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Pragmatically-oriented Input in Business English Textbooks: The Case of Speech Act Realization

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Abstract

As textbooks are main sources for pragmatic development in EFL contexts, they are evaluated to see if they contain adequate inputs. Hence, the frequency of four ubiquitous speech acts (apology, complaint, refusal, request) across four business English textbooks (Business Basics, Business Result, Business Venture, Powerbase) was analyzed. The pragmatic analysis showed that requests and complaints were respectively the most and the least frequent speech acts distributed in Business Basics (124; 3), Business Result (1068; 32), Business Venture (135; 8), and Powerbase (230; 24). The highest frequency of speech acts was found in Business Result's Advanced; Business Venture's Version 1; and Powerbase's Beginner levels. Due to the insufficient distribution of speech acts across the textbooks and within the levels, it is recommended that materials developers reconsider the adequacy of pragmatic input and draw on supplementary materials to compensate for such speech act realization inadequacy.

Keywords: Textbook evaluation, business English textbooks, speech acts, frequency

Introduction

As the nature of textbooks evaluation indicate, we cannot merely label a textbook as standard or nonstandard in and of itself without considering a tapestry of factors such as contexts, needs analysis, individual differences, levels, teachers' ideologies, programs, etc. Bearing the facts in mind, in order to recognize the quality of a textbook and its pivotal role in pedagogy, a good means to which we can resort is evaluation which may be made within different frameworks.

Accordingly, the current research revolves around textbook evaluation in the realm of pragmatics so as to examine some business English textbooks in terms of speech acts.

Models

McDonough and Shaw (2003) suggested that no textbook is perfect by itself so that no neat instructional system can serve as a reliable yardstick and there is a dire need to provide some models for teachers and/or material developers in order to evaluate materials (see also Sheldon, 1988, p. 245). Tomlinson (1999, p. 11; as cited in McDonough & Shaw, 2003, p. 61) verified the paucity of a single model framework for textbooks evaluation and made a mention of the fact that the framework must be in liaison with the reasons, goals and the evaluation conditions.

Speech Acts

With respect to speech acts, it should be noted that speech acts which based on Austin (1962), carry the implication of ‘saying equals doing’ are generally of two types: Direct and Indirect; considering the felicity conditions, they may come under different categorizations and vary in their intensities (Searle, 1979; Levinson, 1983; Kasper & Rose, 2002).

Literature Review

Theorists such as Hutchinson and Torress (1994) believed that textbooks are ‘an almost universal element of teaching’. Similarly, Hutchinson and Torres (1994) labeled textbooks ‘as a possible agent for change’ and stated that textbooks are the best means for ‘providing the structure that the teaching-learning system requires’.

According to Crawford (2002, p. 81) ‘Textbooks [...] remain a contentious issue for many teachers and researchers’. Also, Littlejohn (in Hutchinson & Torres, 1994, p. 316) mentioned that textbooks ‘reduce the teacher’s role to one of managing or overseeing preplanned events’. Richards (2001; also cited in Nahrkhalaji, 2012, p. 185) asserts that ‘textbooks may distort content’. On the other hand, he provides us with a number of advantages for ELT textbooks by saying that ‘they can motivate learners through design and choice of activities, relieve teachers of planning work, provide rich resource bank, provide support for inexperienced teachers’. Conversely, Nahrkhalaji (2012) listed some disadvantages and maintained that such textbooks may ‘contain ideologically-oriented values, are culturally biased, [and] have a constraining effect on the freedom of the teacher’.

In his presentation on ELT course-books, Richards (2012) pointed out different types of materials including print & electronic, skill-based, etc.; likewise, he assumed some roles for them as the basis of a course with peculiar characteristics, and later defined a number of factors affecting the success of a textbook. As well, Crawford (2002) provided us with some salient features of effective materials as language must be functional, contextualized, realistic and authentic. Delen and Tavail (2010) conducted a study on evaluation of four coursebooks being taught at TOBB university located in Turkey in terms of three speech acts including requests, refusals, and complaints and found that the frequency of requests was relatively enough.

Darali (2007) has done a research on Spectrum series in which she has applied six different models, namely Searle (1976), Leech (1983), Matreyek (1990), Holms (1990), Thomas (1983), and Halliday (1978). She revealed that the Spectrum series have provided the learners with various language functions; however, some of them that are frequently used in everyday conversation (promising, vowing, threatening, etc.) were not that much frequent.

The Study

The present study is generally concerned with textbook evaluation and specifically pragmatics in terms of speech acts throughout four salient and widely-used business English textbooks. To this goal, four ubiquitous speech acts, namely apologies; complaints; refusals; requests, within four business English packages including Business Basics; Business Result; Business Venture; and Powerbase are adopted to see how pragmatically rich these textbooks are. What hands-on experience shows is that the end purpose of such business textbooks is to ease how people greet, congratulate, condole, compliment, etc.

The current study is mainly concerned with the internal evaluation of pragmatic facet of the business English textbooks. Consequently, the following interrelated research questions are posed:

1. How frequently the speech acts are across the textbooks?
2. How frequently the speech acts are used within the levels?
3. What strategies are used by the speakers within the textbooks?

Method

Corpus

As noted earlier, four student's book packages of Business Basics, Business Result, Business Venture, and Powerbase are picked up.

Taken together, we passed through three stages to amass the data: Materials collection (e-books/printouts), Speech acts realization (self-recognition and inter-rating), Speech acts estimation (frequency & percentage).

Analytical Framework

In order to analyze the gathered data and to get the answers of the research questions, we have followed the third stage of the data collection procedure to estimate the number frequency of the speech acts in line with the main phases of the research. Thus, analyzing the frequency of each speech act per textbook and all the speech acts per level, we resorted to count each speech act per 1000 words both across the textbooks and within the levels.

To answer the first two research questions, the total words number of the conversations were calculated; however, we could not solely compare and contrast every single of the textbooks (levels) with each other by the time the total words number in the conversations from which the speech acts extracted were not equal. That being so, to have a valid and equal number frequency

of each speech act, as common in most of the corpus-based studies, first we divided the total words number by 1000, then divided the total number of a selected speech act by the obtained amount so as to strike a balance between the textbooks conversations. This doing the case, the probability of any sort of inequality was decreased and the validity of the research results was increased.

Results

First, the number frequency and percentages of each speech act per textbook, then each speech act per level with the frequencies per 1000 words will be illustrated. Afterwards, the elicited speech acts strategies will be demonstrated.

Frequency of Speech Acts across Textbooks

Table 1

Frequency of speech acts across the textbooks

Textbook	Speech act	Number of Speech acts	Total Number of Words	<i>Speech Acts Per 1000 Words</i>
Business Basics	<i>Apology</i>	34	8064	4
	<i>Complaint</i>	3		~ 0.5*
	<i>Refusal</i>	48		6
	<i>Request</i>	124		15
Total		209		
Business Result	<i>Apology</i>	134	52995	2.5
	<i>Complaint</i>	32		~ 0.5*
	<i>Refusal</i>	159		3
	<i>Request</i>	1068		20
Total		1393		
Business Venture	<i>Apology</i>	32	7099	4.5
	<i>Complaint</i>	8		1
	<i>Refusal</i>	18		2.5
	<i>Request</i>	135		19
Total		193		
Powerbase	<i>Apology</i>	102	8222	12
	<i>Complaint</i>	24		2
	<i>Refusal</i>	54		6.5
	<i>Request</i>	230		27
Total		410		

Note. ~ = Approximately; * = Rounded off to 0.5 (decimals)

The number frequency of the speech acts from the highest to lowest, in order are requests (124; 1068), refusals (48; 159), apologies (34; 134), and complaints (3; 32); however, in Business Venture and Powerbase, the refusals yield to apologies; so the order is changed into requests (135; 230), apologies (32; 102), refusals (18; 54), and complaints (8; 24). Together,

requests (124; 1068; 135; 230) and complaints (3; 32; 8; 24) are respectively the most and less frequent speech acts; also apologies and refusals vary depending on the textbooks.

Since the total words number varied across the textbooks and were not equal, they were divided by 1000 to strike a balance between the sum of frequencies in the speech acts within every single of the textbooks and levels for further comparison and also to record the occurrence of each speech act per 1000 words. That being so, as shown in the table, for example, there are totally 8064 words in Business Basics conversations that if it is divided by 1000, 8.064 is obtained; now, by dividing it by the total number of the speech acts, say, requests (124), the remained number will be totally 15. 376, when it is rounded off 15 requests are left that is the most frequent speech act in Business Basics and means that per 1000 words of the conversations in this textbook, roughly 15 requests occur. The same procedure is also applied to the rest of the speech acts within per textbook.

In addition, there are two numbers (0.5) in the table which are marked by asterisks because they are rounded off to 0.5; the rational behind such doing is that the real numbers are thousandth decimals and cannot have that much clear meaning and even significance; as the table reveals, there are respectively 3 and 32 complaints in Business Basics and Business Result which give us the numbers of 0.372 and 0.603 per 1000 words; since they are less than 1 and even 0.5, we decided to round them off to 0.5 for having a better comparison. Taking together, Table 1 suggests that again requests (15; 20; 19; 27) have the most and complaints (1; 1; 1; 2) the least repetitions across the textbooks per 1000 words.

Frequency of speech acts within levels

Table 2

Business Results

Level	Speech act	Number of Speech acts	Total Number of Words	<i>Speech Acts Per 1000 Words</i>
Elementary	<i>Apology</i>	27	5364	5
	<i>Complaint</i>	6		1
	<i>Refusal</i>	29		6
	<i>Request</i>	171		31
<i>Total</i>		233		
Pre-intermediate	<i>Apology</i>	26	8427	3
	<i>Complaint</i>	5		~ 0.5*
	<i>Refusal</i>	37		4
	<i>Request</i>	231		27
<i>Total</i>		299		
Intermediate	<i>Apology</i>	24	8627	2.5
	<i>Complaint</i>	7		~ 0.5*
	<i>Refusal</i>	39		4.5
	<i>Request</i>	266		31
<i>Total</i>		336		
Upper-intermediate	<i>Apology</i>	21	14733	1
	<i>Complaint</i>	4		~ 0.5*
	<i>Refusal</i>	26		1.5
	<i>Request</i>	123		8
<i>Total</i>		174		

Advanced	<i>Apology</i>	36	15844	2
	<i>Complaint</i>	10		~ 0.5*
	<i>Refusal</i>	28		1.5
	<i>Request</i>	277		17.5
	Total	351		

Table 3
Business Venture

Version	Speech act	Number of Speech acts	Total Number of Words	<i>Speech Acts Per 1000 Words</i>
1	<i>Apology</i>	16	3703	4
	<i>Complaint</i>	2		0.5
	<i>Refusal</i>	11		3
	<i>Request</i>	93		9
	Total	122		
2	<i>Apology</i>	16	3396	4.5
	<i>Complaint</i>	6		1.5
	<i>Refusal</i>	7		2
	<i>Request</i>	42		12
	Total	71		

Table 4
Powerbase

Level	Speech act	Number of Speech acts	Total Number of Words	<i>Speech Acts Per 1000 Words</i>
Beginner	<i>Apology</i>	44	1895	21
	<i>Complaint</i>	4		2
	<i>Refusal</i>	22		11
	<i>Request</i>	103		54
	Total	169		
Elementary	<i>Apology</i>	27	2518	10.5
	<i>Complaint</i>	4		1.5
	<i>Refusal</i>	17		6.5
	<i>Request</i>	54		21
	Total	102		
Pre-intermediate	<i>Apology</i>	35	3809	9
	<i>Complaint</i>	16		4
	<i>Refusal</i>	15		4
	<i>Request</i>	73		19
	Total	139		

With the exception of Business Basics for which no special level devised, in Business Result, Advanced level (351) carries the highest number of speech acts, after that are respectively Intermediate (336), Pre-intermediate (299), Elementary (233), and the lowest frequency is for upper-intermediate (174); we can actually observe a sudden slump of the speech acts in Business

Result upper-intermediate level. In the same way, in contrast with the second version of Business Venture which contains the lowest frequency of the speech acts (71), the first version represents the highest frequency (122), and interestingly there appeared the same frequency of apologies (16 apologies per version) in this textbook. Finally, in Powerbase, the highest and lowest frequencies were respectively identified for the Beginner (169) and Elementary (102) level that also had the same frequency of complaints (4 complaints per level).

With respect to the speech acts per 1000 words, as illustrated, in all the levels, requests are the most frequent and complaints are the least ones. In Business Result, the number frequency of requests (31) is equal in Elementary and Intermediate level, complaints equal 0.5 throughout all the levels of this textbook except in Elementary which is 1, refusals (1.5) are the same in Upper-intermediate and Advanced, and the frequencies of apologies and refusals in Elementary and Pre-intermediate are very close (only 1 difference). Similarly, in the first version of Business Venture, the number of apologies and refusals are also close to each other. Finally, in Pre-intermediate level of Powerbase, the frequencies of complaints and refusals are the same.

We have tried to delineate the percentages of the speech acts both in the textbooks and in the levels (see *Figures 1-4*)

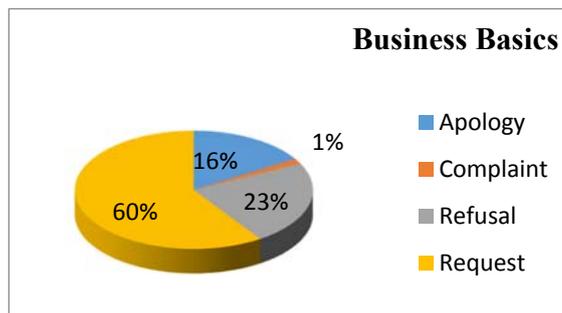


Figure 1. Percentage of speech acts in Business Basics

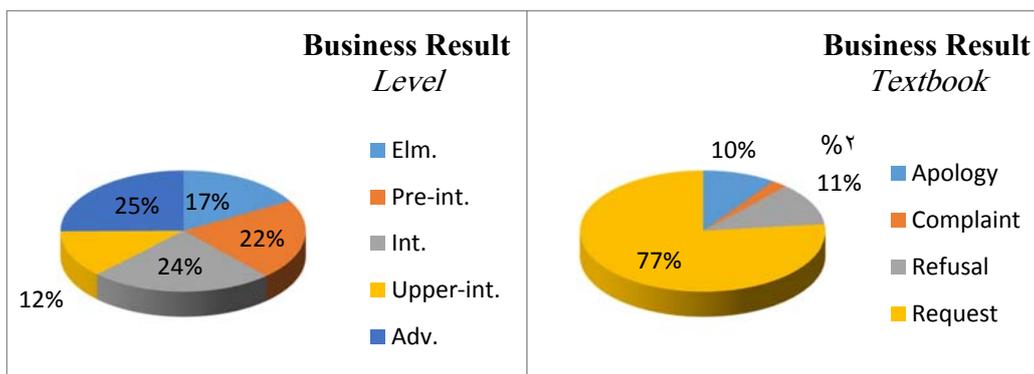


Figure 2. Percentage of speech acts in Business Result

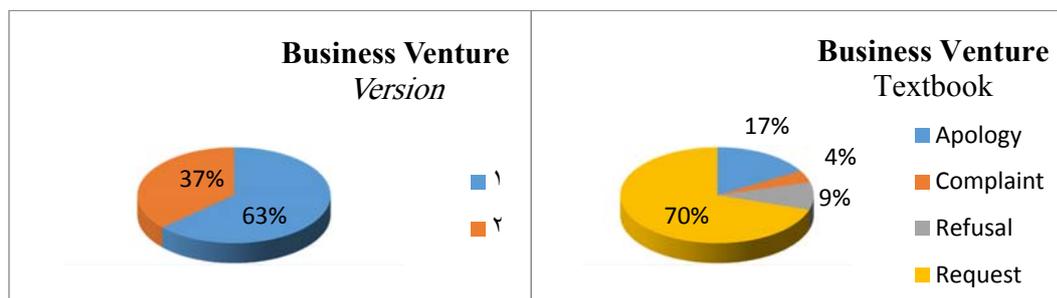


Figure 3. Percentage of speech acts in Business Venture

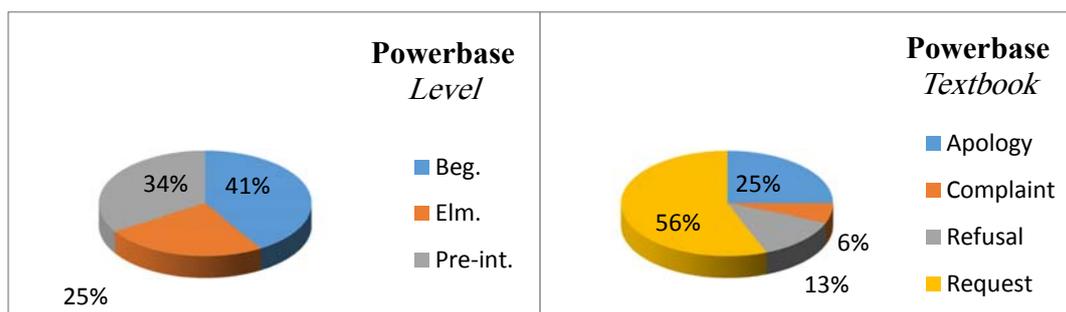


Figure 4. Percentage of speech acts in Powerbase

To have a better understanding, we have rounded off the numbers. As expected, in harmony with the frequencies, percentages also lent support to the aforementioned order of the speech acts depending on the textbooks and the levels. In Business Basics and Business Result, we again have the order of requests (60%; 77%), refusals (23%; 11%), apologies (16%; 10%), and complaints (1%; 2%). As you see, there is a stiff competition between refusals and apologies with only 1% difference in Business Result. In Business Venture and Powerbase we also see the order of requests (70%; 56%), apologies (17%; 25%), refusals (9%; 13%), and complaints (4%; 6%). Regarding the levels, Advanced in Business Result which had dedicated the highest frequency to itself, here again with 25% stand in the highest rank in percentage terms. Similarly, there is a head- to- head competition between intermediate (24%) and pre-intermediate (22%) to reach the second and third ranks; also, after Elementary (17%), upper-intermediate (12%) falls into the last rank. In Business Venture, the first version (64%) has held the highest, and the second version (36%) has the lowest percentages, and finally in Powerbase, the Beginner (41%), Pre-intermediate (34%), and Elementary (25%) are respectively the highest and lowest percentages.

Speech Acts Strategies

Table 5

Speech acts strategies found in the textbooks

Speech acts	Strategies
Apology	<i>Sorry, I'm sorry (about that), I'm very sorry, I'm really sorry, oh, I'm sorry, I'm terribly sorry, I'm sorry! I'm sorry, oh dear I'm sorry, I'm afraid, excuse me, please excuse me, I do apologize</i>
Complaint	<i>Oh no!, not (very) good, business is very slow, can you speak more slowly?, what? Again? That's three times this week, I'm not happy about that at all, it's so frustrating, things aren't running as smoothly as I hoped, today was terrible, it's not fair at all, this is very embarrassing for us</i>
Refusal	<i>I disagree, no, not at all, not really, I don't like it, I'm afraid, no thanks, not yet, I'm not sure, I'm not convinced, of course not, I can't promise anything</i>
Request	<i>Could you (I), would you, can I (you, we), shall I, would it be possible..., single please, hold on please, excuse me, sorry?, I'd like...please</i>

With respect to the speech acts strategies found in the textbooks, they are merged in concordance with the speech acts (not with the textbooks) to avoid any sort of overlapping. Regarding Apology, lines of evidence indicate that no sign of strategies displayed the verbs such as 'Forgive', and 'Pardon' across the textbooks. In addition, all the apology strategies were directly addressed with four intensifiers (very, really, terribly, do) and two softeners (dear, please). With respect to Complaint, as given, they were mostly found in form of long sentences though their frequencies are the lowest. Pertaining to Refusal, only two forms of 'I'm sorry, but ..., I'm afraid, but...' were discovered which carried the sense of apology and regret plus a kind of excuse and/or explanation given after 'but', and the rest of them were direct ways of refusing such as 'I disagree, not really, I don't like it, etc. Finally, considering Request, some of the requests were directly asked such as 'single please, hold on please etc. some were conventionally indirect 'Could you (I), would you, can I (you, we), etc. and also non-conventionally indirect 'oh I think thirty days after the order would be better'.

Discussion

To broaden the scope of the research, we have performed a critical analysis in each textbook to seek the answers of the research questions. Therefore, we cross-compared the textbooks with each other and drew intra-comparisons within the levels. Then, the textbooks were classified into two categories based upon the same precedence that they had in terms of the speech acts. Thus, we compared Business Basics with Business Result, and Business Venture with Powerbase. Yet, since no balanced level was seen across the textbooks, the levels were not cross-compared.

The results in Business Basics and Business Result suggested that the speech acts were similarly ranked in order of precedence; i.e., requests, refusals, apologies, and complaints across both textbooks. Nonetheless, the dispersion of the speech acts was not logically compatible with the rising levels in Business Result; simply put, teachers and learners expect to be gradually exposed to more prolific levels as they make progress toward the end of the textbooks.

Put it another way, with regard to the frequency of the speech acts, it was expected to find the pattern of Elm.< Pre-int.< Int.< Upper-int.< Adv. throughout the levels of this textbook, but no of such an ascending order was observed. Actually, the number frequency of apologies in Elm. is more than all the higher levels except Adv.; however, number frequency of refusals in Elm. is more than Adv. and so forth. The same untidiness was inevitably discovered in the frequency of all the speech acts per level so that we found the irregular pattern of Upper-int.< Elm.< Pre-int.< Int.< Adv. in lieu of the aforementioned expected pattern.

Moreover, while we can again see the same pattern and precedence concerning the frequency of each speech act per 1000 words both in Business Basics and Business Result with its levels, if we want to compare and contrast each speech act per 1000 words across the textbooks, no equal balance will be found. To bolster the claim, consider the most and least frequent speech acts as two representatives; we see that requests happening in Business Result are more than Business Basics; yet, the frequency of complaints per 1000 words is relatively equal across the textbooks. Also, apologies and refusals in Business Basics are about two times the same speech acts in Business Result per 1000 words.

Likewise, the frequency of each speech act from the highest to the lowest in Business Venture and Powerbase, as noted, was respectively requests, apologies, refusals, and complaints. Concerning the incompatibility of the number frequency of the speech acts with the enhancement of the levels, here again we cannot see any optimal balance between distribution of the speech acts and the levels that the textbooks cover. In Powerbase we see an untidy pattern of Elm.< Pre-int.< Beg. instead of the expected pattern of Beg.< Elm.< Pre-int.; in a similar vein, the first version of Business Venture contains more speech acts than the second version ($2 < 1$), just the opposite way round to the pattern of $1 < 2$.

We found out that the repetition of both requests and complaints in Powerbase is more than Business Venture per 1000 words. In addition, the frequency of apologies and refusals in Powerbase is almost three times the same speech acts in Business Venture. Generally, Powerbase has the highest number frequency of each speech act per 1000 words compared to the other three textbooks.

Following the explanation in the results regarding the number frequency of each speech act within the levels per 1000 words, and also in line with the irregular distribution patterns of the speech acts throughout the levels of each textbook, we can conclusively say that virtually the same untidiness remained within the levels per 1000 words even with a rather different order. The pattern in the levels of Business Result are Upper-int.< Adv.< Pre-int.< Int.< Elm.; that is, as opposed to the pattern found through all the speech acts frequencies per level in Business Result, this time Adv. has given way to Elm. which has the highest repetition of each speech act per 1000 words. This pattern has also been changed in Business Venture so that for the first time in comparison to the other textbooks, the levels have met the expectations; that is to say, in contrast to the frequency of the speech acts per version in this textbook which was $2 < 1$, the frequency of each speech act per 1000 words gives the regular pattern of $1 < 2$. Again, in Powerbase the Pre-

int. was replaced with Elm. level and the pattern of Pre-int.< Elm.< Beg. was formed, meaning that Beg. still contains the most frequent speech acts.

On the basis of the empirical knowledge, all the frequencies and percentages fully complemented each other throughout various phases of the study. We could also calculate the percentages of each speech act per 1000 words both in the textbooks and in the levels. Concerning the strategies, we simply revealed some, say, patterns of the overall speech acts strategies and not the number frequency of every single of the strategies; so, further work is required to gain a more understanding of the number of each strategy (not speech act)..

The findings of the current research lend support to Vellenga's (2004) assertion regarding lack of efficient meta-linguistic and explicit meta-pragmatic information in EFL/ESL textbooks. As well, the highest and lowest speech acts found in this study bears a resemblance to Delen and Tavit's (2010) findings.

Concerning rater's and researcher's findings, there were totally found four slight differences between what we realized and what the rater did. What rater's findings reveal is that there is no difference in realization in Business Result; also the frequencies found for complaints and requests are the same between the researcher and the rater. Therefore, the differences only lie in some of the apologies and refusals in three of the textbooks with only one difference in the numbers other than in Business Result. (See Appendix C)

Conclusion and Implications

Following Hutchinson and Torres (1994), Crawford (2002), and McDonough and Shaw's (2003) propositions regarding the flexibility and authenticity of textbooks, business English textbooks should also be more gently and precisely eased into pragmatics instruction; so, it is expected to observe a more optimum, organized, decent, goal-oriented, and balanced amount of speech acts, especially those four particular speech acts throughout the textbooks to, as Richards (2001) noted, 'motivate learners'.

Actually, this study showed that business English textbooks suited neither their own chief purposes nor the learners' needs optimally in terms of the speech acts. Therefore, a research should be done to uncover the ostensible reasons why the distribution of the speech acts are not in harmony with the rising levels in the textbooks. Also, material developers should create a balance between the distribution of the speech acts across the textbooks and their levels.

Viewed collectively, this investigation may create suggestive topics, as noted, for further researches germane to business textbooks evaluation from other pragmatic perspectives, i.e. routines, implicature, and even evaluation of exercises, vocabulary, and any other issues pertaining to materials development.

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