7	Teacher's manual for Textbook 5 Unit 6: Clarifying and asking questions	<i>Explain to students that clarifying questions are confirming if some information is correct, whereas asking a question is a way of asking for more information about something.</i>
8	Teacher's manual for Textbook 7 Unit 10: Using vague language	What purpose would you use vague language <i>To make a statement less strong.</i>

In evaluating the treatment of speech acts in four ESL and EFL textbooks, Vellenga's (2004) found that speech act 'Advice/suggestion' was only associated with modal 'should'. The author argued that such simplified form-function mapping may mislead students to think that is the only option for constructing an utterance. Compared with the textbooks in Vellenga's (2004) study, there is an apparent change in the textbooks analyzed in this study. Occasionally, the speech act is matched with a limited number of structures, as shown in Textbook 2, speech act 'maintaining a conversation' is introduced with merely one expression 'ok, if I'm outdoors, move away from any buildings or streetlights. If I'm indoors,...' (Unit 5, page 35). For most speech acts, students are provided with multiple linguistic forms available to make pragmatic choices. 'Suggesting' is the most frequent speech act in the seven textbooks, with 14 linguistic forms provided to convey such illocutionary forces. By referring to Martinez-Flor's (2004) taxonomy, the underlying strategies and the degree of the directness of each linguistic form are analyzed in Table 8 above. Direct, conventionalized, and indirect types with a wide range of realization strategies are covered. It is noticeable that syntactic structures to perform 'giving advice' presented in this series of textbooks, such as let's..., modals (should, can, could), performative verbs, and impersonal forms, are commonly used for giving advice as evident in language corpus data (Jiang, 2005). This result indicates a positive trend for pragmatic instruction in EFL textbooks in China, as to some extent the authors attempt to select pragmatic inputs based on authentic-like language use in real life. However, an expanded list of linguistic forms is still fall short of the ideal expectation of textbooks' pedagogical value in teaching pragmatics. Again, the lack of contextual information, or cues about the nuances of meaning among different linguistic formulae, or cultural reasoning on L2 pragmatic norms largely undermines the textbooks' efficacy in teaching speech acts.

**Table 8:** Suggesting: linguistic and syntactic structures (Adapted from Martinez-Flor, 2004)

Type	Strategy	Syntactic structure
Direct	Performative verb	I advise you to...
		I would love you to...
	Imperative	Try to...
Conventionalized forms	Specific formulae (interrogative forms)	Why don't we...?
		Would you like me to ...?
	Let's...	Let's...
	Should	We should try to...
		You should try to
Possibility / probability	We can...	
	You could try...	
Indirect	Impersonal	One thing you can do is...
		It might also be a good idea to...
		The best thing is to...
		It's always better to...

## 7. Pedagogical implications

This study evaluates the representation of speech acts in seven EFL textbooks intended for general senior high schools in China. The findings have pedagogical implications for educational managers, textbook developers, and teachers in similar situations in other EFL contexts where exam-oriented language education dominates. The detailed analysis implies that although some encouraging changes have taken place regarding the representation of speech acts, the textbooks still fall short of providing sufficient and adequate speech act information concerning for students' pragmatic needs. It is owing to these potential problems that textbooks should be carefully evaluated before being used in the classroom. Since the language assessment system in China is mainly grammar-oriented written exams and focuses on language usage rather than language use, both teachers and learners concentrate mostly on grammatical competence, pragmatic aspect of language ability is somewhat neglected although it is one key teaching objective in language pedagogy as is written in many official documents in China. There also seems to be a misconception that pragmatic competence can be acquired all at once, as long as they acquired advanced grammatical competence. The first and foremost task is to instil a heightened awareness of the pragmatic use of language in English education. There should be a clear consensus that speech acts are really at the intersection of language and culture. The wide gap between what is actually presented in the textbooks and what learners really need also calls for textbook developers to offer well-designed textbooks for EFL learners. They could lay more emphasis on speech act coverage and provide sufficient contextual reference and meta-pragmatic knowledge in the textbook. They also need to make informed decisions based on empirical research information rather than native intuitions or anecdotal evidence. The weakness in coverage, selection, and presentation of speech acts should be improved to maximize the pedagogical value for the teaching of pragmatic competence appropriately or fully.

Textbook development and revision is a rather time-consuming and arduous project. It is true that textbooks are often not responsive enough to current pedagogical theories or trends. English teachers, however, have the opportunities to constantly upgrade their knowledge base and to make timely informed decisions about language teaching in responding to the most current pedagogical developments and new teaching materials. Teachers should be fully aware of the limitation of the textbooks they are using. In China, textbooks are often authorized and treated as unproblematic, which makes it rather crucial for teachers to use textbooks critically and flexibly for the benefit of pragmatic learning. Teachers should be aware of the discrepancy that emerged from this study and make efforts to compensate for these shortcomings, such potentially effective ways could include, for example, awareness-raising activity in explicitly stating the importance and necessity of speech act learning, meta-pragmatic discussion on pragmatic norms such as politeness, formality, social distance or degree of imposition, and explanation of cultural reasoning for L2 pragmatic norms. In addition, teachers are encouraged to adapt their textbooks with additional materials that they consider beneficial for students learning. In the case of teaching speech acts, corpora of authentic spoken language data, episodes selected from films or soap operas, and other textbooks of a similar level can be complemented as additional pragmatic resources. Many efforts are needed for teachers to bridge the gaps uncovered in this study and more teacher training projects and academic seminars on pragmatic pedagogy are needed to enhance teachers' awareness and competence in preparing students to be pragmatically competent in real-life interaction.

## 8. Conclusion

Textbooks are one of the main linguistic inputs for language learners, particularly for those learners in a foreign language context. This article aims to add to the current research on textbook evaluation and pragmatic pedagogy by investigating the treatment of speech acts in one series of senior high ELT textbooks in China targeting students' oral speaking, with particular attention devoted to the coverage, range, and manner of speech acts presented in the selected textbooks. The results reveal some positive trends in the teaching of speech acts in the textbook series. For example, compared with textbooks examined by Vellenga (2004), in which a particular linguistic form is associated with a speech act, the textbooks provide an extended repertoire of formulae forms for most speech acts. In addition, directive and expressive speech acts are the instructional emphases in the textbook series that concern with students' learning needs.

However, the analysis of the textbook series also uncovers many potential problems evident in their explicit representation of speech acts. First, this study shows that speech act information accounts for a small proportion of the whole texts in each textbook, indicating that speech acts are still marginally treated in recent ELT textbooks in China. Second, the range of speech acts in most textbooks is rather limited, and their distribution across the textbooks does not seem to reflect any systematic plan. Some highly practical speech acts which are fundamental for students' successful functioning do not cover. The result confirms previous discussions in the literature that textbook developers over-rely on native intuitions rather than



empirically based information about L2 pragmatics regarding the selection and distribution of speech acts. Third, most speech acts are taught with lists of grammatical structures as decontextualised language points by rote, the textbooks provide a little attempt to sensitize students to the fine shades of meaning as they learn to use various syntactic structures. There seems to be a misconception that speech act ability can be presumably easily picked up by acquiring a list of phrase-level forms. Furthermore, with respect to contextual and meta-pragmatic information related to speech acts, none of the textbooks offer an adequate contextual explanation and meta-pragmatic discussion in which speech acts are embedded. The majority of speech acts are introduced out of context, and meta-pragmatic information on politeness or norms of politeness are rarely presented or minimal in sense. On the whole, the inadequate treatment of speech acts in the textbooks' series confirms the long-standing complaint in L2 pragmatic pedagogy that textbooks often serve as a poor model to foster the pragmatic competence learners need to achieve in successful communication. The fact that this study has a relatively small sample, and that pragmatic information is so broadly defined bring limitations to this study. There may be more speech act coverage or elaboration of contextual and meta-pragmatic cues in other current senior high textbooks. Larger samples of senior high textbooks and more broad areas in pragmatic information can be examined to shed further light on this field.

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