Learners' Opportunities to Practice Speech Acts in English Language Teaching Textbooks

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This study investigates learners' opportunities to practise pragmatic knowledge in English language teaching (ELT) textbooks. Specifically, it focuses on the frequently recurring speech acts of *giving advice, giving offers, inviting*, and *requesting*. In order to determine how these speech acts are treated in textbook tasks, five beginner level international and seven Japanese high school ELT textbooks were examined. The study revealed that international textbooks used these speech acts to practise everyday interactions. Conversely, Japanese high school textbooks used speech acts to introduce grammar information, and, occasionally, to practise mitigation or softening. Both types of textbooks shared weaknesses, such as a narrow range of language use situations and limited pragmatic choice for learners. In the end, findings from the study suggest the necessity of teacher efforts to modify internal characteristics of materials to adapt tasks to pragmatic instruction.

本研究では、英語教材に頻出される発話行為のうち、「助言」、「申し出」、「招待」および「依頼」に焦点をあわせ、言語使用の訓練ができる機会についての調査を行った。調査対象として、初級レベルの洋書教材と日本国内の高等学校1年生用の英語教科書を比較した。その結果、洋書教材においては、これらの発話行為は日常会話の練習に使用されており、高等学校教科書では文法事項の紹介の手段として用いられていることが判明した。また両タイプの教材には、学習者の言語使用ならびに語用論的選択の範囲が限られているという問題点も発見された。したがって適切な言語使用という観点から、指導者の努力により教材の内的部分を語用論的指導に適応できるように変えていく必要性が求められる。

In Japanese high schools, English language teaching (ELT) textbooks are full of linguistic information, but appropriate language use is rarely practised. Thus, bridging the gap between learners' linguistic knowledge and pragmatic competence is a key goal for foreign language education in this context.

To begin, pragmatic competence is defined as "the ability to use language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context" (Thomas, 1983, p.92). Alongside grammatical and sociolinguistic, pragmatic competence is one of the core concepts involved in communicative competence (Bachman & Palmer, 1982). Speech act theory, which highlights the function of language and specific complex acts requiring, for example, 'politeness' has ascended in recent research (Arai, 2005; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Kasper, 2006, Levinson, 2017). Therefore, this study looks to connect research on speech acts with their presentation in ELT textbooks.

Despite emphasis on the importance of practice, the pragmatic knowledge introduced in ELT textbooks often lacks appropriate practice exercises (McGroarty & Taguchi, 2005; Shimizu et al., 2007, 2008). The current study evaluates learners' opportunities to practise the politeness-sensitive speech acts of *giving advice*, *giving offers*, *inviting*, and *requesting* provided in ELT textbooks. These four speech acts are common features of ELT textbooks and are often used to introduce grammatical information. This study analysed the presentation of these four speech acts in a sample of international and Japanese high school ELT textbooks. The outcomes reveal differences between these two types of textbooks with regards to the communicativeness of the tasks and linguistic forms to be practised. In the end, the analysis offers clues about how to compensate for the deficiencies of these ELT textbooks.

Literature Review
Language Use in Politeness-sensitive Speech Events

English pragmatics is a complex topic with a well-developed literature. Some speech acts such as *requesting*, *refusing*, *suggesting*, and so on, may be regarded as face-threatening acts (FTAs) (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Martinez-Flor, 2005; Trosborg, 1995). At the same time, these speech acts are often used in politeness-sensitive speech events, in which a wide range of highly conventionalized polite behaviours are performed

in English speaking societies (Leech, 2014).

Firstly, the speech act of *giving advice* is often performed in order to tell the hearer what is the best for him/her to do rather than to get him/her to do something (Leech, 2014). However, this speech act often takes place through intruding into the hearer's world and is regarded as an FTA (Martinez-Flor, 2005). Advice-giving tends to be performed inappropriately by English language learners unaware of how to navigate speaker-hearer relationships. Examples include using abrupt-sounding forms as *should* and *had better*, or students giving inappropriate advice to teachers such as "You should get married soon" (Houck & Fujimori, 2010). Leech (2014) argued that giving advice requires the avoidance of expressing one's opinion and indirect strategies should be involved in its performance.

Second, *giving offers* and *inviting* are other speech acts conducted for the benefit of the recipients. These speech acts are performed to the advantage of the hearer and at the expense of the speaker, and using direct forms can be considered polite. Although it sounds constraining, the usage of direct forms provides the hearer with less room to decline. At the same time, giving offers and inviting could be face-threatening events which intrude on the hearer's personal space and impede freedom of action (Leech, 2014). According to Fukushima (1990), the use of imperatives for offering a seat at a party sounds rude, or the use of "Do you want […]?" may sound too direct and pushy when the speaker and hearer do not get along with each other. Moreover, these speech acts are culturally specific and they can be used perfunctorily or ritually to satisfy necessities of hospitality, politeness, and modesty (Yaqubi, 2020). For example, Eslami (2005) noted that genuine invitations in Persian culture often use strong strategies and imperatives, but ostensible invitations tend to use interrogatives. It is important to recognise that politeness in these speech acts is context dependent.

Finally, *requesting*, in contrast to the three aforementioned speech acts, is made to the benefit of the speaker and at the expense of the hearer, and can encroach on the hearer's freedom of action (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Leech, 2014). Additionally, Trosborg (1995) noted the power and influence on the behaviour of the hearer involved in requesting. At the same time, potential rejection of the request is face threatening for the speaker. In addition, Rinnert and Iwai (2010) argued that the speech act of requesting should be performed indirectly and softly depending on the imposition, no matter the relationship between speaker and hearers. Yates and Springall (2010) argued that English speakers use different strategies to soften the force of requests. For example, lexis such as "just," the use of past tense or modal verbs, and preparatory moves such as explanations and offers function as mitigation devices. As a whole, previous research has documented a variety of strategies for realising these speech acts according to the situation.

Issues in practicing speech acts in ELT textbooks

I will now shift the discussion to how these speech acts are presented in ELT textbooks. Numerous studies have emphasised the importance of practising pragmatic knowledge, and pointed out the lack of tasks to support such practice in ELT textbooks (Ali Salimi & Karami, 2019; Ishihara & Paller, 2016; McGroarty & Taguchi, 2005; Shimizu et al., 2007, 2008; Uso-Juan, 2007). In order to judge how language use is practised in ELT textbooks, Dubin and Olshatain (1986) developed a scale for assessing the communicative potential of workouts, which range from the most communicative (Level 1) to the least communicative (Level 7) (p. 98-99). Group or pair interaction involving negotiation of new information is classified as the most communicative task. Providing information to a partner followed as the second most communicative tasks. On the other hand, the least interactive tasks involved only exposure like listening to a song or a story, and the second least communicative category of tasks involved mechanical operations such as word orders, fill-in-a-blank exercises, etc. Based on this scale, McGroarty and Taguchi (2005) found that most exercise types in ELT textbooks used in Japanese high schools were ranked in the least communicative categories. Their study also showed that more than 80% of the communicative functions in the textbooks were ideational (e.g., asking for and providing information), whereas less than 17% of manipulative functions (such as requesting) were practised with tasks. Moreover, most of these tasks were less communicatively designed, mechanical/structured exercises with formulaic expressions (Dubin & Olshain, 1986).

In another study, Shimizu et al. (2007) examined EFL textbooks used in Japanese upper secondary education to determine the ratio of tasks to practise speech acts. Less than 20% of these tasks provided practice opportunities. At the same time, tasks to practise linguistic forms were rare even though some of these forms were explicitly introduced. McGroarty and Taguchi (2005) also pointed out the lack of indirect categories of requesting, absence of ways to make suggestions such as "you could + verb" and "you might want to + verb", and a dearth of scenarios for students to practise communicatively. In addition to these studies, Uso-Juan (2007) analysed five ELT textbooks for tourism used in universities in Spain. Activities to practise requesting were presented mainly for learners' acquisition of linguistic competence with no context. More recently, Ali Salimi and Karami (2019) noted that the majority of tasks in the ELT textbooks used in Iranian universities did not cover pragmatic use of language. At the same time, they found the majority of learners were aware of the importance of pragmatic knowledge, and showed a preference for communicative tasks aimed at

pragmatic competence. Ren and Han (2016) also noticed a substantial gap between EFL learners' needs and the information in textbooks used in universities in China. Moreover, Nguyen and Canh (2019) pointed out the importance of contextualisation of tasks allowing learners to make pragmatic choices in addition to focusing on fluency development. Overall, many ELT textbooks provide learners with limited opportunities to practise appropriate language with context despite the importance of practising pragmatic knowledge.

Aim of the Study and Research Questions

In many cases, textbook evaluations are conducted for two reasons: 1) to help teachers or program developers select appropriate textbooks; and 2) to inform teachers of the merits and demerits of the chosen materials (Bahar & Zaman, 2013). This study specifically compares international ELT textbooks and Japanese high school ELT textbooks to assess the weaknesses and potentials in presenting pragmatic knowledge. Therefore, analyses of pragmatic information in textbooks may reveal what elements are missing in the tasks or what linguistic information may allow learners to practise pragmatic skills. Analysis may also suggest how to compensate for gaps or how existing linguistic information in textbooks can be incorporated into pragmatic instruction. In order to address these problems and issues, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1. How 'communicatively' are the speech acts of *giving advice*, *giving offers*, *inviting*, and *requesting* practiced in beginner-level ELT textbooks?

RQ2. Can different linguistic forms of each speech act be practised according to the speaker-hearer relations?

Methods

Textbook Selection

This study compared two types of ELT textbooks with regards to learners' opportunities to practice the speech acts of *giving advice*, *giving offers*, *inviting*, and *requesting*. To select the materials for the study, an informal survey of major publishers was conducted enquiring about their top-selling international ELT coursebooks and Japanese high school ELT textbooks. Next, following Kawashima's (2021) study of pragmatic visuals in ELT textbooks, five widely used beginner level international adult and seven first year Japanese high school texts were chosen. The former type of textbooks includes the titles: *Interchange*, *Headway*, *Cutting*, *Global*, and *Time*. The latter types were

Progress, *Treasure*, *Crown*, *Vista*, *Vivid*, *Select*, and *Quest* (See Appendix A).

Data Analyses

After identifying tasks involving *giving advice*, *giving offers*, *inviting*, and *requesting* in each textbook, tasks were categorised according to levels based on the scale illustrated in Figure 1 (Dubin & Olshtain, 1986; McGroarty & Taguchi, 2005).

Figure 1

Scale for Assessing the Communicativeness Potential of Workouts (Dubin & Olshtain, 1986, p.
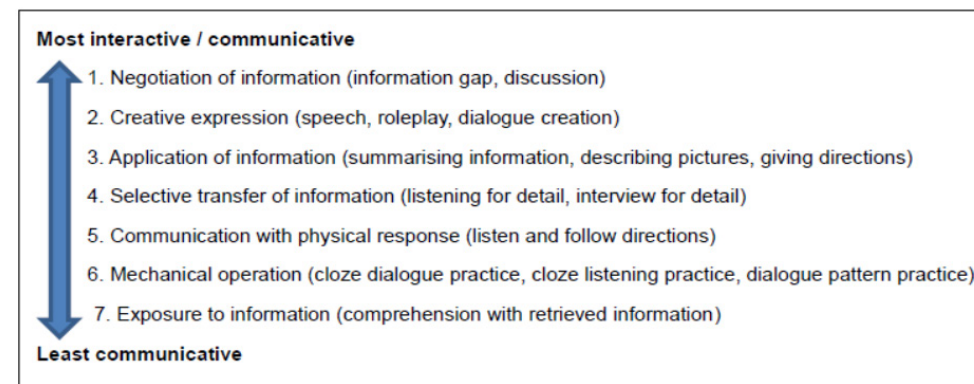
98-99)

In order to rate the degree of communicativeness in the practice tasks, speech act tasks were ranked numerically. The calculation of the average levels of communicativeness was made with the number of each cell. The speech act with the lowest average number was determined to be practised the most communicatively.

Further investigation was undertaken to analyse the range of linguistic forms practised in each speech act. Following Martinez-Flor (2005), linguistic forms for giving advice were categorised as *direct*, *softened*, or *indirect*. In line with Eslami (2005) and Fukushima (1990), linguistic forms involved with giving offers and inviting were classified as *question*, *persuasion*, *appeal*, or *indirect*. Finally, using the scale developed by Blum-Kulka and House (1989), forms associated with requesting were coded as *direct requests*, *conventionally indirect*, and *non-conventionally indirect*. Additionally, the speaker-hearer

relations involved in each of these speech acts were coded based on their social distance (close or distant) and power relations (equal or unequal).

Results

Communicativeness of Textbook Tasks

The levels of communicativeness of the tasks are displayed in Table 1 and Table 2. As a whole, these speech acts were commonly practised in more than half of the textbooks. In the case of international ELT textbooks, the four speech acts were generally treated communicatively. The average level of communicativeness was Level 3 or above. Giving advice was practised most communicatively, and learners were given opportunities for negotiation of information or creative expression to perform this speech act. Giving offers and requesting were practised across all five textbooks while *Global* and *Time* did not provide learners with the opportunities to practise these speech acts communicatively (see Table 1). In addition, inviting was practised at Level 1 only in *Interchange* while the most communicative tasks in the remaining textbooks of *Headway* and *Time* were selective transfer of information at Level 4.

Table 1
Communicativeness of Tasks for Speech Acts in International ELT Textbooks

Speech act	Interchange	Headway	Cutting	Global	Time	Average
Giving advice	1	2		2	2	1.8
Giving offers	2	2	2	4	4	2.8
Inviting	1	4			4	3.0
Requesting	2	2	2	4	4	2.8

Note: Blank cells refer to the absence of the relevant tasks

In Japanese high school ELT textbooks, as shown in Table 2, except for giving advice, speech acts were mainly practised through mechanical operation, or grammar exercises. Although the average level of the most communicatively designed tasks for giving advice is relatively high, this speech act was practised solely at Level 6 in *Crown* and *Select*. Similarly, requesting was practised at Level 6 in all textbooks except *Quest*. No relevant communicative tasks were identified in *Crown*, *Vivid*, or *Select*.

Table 2
Levels of Communicativeness of Tasks in Japanese High School ELT Textbooks

Speech act	Progress	Treasure	Crown	Vista	Vivid	Select	Quest	Avg.
Giving advice	2	3	6	2		6	2	3.5
Giving offers		3		6	6	6	4	5.0
Inviting				6	6	6	2	5.0
Requesting		6	6	6	6		4	5.6

Note: Blank cells refer to the absence of the relevant tasks

Linguistic Forms for Speech Acts

Tables 3 and 4 illustrate the number of linguistic forms used to practice giving advice, giving offers, inviting, and requesting along with the speaker-hearer relations. In addition, the tasks for these speech acts were categorised into communicatively designed tasks (Level 1-3) and less communicatively designed tasks (Level 4-7).

The presentation of speech acts in international ELT textbooks had several particularities. Slightly more than half of giving advice tasks were communicatively designed, and direct forms were typically practised without information about the speaker-hearer relations (see Table 3). Approximately one-third of the tasks for giving offers were communicatively designed. This speech act was mostly practised with the use of question forms. The speaker-hearer relation for practising this speech act was typically Distance-Equal. As for inviting, less than a quarter of the tasks provided practice opportunities. Interestingly, communicatively-designed tasks for this speech act typically used questions without speaker-hearer information, whereas persuasion and appeal in addition to questions were used for less communicative tasks mostly with Close-Equal speaker-hearer relation. Approximately 30 percent of the tasks for requesting were communicatively designed, and conventionally indirect forms were typically practised as well as direct forms. Similar to giving offers, Distant-Equal speaker-hearer relation was typically provided. Even though learners were given opportunities to practise these speech acts communicatively, the use of indirect or polite forms were not practised in these textbooks.

Table 3

Communicativeness, Linguistic Forms, and Speaker-Hearer Relations in International ELT Textbooks

Speech Act	Communicative-ness	n	Linguistic Form	n	Speaker-Hearer Relation	n
Giving Advice [18]	Communicative	10	Direct	6	None	6
			Softened	3	Close-Equal, Distant-Equal	1
					Distant-Equal	1
					None	1
			Indirect, Direct	1	None	1
	Less Communicative	8	Direct	7	Distant-Unequal	1
					None	6
			Softened, Direct	1	None	1
Giving Offers [19]	Communicative	6	Question	5	Close-Equal	1
					Distant-Equal	3
					None	1
			Question, Appeal	1	None	1
	Less Communicative	13	Question	12	Close-Equal	1
					Distant-Equal	9
					None	2
			Question, Appeal	1	None	1
Inviting [23]	Communicative	5	Question	4	None	4
			Question, Persuasion	1	None	1
	Less communicative	18	Persuasion	9	Close-Equal	9
			Persuasion, Appeal	1	Close-Equal	1
			Question	5	Close-Equal	3
					None	2
			Question, Appeal	1	Close-Equal	1
			Question, Persuasion	2	Close-Equal	2
Requesting [36]	Communicative	11	Conventionally Indirect	6	Distant-Equal	4
					None	2
			Conventionally Indirect, Direct	1	Distant-Equal	1
			Direct	4	Close-Equal	1
					Distant-Equal	3
	Less Communicative	25	Conventionally Indirect	18	Close-Equal	1
					Distant-Equal	10
					None	7
			Direct	7	Distant-Equal	3
					None	4

Note: The total number of tasks for each speech act is shown in brackets.

Tasks for these speech acts had another notable characteristic. Japanese high school ELT textbooks, provided limited opportunities for communicative practice. However, different types of linguistic forms were involved. Nearly half of the tasks for giving advice

were particularly communicatively designed, and both direct and softened forms were practised partly with the speaker-hearer information provided. The indirect form, "If I were you, I would [...]," with the use of subjunctive mood was presented in some of these textbooks, primarily for developing grammar knowledge, and speaker-hearer information was mostly absent. Giving offers was practised less communicatively with the use of question forms such as "Would you like [...]?" or "May/Can I [...]?" across textbooks. The speaker-hearer information provided was only Distant-Equal in less communicatively designed tasks. Learner opportunities to practise inviting were also limited across this set of ELT textbooks. As shown in Table 4, this speech act was seldom presented communicatively. The linguistic forms of both question and persuasion were used, and the speaker-hearer information of Close-Equal was only provided in one task.

Unlike the above three speech acts, there were no opportunities to practise requesting communicatively in these textbooks. In addition, although more polite conventionally indirect forms such as "Would/Could you [...]?" were completely absent in international ELT textbooks, these forms occasionally appeared in grammar exercises across Japanese textbooks. Distant-Equal speaker-hearer relation was present only in a limited number of tasks. Although indirect forms of these speech acts were included across these textbooks, most of them were present to practise grammar knowledge.

Table 4

Communicativeness, Linguistic Forms, and Speaker-Hearer Relation in Japanese High School ELT Textbooks

Speech Act	Communicativeness	n	Linguistic Form	n	Speaker-Hearer Relation	n
Giving Advice [12]	Communicative	5	Direct	2	Close-Equal	1
					None	1
			Indirect, Softened	1	None	1
			Softened	2	Close-Unequal	1
					None	1
	Less Communicative	7	Direct	3	None	3
			Indirect	1	None	1
			Indirect, Softened, Direct	1	None	1
			Softened	1	Close-Equal	1
			Softened, Direct	1	None	1
Giving Offers [7]	Communicative	1	Persuasion	1	None	1
	Less Communicative	6	Persuasion	1	None	1
			Question	5	Distant-Equal	3
					None	2
Inviting [4]	Communicative	1	Question	1	None	1
	Less Communicative	3	Persuasion	1	None	1
			Question	1	None	1
			Question, Persuasion	1	Close-Equal	1
Requesting [11]	Less Communicative	11	Conventionally Indirect	8	Distant-Equal	2
					None	6
			Direct	3	Distant-Equal	1
					None	2

Note: The number of tasks for each speech act is shown in the brackets.

One example typical of communicative tasks in *Interchange* was designed to practise partner interaction through giving advice based on an image and a scenario description. Student A imagines having a problem, stating, "I don't have any energy." Then, Student B gives advice such as, "Eat good breakfast every day. " Next, students do a large group activity: one student tells the class a problem such as "I don't understand this activity"; other group members can practise giving advice like "Reread the instruction," or "Don't worry! Ask the teacher." Although learners can practise communicatively in this activity, they are supposed to use only imperatives throughout this activity without any examples of softened or implicit form provided. In contrast, a representative grammar exercise in the Japanese textbook *Crown* practises subjunctive mood mechanically for giving advice. For example, learners change verbs in parentheses such as "Why do you buy so many CDs? If I (am) you, I (buy) books instead." These two tasks illustrate the difference between the communicative focus of international ELT textbooks and the grammar focus of the Japanese high school ELT textbooks.

Discussion

Overall, this study shows that the speech acts of *giving advice*, *giving offers*, *inviting*, and *requesting* were practised for everyday communication across international ELT textbooks whereas these speech acts were typically used for introducing grammar in Japanese high school ELT textbooks. Therefore, either functional or grammatical importance is attached to practising these speech acts in each category of ELT textbooks. In other words, these two types of textbooks have different pedagogical goals: to foster learners' communicative ability, or to teach grammar knowledge. However, neither type necessarily provides learners with opportunities to practise appropriate use of these speech acts with regards to speaker-hearer distance, power relations, and the degree of imposition despite their connection to the pragmatic concept of politeness. Therefore, tasks need to be modified so that learners can practice language use appropriately.

The communicatively designed tasks to practice giving advice introduced in international ELT textbooks typically require learners to use only imperatives without any information about the speaker and hearer. These tasks focused only on what advice should be given to the hearer depending on his/her problems regardless of the speaker-hearer social distance and power relations. If advice-giving is performed imperatively, it may be inappropriate and may even sound offensive. When learners practice this speech act, they may need to be aware of different levels of directness and begin thinking about how advice should be given appropriately. Houck and Fujimori (2010) suggest that learners consider how advice is given indirectly to superiors, 'softened' for peers,

sparingly used directly; students are also warned to question the necessity of the advice before speaking (p. 94). On the other hand, grammar exercises involving indirect advice are present in some of Japanese high school ELT textbooks without information about the speaker and hearer provided. With a teacher's assistance, such exercise might be used to raise learners' awareness of how to appropriately give advice in accordance with speaker-hearer relations.

Interrogative forms were typically introduced to practice giving offers and inviting in both categories of ELT textbooks. Examples of direct forms with the use of imperatives could be included as a way to make these speech acts more genuine. However, as with other speech acts, students should be aware that giving offers and inviting are potentially face-threatening. Since there is ambiguity around politeness, practising speech acts in context may be necessary. This would allow learners to consider the preferable language pattern for the situation.

The speaker-hearer relation provided for practising giving offers was typically Distant-Equal whereas that of inviting was mostly Close-Equal across both sets of ELT textbooks. Giving offers was, for the most part, practised for service encounters along with requesting. The repetition of the phrase "Would you like [...]?" throughout a textbook may limit learners' opportunities to practise different linguistic forms for this speech act used in a variety of situations even though these tasks were communicatively designed. The repetition of practising conventionally indirect forms for requesting may also limit the variation of learners' strategies. However, the polite forms for conventionally indirect requests were practised as grammar knowledge in Japanese textbooks only. This might be a valuable opportunity to raise awareness of when and how to make polite requests. Overall, contextualisation of tasks may help learners acquire different linguistic forms for speech acts appropriate for the situation.

Concluding Recommendation

This study revealed weakness and potential for both international and Japanese high school ELT textbooks with regards to learners' opportunities to practice speech acts. The common weaknesses of both types of ELT textbooks are as follows. First, the presentation of a variety and range of social acts as well as social situations provided to practice speech acts was narrow. Furthermore, contextualisation of language use where learners can make appropriate pragmatic choices was limited. The potential, on the other hand, of international ELT textbooks is the emphasis on interaction rather than single sentences. As for Japanese high school ELT textbooks, grammatical forms to soften

or mitigate face-threatening language use are present although they are introduced in single sentence utterances without contextualisation.

In order to raise learners' awareness of appropriate language use, teachers should make efforts to adapt the textbook to pragmatic instruction through changing the internal characteristics of materials by adding and modifying. For example, a modified communicative activity for giving advice could provide learners with another opportunity to practise appropriate language use. Contextualisation of activities providing an inventory of linguistic forms for advice-giving may allow learners pragmatic choice. From teacher awareness, methods for modification, improved textbooks, and task design will lead to improved learner outcomes in practical language ability.

Although limited in its scope, this study has shown the importance of practising language in context, and the deficiency of this in both ELT textbooks used internationally and in Japan. Beyond improving textbooks, the next step is offering direction to teacher efforts to develop learners' pragmatic competence.

Bio Data

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Appendix

Textbooks Evaluated in This Study

International ELT Textbooks

- *Interchange Intro* (Cambridge University Press, 2013)
- *American Headway Starter* (Oxford University Press, 2010)
- *Cutting Edge Starter* (Pearson Education, 2012)
- *Global Beginner* Course Book (MacMillan, 2010)
- *Time Zones 1* (Cengage Learning, 2010)

Textbooks Used in Japanese High Schools

- *Progress* in English 21 Book 3 l (Edec, 2012)
- *New Treasure English Series: Stage 3* (Z-kai, 2003)
- *Crown: English Communication I* (Sanseido, 2013)
- *Vista: English Communication I* (Sanseido, 2013)
- *Vivid: English Communication I* (Daiichi Gakushusha, 2013)
- *Select: English Expression I* (Sanseido, 2013)
- *Vision Quest: English Expression I* (Keirinkan, 2013)