

A Corpus-based Comparative Evaluation of Internationally Published vs. Locally Designed EFL Textbooks Regarding Politeness Strategy Teaching: Interchange vs. Prospect

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ABSTRACT

Due to the important roles of textbooks in language curricula, different experts approached them from different perspectives and devised different procedures for textbook evaluation. The purpose of this study was to investigate politeness strategies included in Iranian high school EFL learners' textbook: Prospect 3 and in internationally published EFL learners' textbook: Interchange 2. Moreover, it investigated the difference between these two textbooks in terms of the politeness strategies included and the differences regarding the use of politeness strategies among Prospect 3, Interchange 2, and British National Corpus (BNC). In order to achieve these goals, the researcher analyzed each task in the books in order to know what functions were incorporated and what the frequencies of each function were. Then these frequencies were used to compare the textbooks with one another and with the corpus. The results of the study showed that both textbooks included the strategies heterogeneously among the lessons. Moreover, further investigations showed that the types of strategies used in the lessons were varying greatly in one lesson to another. However, direct politeness strategies were the exceptions since they were present in all lessons. In addition, there was not a significant difference between the two textbooks in terms of the distribution of the types of strategies including direct, positive, negative and indirect politeness strategies. Finally, there was a significant difference between the two textbooks in terms of applying the natural English bundles, collocations, and terms related to politeness in terms of their frequency in authentic English as it was reflected in BNC.

1. Introduction

Teachers and students can hardly imagine their classroom without textbooks. Moreover, textbooks put teaching procedures into an operational frame which, to some extent, dictates pedagogical techniques, activities, and atmosphere. Considering the axiomatic role of textbook in a language course, it seems necessary to evaluate them based on different but well established criteria. Foreign language textbooks in general and Iranian high school textbooks in particular have been evaluated from various perspectives, for example, Jahangard (2007), Amerian (1987), Razmjoo (2007), and Shirvani, 2009. These studies have led to a better understanding of the potentials of these textbooks. However, few studies - such as AkbariKelishadi and Sharifzadeh (2013) and Alemi and Irandoost (2012) - have evaluated from the perspective of politeness strategy use, and to the best knowledge of the researcher none of Iranian high school course textbooks – Prospect – has been evaluated from this perspective since the Iranian educational system modification in 2011.

However, considering the previous research done in Iran, pragmatic aspects of language learning has not been the cannon of the studies done by Iranian researchers on locally developed textbook, except few recent such as Jalilian and Roohani (2016), Gholami (2015), and Athar (2014). Furthermore, there exists a bigger gap regarding textbook evaluation in Iran. Since the revolutionary change in the textbooks occurred in 2011 along with the modification of

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educational system in Iran, there has been very few analysis and evaluation of the textbooks done in Iran on the two new locally developed textbooks, Perspective and Vision, developed by the Ministry of Education for high school students.

The present study aimed at probing the high school textbooks (i.e. Prospect3) and the internationally published one (Interchange Series), regarding a specific aspect of communicative competence, that is, politeness strategy teaching from a different perspective, even distinct from the angle which recent studies - for example Jalilian and Roohani (2016), Gholami (2015), and Athar (2014) – adopted. This study relies on a corpus-based approach to evaluate the textbooks.

2. Review of the Related Literature

Due to the important roles of textbooks in language curricula, different experts approached them from different perspectives and devised different procedures for textbook evaluation. According to the researcher's review of the literature, there are three major procedures for textbook analysis:

1. Using checklists
2. Using questionnaires
3. Analyzing content

Jahangard's (2007) study is the most recent example of the evaluation which has incorporated valid a checklist to analyze foreign language course books taught at Iranian high schools. He focused on 4 high school textbooks and developed a checklist after consulting the checklists offered by Tucker (1975), Sheldon (1988), and Ur (1996).

The first attempts to develop an evaluation questionnaire were accomplished by Tucker (1975). Their questionnaires were based on a number of criteria each of which was realized in a number of questions. Each question was followed by a Likert-scale type scoring procedure; that is, each question may be scored from one to four.

Ansary and Babaii (2002), in a more recent attempt, analyzed a corpus of 10 EFL/ESL textbook reviews plus 10 EFL/ESL textbook evaluation checklists and outlined what they perceived to be the common core features of standard EFL/ESL textbooks. The major categories comprise approach, content presentation, physical make-up and administration concerns. Each set of major features of EFL/ESL textbooks consists of a number of subcategories. They concluded the article mentioning that not all of these characteristics would be present in each and every textbook.

This trend of evaluation is mainly dependent on the use of computer technology and computerized corpora. With the emergence of data banks, linguistics and especially lexicographers developed a data base of language instances called language corpus which later evolved into a basic tool for further research in applied linguistics, especially, material development and assessment. There are many definitions of a corpus, but it is generally defined as a collection of *machine-readable authentic texts* which is *sampled to be representative* of a particular language or language variety (McEnery et al., 2006). In simpler words, a corpus is a collection of texts, written or spoken which is stored on a computer (O'Keeffe et al., 2007).

The theory used in the present study is the *model of politeness strategy* offered by Brown and Levinson (1987). Most of the research into politeness may be characterized as somehow related to Brown and Levinson's theory. Although different aspects of this theory have been criticized by many researchers, it has been the preferred model focusing on the notion of politeness (Watts, 2003).

Brown and Levinson's politeness model is founded on the notions of face which was explained by Goffman (1967, p. 5) as the "positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by his or her self-presentation". Additionally, Deutsch (1961, p. 897) referred to face as "one of an individuals' most sacred possessions" and insisted that maintaining this possession is necessary to sustain one's self-esteem. Brown and Levinson (1987) sought to develop an explicit model of politeness based on what it is to be a human being.

Brown and Levinson (1987) outline four main types of politeness strategies including bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record (indirect). The main idea is realizing various strategies used by various people in their interactional behavior to satisfy specific wants of face.

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In the field of textbook evaluation, Alemi and Irandoost (2012) evaluate speech act of complaints and compliments in English Result series. The result indicated that the books were rich in terms of the number of the two speech acts, but in presenting them, there were one or two dominant strategies in both cases. However, the books were reported to provide learners with adequate amount of complaints and compliments, but with low variations in strategy types, which may result in learners not having sufficient conceptual and practical knowledge of speech acts to use them appropriately in different context.

Another study examines politeness strategies in model conversation in English textbooks (Purwanto & Soepriatmadji, 2013). They carry out a qualitative research to find politeness strategies integrated in the conversation models in five English textbooks for grade-6 elementary school student. The result of the study revealed that politeness strategies have been adopted in the five books under study with the most significant use of non Face Threatening Act (FTA).

In Iranian context, Akbari Kelishadi and Sharifzadeh (2013) evaluate Top Notch series framework. The findings indicated that the series fulfill the intended objectives and enjoy benefits for language learners through encouraging the L2 learners to communicate successfully by offering opportunities for interaction. However, one shortcoming of the series is the lack of activities or discussions for presenting new words that require EFL teachers' consideration.

Sznajder (2013) aimed to evaluate the selection of metaphors in a published business English textbook using findings from a specialized corpus of written business English. The results obtained from this analysis reveal only a slight overlap between the textbook metaphors and the metaphors from the corpus sample, ranging from two to three items depending on the source domain examined. The results confirm the need to base the selection of metaphors for classroom instruction on real language use.

Orio (2014) showed that the distribution of vocabulary knowledge dimensions is different in the two textbooks under examination, which may give rise to differences in learners' lexical acquisition and output.

Moiinvaziri (2012) tried to investigate the vocabulary content of the General English textbook of Payame Noor University one of the state universities in Iran. He concluded that the type and amount of vocabulary presented was not appropriate for the level of the students.

3. Methodology

This study is going to focus on three sources of contents as follows:

- 1- An internationally developed textbook, Interchange 2, developed by Jack C. Richards, Jonathan Hull, Susan Proctor, and David Bohlke published by Cambridge University Press in 2011.
- 2- Prospect 3, by seyedBehnamAlaviMoghaddam, Reza Kheyr-Abadi, ElhamForoozandeh, SharamKhadirshariban, and JahanbakhshNikpoor. published by the Ministry of Education in 2013. It is worth mentioning that this book was first published in 2013 along with the renewal of the educational system in the public schools.
- 3- British National Corpus (BNC) which includes a 100 million word collection of samples of written and spoken language from a wide range of sources, designed to represent a wide cross-section of British English from the later part of the 20th century, both spoken and written.

As stated before, the research at hand aimed at analyzing current widely used textbooks in Iran in terms of their pragmatic conscious-raising based on a corpus-based approach in order to know, to what extent they engage English pragmatic function, and to what extent they are comparable to a standard corpus. In order to accomplish these goals, the researcher selected two series of textbooks, Prospect 3 and Interchange Series – that are being widely used in Iranian context and analyzed each task in the books in order to know the what functions were incorporated and what were frequencies of each function. Then these frequencies were used to compare the textbooks with one another and with the BNC. Besides high school textbooks which were used in Iranian high schools, the researcher selected Interchange Series that have been used in different private institutes for several years in Iran. The textbooks were analyzed to determine if pragmatic functions are included in those books and to identify the pragmatic function profile of the books. The researcher identified which functions were included, which functions were predominant and which ones were less common or not included in these two textbooks. The conversations included in the two textbooks were reviewed for the identification of the strategies embedded in each. The focus of the study was to focus on politeness function or speech act of the questions and statements included in the model conversations provided in each textbook; in other words the model conversations which were used to be role-played or practiced in a way or the other in the class.

4. Results and Conclusion

Considering the distribution of the types of strategies in the lessons, it should be noted that not all main types of the strategies are included evenly in the six lessons of the textbook. According to the Brown and Levinson's (1987) model, there are four main types of politeness strategies. The distribution of these types are shown below in figure 1.

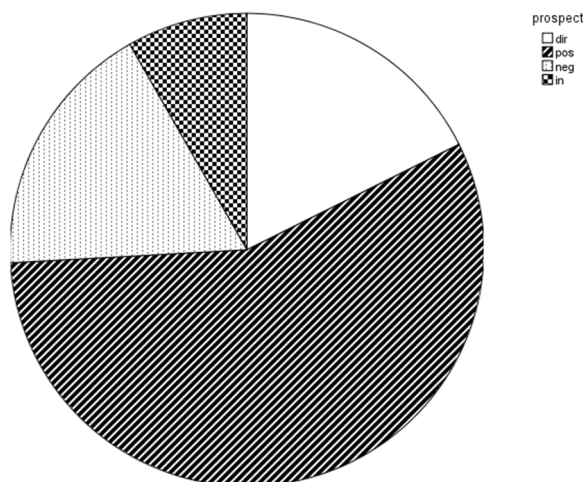


Figure 1. The distribution of the main types of politeness strategies in Prospect 3

As shown in the figure 1, the positive politeness strategies included in the textbook include more than half the types of the strategies in the textbook (56%) while the indirect strategies form only 7% percent of the strategies. However, it is worth mentioning that the other two types of the strategies, direct and negative types, are distributed rather evenly in Prospect 3. Considering the main types of politeness strategies the positive politeness strategy was the most commonly used in the textbook while the direct politeness strategy was the least common one. The distribution of the main categories of the strategies are shown below in figure 2.

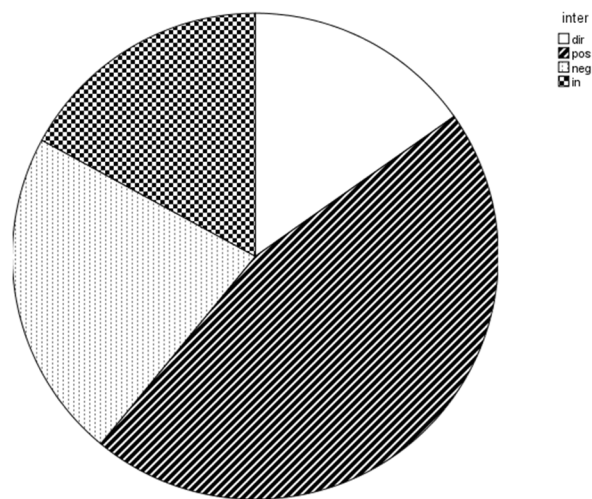


Figure 2. The distribution of the strategies in Interchange 2

According to the figure above, 47% of the whole instances of politeness strategies used in the textbook are positive politeness strategies and negative politeness strategies and indirect strategies appeared at the next level with 22% and 17%. Although the direct strategies used in the textbook are the most frequent type of politeness strategy used in terms of subcategories, it is the least type of strategy used in terms of the broader four-category classification of the politeness strategy according to Brown and Levinson's model.

A glance at the statistics in tables 1 and 2 shows that the distribution of the politeness strategies are not very similar in the two textbooks in terms of the frequency. The following table shows the distribution of the strategies in the two textbooks, Interchange 2 and Prospect 3, comparatively.

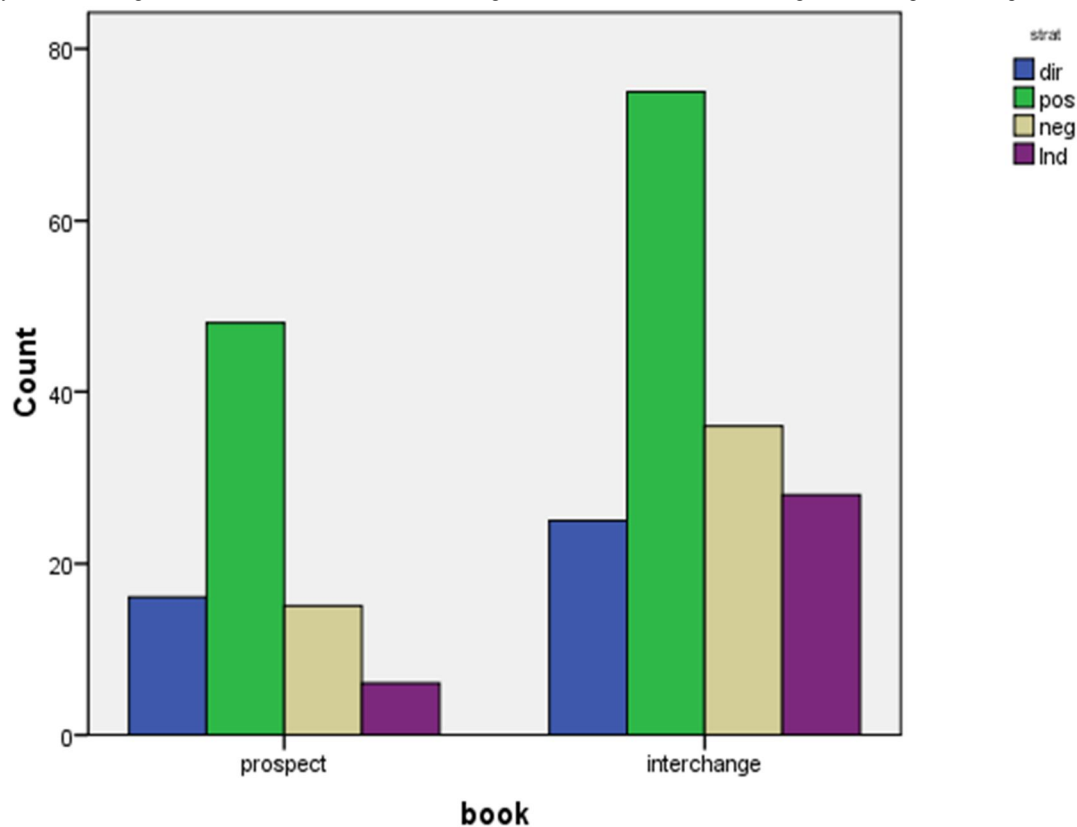


Figure 3. Comparative distribution of the politeness strategies in Interchange 2 and Prospect 3

Although there is a big gap between the two textbooks in terms of the frequency of the politeness strategies used, there seems to be a similar pattern regarding the types of the strategies used in the two textbooks. A closer look at the figure above shows that in both textbooks, the negative politeness strategies are the most commonly used strategies in the textbook while the indirect strategies are the least commonly used strategies in the textbooks. The negative politeness strategies and direct ones are at the second and third rank respectively in these two textbooks. In order to have a precise statistical comparison between the two textbooks, a chi-square analysis was used to shed light on the issue.

Table3. Chi-square for comparing the distribution of the strategies in the textbook

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.361	3	.095

Based on table 3, the chi-square statistic was calculated to be 6.36. With reference to the table, the obtained p -value was .07 which was larger than .05. So, it was concluded that the result was *not* significant at $p < .05$.

Based on the statistics shown above, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between the two textbooks, Prospect 3 and Interchange 2, in terms of the distribution of the politeness strategies. The instances of the each main type of politeness strategies obtained from each textbook were first entered into BNC search engine and the obtained frequencies were recorded. The frequencies of the types of strategies as found in the BNC are recorded in the following table for each textbook.

Table4. Frequencies of the distribution of each type of strategy in BNC according to Prospect 3 and Interchange 3

	Direct	Positive politeness	Negative politeness	Indirect
Prospect 3	581	1728	503	196
Interchange 2	828	2391	1308	1018

The frequencies of the types of strategies as found in the BNC are recorded in the above table for each textbook. A closer look at the table shows that the generally the expressions used in Interchange 2 are more common in BNC than the ones used in Prospect 3. However, in order to compare the frequencies in the textbooks, a chi-square test was run. The results are shown below in table 5.

Table 5. Chi-square for comparing the distribution of the strategies in the textbook according to BNC

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.006	3	.000

Based on table 5, the chi-square statistic was calculated to be 6.00. With reference to the table, the obtained p -value was .00 which was smaller than .05. So, it was concluded that the result was significant at $p < .05$. Based on the observed statistics, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the two textbooks in terms of including the politeness strategies according to the frequencies of the instances of the four types of strategies used in the BNC. Moreover, considering the frequencies of instances of the availability of the terms, bundles and collocations in the BNC, it can be concluded that in comparison with Prospect 3, Interchange 2 is more faithful to the occurrence of the instances of the politeness strategy markers as used in the natural English in everyday life. More interpretation and discussion of the findings are provided in the next section.

As shown by Orio (2014) and Sznajder (2013) the results obtained from corpus analysis of the locally developed textbooks reveal that there is only a slight overlap between the textbook and corpus sample. This fact suggest that the corpus evidence, including frequency data, should be considered when selecting instructional material for English courses, especially when the authors are non-native. Although there has been a number of studies on the local textbooks developed in Iran for high school, it is not logical to make a direct comparison of the results of the present study with the ones obtained in those past studies since the new English textbook series has recently undergone a thorough revision in Iran and actually, a new team of authors were in charge of developing a new material under a new title for the new series, that is, Prospect.

However, the general conclusions made in the past research on the high school textbooks are worth mentioning and discussing. For example, Amerian (1987) indicated that high school textbooks represent the structural syllabus and design. It can be still true for the current textbooks since a comparison of a pragmatic aspect of the textbook, politeness, shows that there is a wide gap between the way the bundles and collocations are used in the locally developed textbook and in the corpus.

The similarity of the pattern of adopting the types of strategies in the textbooks analyzed in this study shows that there may be universal pattern in terms of incorporating politeness strategies in that it is not possible to focus on these strategies homogeneously along the courses and there may be considerable fluctuations depending on the nature of tasks or situations embedded in each lesson. On the other hand, there seems to be a gap regarding locally developed textbooks by non-naive speakers and the ones developed by the native ones. That is, native speakers may have the superiority of being better familiar with the way language is used for achieving pragmatic functions while the non-native ones have less mastery over the communicative values of the expression and the commonality of the bundles and clues.

However it is not easy to generalize the findings of the previous studies to the current textbooks taught in high schools due to the fact that Prospect 3 has been used in high schools for about three years and little, if any, research has been done on it. Regarding the previous studies done the previous textbooks used in Iranian high school it can be argued that Iranian textbook writers are mainly willing to focus on the structural aspects of language (Jahangard, 2007; Shirvani (2009). Unlike the Iranian authors, those who are developing books for international use are more careful about corporation of a variety of pragmatic functions in order to stic to communicative use of language (Shirvani, 2009).

However, as shown by Shirvani (2009) and the present research, the Interchange series and the high school textbooks series are similar regarding the attendance to communicative and linguistic aspects. However, when it comes to the variety of lexical items and the richness of the strategies, they are far apart in terms of providing rich input for their audience, especially the ones learning English in a foreign language learning context with rather poor opportunities to use language in communicative speech events.

As seen in previous research, for example the one done by Alemi and Irandoost (2012), the textbooks developed by Iranian writers are limited in terms of the use of politeness strategies in conversations and conversation practice sections. The limited number of strategies may be due to the fact that the writers themselves have not included the real world conditions and situations in which the language is going to be used or the fact that the language is going to be used for come communicative purpose (Alemi&Irandoost, 2012).

This study was interested in the investigation of how the politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson are used in the local textbooks of Iran, Prospect 3, written by local authors who were all non-native speakers of English and one of the most commonly used textbooks in Iran, interchange 2, as an example of a successful international textbook which was developed by native speakers of English. Moreover, this study adopted a comparative perspective to the issue and compared the textbooks with one another regarding the use of the strategies and also compared these textbooks with BNC which can be considered as a true reflection of natural English as used in everyday life.

The results showed that there was a not a significant difference between the two textbooks in terms of the distribution of the types of strategies according to Brown and Levinson's main categorization including direct, positive, negative and indirect politeness strategies. Both textbooks, based on the results obtained from chi square test, had the same pattern; negative politeness being the most common strategy while the positive politeness, direct and indirect in the following rank. In both textbooks, the indirect strategies were the least common ones. Considering the natural use of politeness strategies in everyday life, a reference was made to BNC. According to the results obtained from investigating the instances of each strategies in the corpus, the researcher searched the instances of the bundles, terms and clues found in each conversation, role play and the related tasks in BNC and added up the frequencies found for each category. Finally, a chi-square test was run to compare the two sets of data. The results showed that there was a significant difference between the two textbooks in terms of applying the natural English bundles, collocations, and terms related to politeness in terms of their frequency in authentic English as it was reflected in BNC. The findings of this study have a number of implications for the teachers and material developers. First, there is need to incorporate corpus of the real language use and authentic material when developing a textbook or even a temporary material, especially for non-native learners. Moreover, when the writers are developing material in a non-native context there is a chance to ask a native speaker expert to review the developed material to give constructive suggestions regarding the pragmatic aspects of language use. Moreover, teacher trainers and material developers should develop opportunities regarding the ways and techniques corpus may be best used for developing material in a non-native context or a foreign language teaching situation in order to further the incorporation of authentic material in the textbook and thus the classes. There is a need to familiarize the teachers of different levels with various years of experience with the possible applications of BNC or similar corpora in order to help them to learn authentic natural English to the learners in foreign language teaching situation, rather the scripted ones.

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