

# A Pragmatic Study on Primary School English Textbooks in Mainland China

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**Abstract.** English pragmatic competence in primary schools of mainland China has received increasing attention and the related issues have become popular research topics, but most former studies are limited to classroom teaching and particularly few on English textbooks of primary school. This study makes a pragmatic evaluation on the current primary school English textbooks in mainland China by taking a set of popular textbooks as an example. Adopting Cooperative Principle as theoretical frame, it mainly investigates and analyzes the conversational interactions in the textbooks, and the statistics shows that the textbooks generally conform to Grice's "idealized communication model", but there still exist many "odd" utterances which violate the maxims of Cooperative Principle, especially the Q-maxim and the M-maxim, while do not produce any conversational implicature in Grice's sense. It thus concludes the pragmatic features of the textbook as "low naturalness", "singularity in type" and "weak culturality". This study is expected to act as a move for further research in this domain and a call on further improving the pragmaticity of primary school English textbooks in mainland China.

**Keywords:** Pragmatic features; conversational interaction; cooperative principle; primary school English textbook.

## 1. Introduction

Pragmatic competence is one of important factors in English as Foreign Language Teaching. This competence refers to the interlocutors' ability of using felicitous language to achieve communicative purposes via certain discourse or in specific context" (Bachman & Palmer 1996; Nguyen, 2011), or simply, the competence of communicating and interpreting meaning and intention appropriately in a specific communicative situation (social and cultural) (e.g., Nguyen, 2011; Koran<sup>1</sup> & Koran<sup>2</sup>, 2017). It is a fundamental element of wider communicative skills, and is widely considered as the main goal of most language programme (Savignon, 2017), by which people can understand and express themselves when engaging in linguistic activities in specific (social and cultural) context.

Therefore, more and more English teaching researchers call for bringing attention on pragmatics into the classroom (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Vellenga, 2004), and on the requirement that learners should get enough input or materials from the textbooks to develop L2 pragmatic competence and apply it in real context practically (Farashaiyan & Shahragerd, 2018). Even the Common European Framework of Reference (2001) officially emphasized the importance of acquiring pragmatic skills from the early stages of learning. However, the cultivation and researches of English pragmatic competence in the current compulsory education in mainland China still seems to be undervalued. By a quick look at a current popular English textbook, many odd sentences as the example below are found.

Can: Can you help me? I want to go home.

Bird: Where is your home?

Can: It's over there.

Bird: Oh, sorry, I'm busy.

Textbooks is considered as 'the backbone' of most language courses (Diepenbroek & Derwing, 2013), so it seems reasonable to expect primary textbooks to be designed with appropriate

pragmatic content. While the former related studies mainly focused on “communicative competence” or “communicative strategies”, but few on pragmatic competence, especially the pragmatic study of textbook. Although some studies do cast concerning on textbooks, they have largely focused on adult teaching materials and do not incorporate pragmatic themes in an adequate or logic way (Nguyen, 2011; Diepenbroek & Derwing, 2013).

As the textbook for starters, the contents are mostly interaction-based, closely connected with daily life, therefore, its pragmatic function should be more prominent and the pragmatic design should be given more attention to, so as to help the starters form a sense of nativelikeness. Thus, this study aims at investigating the current English textbooks of primary school under Grice’s Cooperative Principle to find out its status quo of pragmaticity.

## **2. Literature Review**

Scholars at home and abroad have been paying more and more attention to the researches related to the pragmatic content of textbooks in the past 20 years, which makes the pragmatic studies on textbooks become hot topics in different fields, as it shows below.

### **2.1 On the Status and Necessities**

In view of Harwood (2013), the necessity of pragmatics in textbook is self-evident, and English textbooks cannot be devoid of pragmatic knowledge. That’s true. Considering that textbooks usually provide the foundation for second language learners, it is necessary to investigate to what extent these textbooks incorporate the pragmatic elements of language (Ren & Han, 2016). Similarly, Vellenga (2004) argued that textbooks are the core of most classroom teaching course and syllabus, playing an indispensable role in the process of students’ receiving linguistic knowledge input. However, there is limited information for learners to acquire pragmatic competence successfully. While some studies (e.g. Vellenga 2004; Ren & Han 2016) further pointed out that there are issues with insufficient emphasis on pragmatic information in textbooks, even some English textbooks widely used in universities have deficiencies in both pragmatics and cultural knowledge. The former studies lead to a same conclusion that the pragmatic content only accounts for a small portion of the total text, there also phenomena such as omissions of pragmatic knowledge or provision of incorrect information, which may hinder the development of learners’ communicative competence.

Other than the theoretic arguing that pragmatic knowledge should be a necessary component of the teaching materials, issues with the investigation of pragmatic information in textbooks were conducted by some scholars at the same time. Such as Ton Nu, A. T. et al. (2020) found that the pragmatic input in Vietnamese national English language textbook series was accounted for a low percentage and the level of pragmatic was too limited to develop learner’s communicative competence, so it is necessary and essential to incorporate pragmatics into the textbook content process. While the limit of all of these related researches is mainly on textbooks for adults, none for kids in primary school.

### **2.2 On Speech Acts**

Speech Acts serves as a favorite theoretical perspective in pragmatic study on textbooks. Although, different speech acts such as apology, request, request modifiers have been discussed in many researches, generally speaking, it is still not adequate enough. For examples, Inawati (2016) analyzed the meta-pragmatic information presented in Indonesian textbooks for grades 7 and 10, and found that the presentation of meta-pragmatic information was insufficient and limited to one to three speech acts, such as request, refusal, and complaint, etc. Another example comes from Schauer (2019), he examined and found that most speech acts are underrepresented in textbooks, for example, the requesting act accounts for 74% of all instances, but responses takes only 11%. As a

result, a great deal of inconsistency in the scope and treatment of pragmatic content providing are extremely lacking (Jakupčević & Čavar 2021), which will make it harder for learners to notice input, and degrade the effect of acquiring the patterns of natural language use.

In addition, inadequate presentation of speech acts can easily cause students make pragmatic errors in real communication. The reason is that the low frequency and diversity of individual speech acts cannot improve students' pragmatic competence (Pramono & Kurniawan, 2020; Siswantara & Ariffin, 2021). This is well illustrated in some experimental studies. As Koran<sup>1</sup> & Koran<sup>2</sup> (2017) stated in their study of the performance of speech acts in local secondary school textbooks, the instructional materials provided inappropriate or misleading pragmatic inputs would lead to communicative failure. The other reasons are that in one way, textbooks writers often tend to presuppose that learners know in which situations particular speech acts are more appropriate, resulting in learners acquiring a range of expressions without knowing how/when to use them (Crandall & Basturkmen, 2004); in another way, even though learners may know when to use the particular speech acts in communication, they may use the pragmatic elements according to their native norms, which can lead to misunderstanding, e.g. over-apologizing (O'Keeffe et al., 2011).

In all, the studies from perspective of Speech Acts show that the number and variety of speech acts in the textbook are both inadequate.

### **2.3 On Social-cultural Aspect**

In the context of English as second language teaching or acquisition, the social-cultural aspect in the textbooks is bound to be a key research topic. Munandar & Ulwiyah (2012) made a cultural classification of high school English textbooks based on the perspective of cultural sources, they found that the textbooks were only briefly introduced the local culture and the target language culture without the detailed explanations, which made it difficult for learners to acquire pragmatic knowledge from it. In addition, McConachy & Hata (2013) in their study found that the textbooks do not fully consider the power relationship between the interlocutors, and the introduction of cultural knowledge was relative rigid, without presenting its diversity.

The concerning researches show that social-cultural elements in textbooks are pending to be enriched, so the writers should consider expanding the range and diversity of cultural materials in curriculum (Nguyen, 2011). As English and Chinese are not only quite different in the linguistic forms but also in terms of social and cultural facets, thus understanding the social-cultural knowledge of the target language, the Anglo-Saxon social-cultural knowledge for China English learners, will contribute greatly to the development of their pragmatic competence. So the cultural-pragmatic aspect should take an important stance in the primary school English textbooks, while such researches cannot be found so far.

### **2.4 On other Related Issues**

Except for the researches on the embodiment of pragmatic knowledge in textbooks above, many scholars have also conducted in-depth researches in other related fields. For example, Chinese scholars are committed to comparing the pragmatic content in different textbooks. Such as Ma (2021) compared and analyzed the types, frequencies as well as methods of presenting pragmatic knowledge in three sets of international Chinese oral teaching textbooks, and stated that there were differences in the number and frequency of speech acts; While Li & Yu (2020) compared Chinese and foreign English textbooks and pointed out that both Chinese and foreign textbooks did not cover classical topics of pragmatics such as conversation analysis, cooperative principles and conversational implicature. Similarly, They all called for textbook that compilers should consider presenting more pragmatic content.

To sum up, as the literature above show, studies mainly focused on the pragmatic types and the status of presenting pragmatic knowledge, as well as the comparison between different textbooks, which reveals the fact that the pragmatic information is insufficient in textbooks. And the main specific shorts are summed up as the following.

As for the research contents, most of the pragmatics researches on textbooks at home and abroad are conducted from the dimensions of speech acts and the presentation status of pragmatic knowledge in the textbooks, while few studies have been done to explore the conversational interactions.

With regard to the theoretical framework, most of the studies were based on the so called pragmatic framework, while few specific pragmatic theories was adopted, which makes the research seemed not in-depth enough.

In terms of research objects, despite the rising popularity of textbook research in the area of middle school and university textbooks, and have largely been found to lack the diversity and frequency of content related to pragmatics, little is discussed at primary stage. Moreover, the existed study mainly emphasized the discussion of pragmatic failures, most of them lack of data statistics and theoretical analysis.

Therefore, from the perspective of the Cooperative Principle in pragmatics, this study takes the conversational interaction in a set of primary school textbooks in mainland China as research object, with a view to enriching the research on the pragmatics of textbooks, further enhancing the pragmaticity in primary school English textbooks, so as to better improve students' pragmatic competence.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Questions**

Given the importance of language learning at primary school for the development of students' pragmatic competence, the overall aim of this study was to evaluate the conversational interaction design in the textbooks, and Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle was adopted in this study.

The Cooperative Principle holds that in actual contexts, people's interactions do not consist of a series of incoherent and disorganized words, interlocutors will generally make efforts to promote communication and cooperation between two parties when talking. The principle consists of four maxims, namely, maxim of quality, maxim of quantity, maxim of relation and maxim of manner, which provides a theoretical basis and an analytical framework for examining conversational interactions presented in the textbooks. In Grice's sense, the intentional violation of which in verbal communication will produce conversational implicature, it reflect to the fact that the meaning of the speaker's word is more than just literal during the communication, the listener should infer the purpose and implicit meaning of the speaker's according to the context.

With the above-mentioned aim of investigating the pragmatic content in primary English textbooks, this study was not limited to the analysis of the conversational interactions, but also the pragmatic features. Accordingly it intends to answer the following questions:

How does the conversational interactions in line with the Cooperative Principle?

What kind of pragmatic features are presented?

What are the reasons for presenting the pragmatic features in textbooks?

#### **3.2 Research Questions**

A set of very popular elementary school English textbooks in mainland China is selected as the research source, including eight textbooks from Grade 3 to Grade 6. Each textbook includes six new units (except for the second book of the sixth grade, which contains four new units), and its interactive content are diverse and most of them in line with actual contexts, which mainly covers daily communicative topics such as school experience, family lives and other social situations.

It conducts both ways of quantitative and qualitative to examine the pragmatic information presented in the textbooks. Specifically, the first step is to review the conversational interactions in the textbook in general according to the four maxims, with the purpose to find out the whether there exist examples that violate the maxims or not. And then, if the violated interactions do exist, the statistical analysis of the distribution will be conducted. Finally, typical cases of violating the

maxims are subjected to pragmatic analysis, so as to summarize its features and analyze the main causes.

### 3.3 Findings

First of all, the statistics and analysis indicate that conversational interactions in textbooks generally are in line with daily interaction habits and student's current cognitive abilities, but there still exist many "odd" utterances which violate the maxims of Cooperative Principle. As it is shown in Table 1, with a total of 58 cases, and the majority of them flout the quantity and manner maxim, 39 and 15 respectively, which are concentrated in the fourth and fifth grade textbooks, as shown in Table 2. When examining the textbooks for each grade, it is interesting to note that the fifth grade contains a higher percentage of conversational interactions that violate maxim compared to the sixth grade textbooks. Since L2 proficiency is positively correlated with pragmatics, i.e., the younger learners know, the easier it is to teach them pragmatics (Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019), one possible explanation for the high percentage of violations of the maxim in fifth grade is that the textbook focuses more on grammatical issues. It seems to imply that fifth grade textbooks have fewer pragmatic elements, and that there will be relatively fewer opportunities for students to gain access to use pragmatic forms correctly.

Table 1. Data on the Violation of Cooperative Principle in the Textbooks

Grade	Violation of quantity maxim	Violation of manner maxim	Violation of relation maxim	Violation of quality maxim
Third grade	0	1	0	1
Fourth grade	0	6	1	0
Fifth grade	17	6	1	0
Sixth grade	12	2	0	1
Total	39	15	2	2

Table 2 Data on the Violation of Cooperative Principle in Textbooks for Each Grade

Maxims	Quantities
Violation of quantity maxim	39
Violation of manner maxim	15
Violation of relation maxim	2
Violation of quality maxim	2
Total	58

Secondly, from the corpus, the conversational interactions in the textbook exhibit kind of feature as "artificiality", because there are a lot of "unnatural" expressions are presented in the textbooks. Further more, the design of conversations seem to be based on writer's intuition about language use, which is also noticed by some other studies (e.g., O'Keeffe 2011, Nguyen 2011). Meanwhile, the content of textbooks basically focus on grammatical knowledge items, ignoring actual contexts and the cultivation of student's pragmatic competence. Although EFL learners need more than just grammatical knowledge, it is the ability to use language appropriately and to choose the right form of language in given socio-cultural context (Živković, 2022) weighs a lot as for the purpose of second language learning. According to the New Curriculum Standards in mainland China, one of the important tasks of language teaching is to enable students to use the language they have learned in real contexts (MOE, 2022). However, as the findings shows, it lacks the authenticity of the textbook content related to pragmatics. For one thing, the characters in textbooks are Chinese

children, who interact with others under the topics involved (e.g. age, place of residence, asking for directions, weather, etc.) in non-authentic contexts; for another thing, the conversational interactions are largely presented in the form of question-answer and numerous complete sentences are used, accompanying all the responses in textbooks are in the form of syllogism, such as “No, they aren’t. My shoes are green”. It is hard to imagine two Chinese children being able to communicate in English in the target language context, and difficult to understand that they would always use complete sentence structures for daily communication. The cases should be like that there must be a large number of elliptical and abbreviated structures in natural contexts. This problem may stem from the wish to simplify materials for learners by presenting them with fewer choices, but pragmatic competence usually requires subtlety. Otherwise, the practice of simplification may cause unfavorable consequences and leave the learners with incomplete knowledge of pragmatic forms (Diepenbroek & Derwing, 2013).

Furthermore, Cooperative Principle and the maxims aim to construct an “idealized communication model”, which is intended to provide the way for interpreting the implicit meanings of natural interactions which violate the model or the specific maxims. According to the statistics data, on the one hand, the number of conversational interactions violating the individual maxim is relatively small, which means that the interaction content in textbook are close to the model on the whole; on the other hand, do those interaction contents that violate the maxims generate conversational implicature as Grice implies? However, the conversational interactions that violate the quantity maxim and the manner maxim did not produce any conversational implicature, but just “violating” in forms. That is the key problem and important feature of this set of textbooks, which will be analyzed in detail in the following subsections.

## 4. Research Methodology

### 4.1 Violating Quality Maxim

The quality maxim “try to make your contribution one that is true” requires interlocutors “do not to say what you believe to be false” and “do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence” (He & Ran, 2002: 107). While saying somethings untrue intentionally probably is intended to make the listener deduce the conversational implicature. For example, the discourse “X is a really good friend”, whose imply “You are not a friend at all”. Considering the cognitive ability of primary school students, the conversational interactions in the textbook basically conforms to the quality maxim. However, there are some exceptions, mainly reflected in the lack of sufficient contextual information as basis or presupposition, which weakens the semantic clue logically and makes the dialogue appear “unreal”. For example:

A: Let’s make a puppet.

B: Good idea!

A: First, make the head.

...

A & B: Let’s play with the puppet.

C: Goodbye!

The above interaction between A and B describes they are assembling a puppet with fragments, when they finished, the puppet suddenly “bring back to life” and said “goodbye” to them. Authenticity text refers to the real instances of language use, rather than those translated versions or designed ones for language teaching and learning (Hamidi & Benaissi, 2018). Although this design is somehow in line with children’s jump thinking, there has no transitional discourse as before, it seems abrupt and unrealistic. And although the “real” concept here is not strictly in line with Grice’s sense “say what you believe to be false”, the “unreal” mode in textbook will cause the starters develop an “abrupt” communicative habit when such conversation occurs in a true

## 4.2 Violating Manner Maxim

The M-maxim holds that the conversational interaction should be perspicuous and orderly. Inappropriate ways on response, such as ambiguity, excessive length, brevity may cause inconvenience to smooth communication. Obviously, intentional ambiguity that violates the M-maxim in specific contexts is usually intended to convey the conversational intention. For example, when the father suggests, "Let's get the kids something," the mother respond, "Okay, but I veto C-H-O-C-O-L-A-T-E," which is intentionally ambiguous in semantics, with the purpose of preventing children from hearing the word "chocolate" and thus asking for it, because most children can understand the pronunciation but not spelling.

The conversational interaction in the textbook that violate the maxim are found in unit modules such as "Let's try, Let's talk, Role play". Strictly speaking, these dialogues are not considered violating the Cooperative Principle, but the linguistic forms are not concise enough as M-maxim defines. For example:

- A: What's your father's job?  
B: My father is a doctor.  
A: Where is the teacher's office?  
B: The teacher's office is next to the library.

In the above interaction, the answers are all in complete sentence form, however, in natural context, the answer above "my father" and "the teacher's office" are usually replaced with pronouns "he" and "it". Deixis is an important issue in pragmatics, and person deixis is very common in native communicating context, which can point to a specific person or thing (e.g object, events, activities, etc.) in our speech events or communication. Pronouns also have the function of directly indicating certain grammatical features in specific context as well as involve the interpretation of the discourse (Raputri, 2020), while the use of pronouns is intentionally avoided in conversational interactions. As a result, ignoring the diversity of pragmatics will leave the impression of single pragmatic form for students. Certainly, the English teaching materials intended for young age learners would be better to present in brief linguistic structures as much as possible to match the students' cognitive abilities, but we can use the natural and simple way to convey pragmatic information instead of complete sentence forms, like in "He is a doctor" in (2) and "It's next to the library" or "Next to the library" in (3). while as the example in (4) from Cambridge Primary English textbook shows, the appropriate use of pronouns and omission can avoid redundancy in the whole conversational interaction and conforms to the real communication context.

- A: C, What's your favorite day?  
C: My favorite day is Friday.  
A: B, what's your favorite day?  
B: It's Wednesday. We wish play football on Wednesday.  
A: What's your favorite day, D?  
D: Sunday of course. I love Sunday.  
(Example (4) from Cambridge Primary English 1A, Lesson 5 Weeks)

Moreover, pragmatic ability is context-sensitive for it involves the production and understanding of language in social context (Sickinger & Schneider, 2014), while the current textbooks offer very limited contextual clues, not to mention the social-cultural pragmatic context. Meanwhile, the interrogative expressions like "How about..." and "What about..." are absent in the textbook, while such expressions can make the language without being too formal in one way, and present the varieties of the same concept in another way. Sometimes, textbooks tend to emphasize

one semantic formula over others or provide misleading information (Nguyen, 2011), which is true in this textbooks. Although the intention is to make students master the corresponding grammatical structures by repetition, in real-life communication, this kind of conversational interactions lacks of real communicative purpose, which is easy to lead to pragmatic errors.

### 4.3 Violating Quantity Maxim

The maxim of quantity “make your contribution as informative as is required” and “do not make your contribution more informative than is required”, holds the central idea that the interlocutors only need to provide appropriate information during communication. For example, A asks, “At what time are they going to the airport?”, while B answers, “Sometime this morning”. Obviously, B’s answer does not provide the exact information, expressing the implicit meaning of “unwilling to inform”, and at the same time, he/she does not want to intentionally violate the Cooperative Principle by saying “I don’t know”.

However, according to the survey, the numerous examples of violating the quantity maxim in the textbooks are not intended to convey conversation implicature, but presented as information overloaded by adding a large number of additional sentences in response. For example:

- A: Hi John, I have a good friend.  
 B: A boy or girl?  
 A: A boy. He’s tall and thin.  
 A: My uncle is a fisherman.  
 B: Where does he work?  
 A: He works at sea. He sees lots of fish everyday!

The interaction centers on the friends and relative’s work, and are detailed to where they are working. Although the underlined sentences in (5) and (6) serve as comments and supplements to the previous information, the necessity is still worth discussing. Logically, such extra information are not the semantic coverage of question sentence, which means it is not necessary information for the question. The reason is that the textbook writers may have other intention besides pragmatics, like increasing the sentence form training and emphasizing the richness of information expression to help students master the basic English grammatical structures. However, such expressions appear to be too formal and rigid in actual situations, thus, it is easy to create a formulaic illusion of response for students.

### 4.4 Violating Quantity Maxim

The R-maxim emphasizes that “what is said is relevant”, which means the answer should be formally and logically related to the question. Intentionally violating the maxim of relation is to convey the conversational implicature. For example, the company colleagues complains to you “don’t you think the boss is too stingy?” and you respond with “Yeah, it’s a nice day”. It is clear that the answer seems unrelated, while it expresses the implicit meaning of “unwilling to continue the topic”. The conversational interactions in the investigated textbooks provided fewer examples of violating the R-maxim, but similarly those violated ones convey no conversational implicature, and those “odd” sentences which could entail using the pragmatic forms wrongly.

In the following case (7), it is clear that the utterance of D is not a response in the interaction, however, as a part of speech activity, it appears to be alien and irrelevant to other utterances. It is noted that communicators’ interaction are centered on certain topics in the hope of achieving their communicative purposes, such as expressing their own needs or obtaining relevant information, but it seems that in (7), the turn in the interaction has not ended. The conversational implicature of D’s word may be to ask others if they have anything to eat, or he may want everyone go out to eat something together. However, the interaction ended with “I’m hungry” and did not continue the topic, thus failing to achieve this communicative goal.



A: Welcome to our school, please.  
B: How beautiful!  
A: This is the library.  
C: I like storybook.  
D: Oh! I'm hungry.

## 5. Pragmatic Features

Based on the analysis of conversational interaction that violate the maxims, it is found that the content of the teaching materials is closely related to students' life and conforms to students' cognitive development level. However, expressions base on Chinese-thinking-way in the textbook are quite obvious, and the quantity and quality of pragmatic knowledge is inadequate, thus, we concludes the pragmatic features of the investigated textbooks as low naturalness, singularity in type and weak culturality.

### 5.1 Low Naturalness

Compared to natural language communication, "low naturalness" refers to the phenomenon of "odd sentences" (Kecskes & Kirner-Ludwig, 2019), such as noun repetition, simple pronouns missing, additional clauses and insufficient logical links mentioned above. The fundamental reason is that the conversational interaction corpus in textbook are mostly compiled artificially. Some are subjective and made up randomly, and some are deliberately made, reflecting a strong sense of Chinese thinking mode and cultural conventions. As for thinking mode, English mode is linear while Chinese mode is "circular thinking" (Kaplan, 1966), exhibiting the features of generality and ambiguity. The English expression with Chinese thinking modes reflected in conversation design are Chinglish, information overloaded and excessive discourse integrity. For example:

A: Hello, Pig! Follow me!  
B: Hello, Dog! Follow Pig. Follow me!  
...  
A: Hello! Rabbit! Follow Zoom. Follow Pig. Follow Dog. Follow me!

In example (8), A asks the animals to follow him ("follow me"), but there is no demonstration of what the animals follow A to do. However, in the Oxford English Dictionary, the prominent meaning of "follow me" is "learn from me, do with me", such as the original BBC video, the accompanying textbook and audio recording of the textbook Follow me. It seemed that the textbooks writer only noticed the literal meaning of the "follow me" and did not connect it with the actual context to which it applies, resulting in a deviation between the content and the communicative context. In actual context, in order to express the speaker's communicative purpose accurately, they will carefully choose the appropriate form of language expression in relation to the context. Therefore, the more appropriate expression for expressing "follow me" in physical behavior is "come (along) with me". As shown in example (9).

In the night the wind came along.  
"Oo-oo, oo-oo, oo-oo." It said.  
"Come with me, red wagon. Come along with me."  
Away went the big red wagon down the street.  
(Example (9) from American Primary English 1A, Lesson 6 The wind and the Toys)

The culture-deviation is another aspect of low naturalness. In western cultures, people believed that they can do their own affairs without interference from others. They usually ask each other if

they need help first, and then warmly help after receiving recognition from others. While in (10), B planned to learn swimming the next day, A enthusiastically expressed his willingness to teach B without asking if he needs help, and A did not take into account B's right to choose. This is a typical English expression based on Chinese culture, usually offering more information or willingness to help.

A: What are you going to do tomorrow?

B: I'm going to learn how to swim.

A: OK, I'll teach you.

## 5.2 Singularity in Type

"Singularity" here is relative to linguistic diversity. In terms of conversational interaction design in a textbook, "pragmatic diversity" is mainly reflected in the variety of language forms and the contextualization of discourse meaning construction. By examining the interactive content in the whole set textbook, it is found that the conversational interactions presented in the textbooks from grade 3 to grade 6 are mostly complete structures, exhibiting a prominent feature of "singularity in type".

From the perspective of pragmatics, overuse of complete sentence always leads to conversational implicature, such as "impatient" and "blame", etc. In addition, contraction and the appropriate use of pronouns in conversations are the standard for mature L2 learners. Many English learners who first arrive in the British and American countries often feel that they have great difficulties in understanding and expressing themselves, besides the cultural differences, it is also an important reason that the inability to use the correct linguistic forms. Li & Yu (2020) also suggested that the lack of such knowledge is not conducive to cultivating learner's competence to understand speaker's intention and carry out conversational cooperation as well as implement the conversation. It is worth noting that the study was conducted on English textbooks for Chinese college students. So it can be presumed that the proportion of pragmatic content in primary school English textbooks will be much lower and the pragmatic types will be much less.

Although there is no universal standard for the percentage of pragmatic knowledge that should be included in textbooks to develop EFL students' communicative competence, the small amount of pragmatic knowledge may be problematic (Ton Nu & Murray, 2020). For this, Siswantara & Ariffin (2021) found that the speech acts provided low in frequency and lacked variety will hinder the development of better pragmatic competence for the students. So it is crucial to add more pragmatic types to English textbooks as they are the fundamental references used in the classroom.

In EFL context, textbooks may be the main source, or perhaps the only source, of language practice in and out of the classroom (Nguyen, 2011), and most teachers also tend to follow the textbooks to teach students how to use the language. More importantly, for the starters, they may have more difficulties in understanding the teaching content, which will inevitably makes them acquire standardized but inappropriate verbal expressions, form fixed thinking mode, and so as to result in pragmatic failures in the authentic communication. In addition, although L2 teachers believe that it is important to teach appropriate language for specific language functions, not all of them hold that they have the enough background knowledge to teach pragmatics (e.g., Savvidou & Kogetsidis, 2019; Schauer, 2021). Therefore, teachers should also need to be trained on how to teach pragmatics knowledge to the students (e.g., Glaser, 2018; Ton Nu & Murray, 2020).

So for the starters of English as second language learning, the singular and complete sentence structure seems a trivial issue and acting as strategic way to teach and solidify their grammatical cognition, but these unnatural conversational instances will do great harm to the development of their pragmatic competence.

## 5.3 Singularity in Type

Language and culture are inseparable, and one of the important purposes of foreign language

learning is to understand interlocutor's social and cultural knowledge, so as to avoid cross-cultural pragmatic failures in communication (McConachy & Hata 2013). So in L2 pragmatic teaching, it is not only necessary to take learner's subjectivity and social claims into account, but also respect their own culture and language (Kasper, 1997).

Obviously, there exist huge differences between Chinese and English both linguistically and culturally. For example, the concept of "politeness" in Chinese has its own characteristic, so it is necessary for students to fully understand their differences. In pragmatics research, the issue of "(Im) politeness" is an important topic (e.g., Culpeper, 2021; Ran, 2022), and other than the theoretical discussion, the pragmatic instrument with a variety of structures (including nonverbal structures) to launch and enhance polite acts are also concerned by some scholars (e.g., García-Fuentes & McDonoug, 2018). Those related researches show that politeness awareness and strategies are conducive to promoting successful verbal communication and maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships. Therefore primary English teaching materials should thoroughly consider cultural differences and cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness, rather than merely using English forms to express the "Chinese etiquette". For example:

A (with gifts and cake): Happy birthday!

B: Thank you! Let's eat the cake.

In (11), many animals go to B's birthday party, B gladly accepts the gifts from his friends and expresses his gratitude, but does not open it in front of his friends. Whereas in Western culture, the protagonist usually open the gifts and express his gratitude in person, such as "It's beautiful, I really like it". In order to use speech acts appropriately, learners need to be aware not only of the linguistic resources used to express them, but also of the rules for using. However, the textbooks often do not provide enough information about when and for what purpose it is appropriate to use the speech act and what expressions are appropriate in a given context (Nguyen, 2011), which will lead to the improper or imperfect establishment of cultural concepts.

Another important cultural issue with great difference China and the West is privacy. Age, address, personal income, physical features, and health status are regarded as personal privacy in Western culture, and people usually avoid to talk about this kind of question related to personal privacy (Luo, 2019). In contrast, in Chinese culture, it is a common way of interpersonal expression of concern for people to ask each other about private topics, and it can show people's kindness and concern for each other. Like example (12), the conversational interaction requires students to master the English expressions of height and weight, although such topics commonplace behaviors in Chinese culture, it is relatively private in the West.

A: How tall are you?

B: I'm 1.61 metres.

A: I'm taller.

B: You're older than me, too.

...

A: How heavy are you, Jim?

B: I'm 52 kilograms.

A: You're heavier than me.

So the topics choosing in a textbook is crucial, because it reflects the compilers' awareness of cultural differences, and pragmatic consciousness as well. As example (23) from the authentic English corpora New Concept English shows, the conversations are centered on casual topic like work, study, or feelings about the location, and seldom involve personal privacy. The linguistic forms and content in the dialogue is natural and authentic, so the communication between A and B can proceed smoothly.

A: Hi, I'm A. I'm C's brother.

B: Oh, nice to meet you. And C has told me a lot about you.

A: You work with her, don't you? What do you do, exactly?

B: I'm a teacher. I teach maths. What about you?

A: I work for an IT company.

B: Oh. Where are you from?

A: I'm from Sydney in Australia.

B: So what do you think of the weather here? It must be cold for you.

A: Well, sometimes it can be too hot, but a bit more sun would be nice here.

(Example (13) from New Concept English Book 2, Lesson 12 My New Neighbour)

In all, textbook writers intend to emphasize the sentence presentation and drilling in compiling the contents, but the weak culturality of the textbook often leads to pragmatic mistakes and damage the communicative appropriateness in real context.

## 6. Pragmatic Features

This study, based on Grice's Cooperative Principle, examines the conversational interaction in a set of primary school English textbooks in mainland China. With reference to the four maxims, it summarizes the examples of violating the different maxims and finds that the interaction content in textbooks generally conforms to Cooperative Principle, presenting the feature of "idealized communication model". However, there still exist some "odd" utterances that violate the maxims, especially the maxim of quantity and the maxim of manner, without conveying any conversational implicature. Thus we conclude the textbook's pragmatic features as "low naturalness", "singularity in type" and "weak culturality". The fundamental reason is that the conversational interactions in the textbooks are not designed from authentic contexts, but are "artificially" compiled or edited, which is a trend and also a problem pending to be solved (e.g. Vellenga, 2004; Diepenbroek & Derwing, 2013; Limberg, 2016). Meanwhile, a large number of English expressions with Chinese thinking mode are used, highlighting Chinese expressing habits, which is not in line with the cultural conventions and interpersonal pragmatic habits of the target language.

Textbook is an important source of information and inspiration for many textbook writers and teachers (Jakupčević & Portolan, 2021), so it must be correctly and authentically written to enable students to immerse themselves in acquiring language forms and avoid pragmatic errors. While the current primary school English textbooks in mainland China don't emphasize enough the importance of pragmatic knowledge in textbooks, accordingly teachers cannot be expected to realize the pragmatic need, instead, they focus more on the linguistic knowledge. Since the pragmatic issues cause more efforts on how to explain certain concepts and choose which are appropriate for specific age students (Glaser, 2018), the textbook writers should pay more attention to the pragmatic forms and contents.

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