

English Textbook Analysis for Developing the 8th National Curriculum: Focused on Discourse Study Using Discourse Completion Tasks

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This paper is aimed to evaluate the communicative competence of Korean EFL learners through the Discourse Completion Tasks(DCT) analysis. The present study has three purposes. The first purpose is to analyse English textbooks on the basis of thanking strategies, apologizing strategies, and requesting and offering strategies presented in Aijmer(1996). The second purpose is to analyse the discourse completion data collected from Korean middle school students and university students. The third one is to suggest the discourse syllabus model for the 8th national curriculum in Korea.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the main purposes of English education in Korea can be said to cultivate the communicative competence of Korean EFL learners. In more than 100 years of English education history in Korea, many innovations have been made to improve English education contexts and cultivate the communicative competence of Korean learners. The notion of a "communicative syllabus" which has been adopted from the 6th national curriculum reflects this innovative atmosphere of English education policies in Korea.

The notion of communicative competence has had a very powerful influence on every aspect of language teaching. English textbooks have been published on the basis of communicative syllabus since the 6th national curriculum. Communicative competence is not on the list of items learned, but a set of strategies for realizing the value of linguistic elements in contexts of use is on the list (Widdowson, 1979).

Although the importance of communicative competence is widely acknowledged, it is doubtful whether Korean EFL learners have acquired communicative competence. So we need to investigate Korean EFL learners' uses of speech functions in order to know if they can communicate in appropriate contexts and manner.

This study focuses on achieving three purposes. The first one is to analyse English textbooks on the basis of thanking strategies, apologizing strategies, and

requesting and offering strategies presented in Aijmer(1996) because I had analysed these four language functions in the previous study(Park, Kyung-Ja et al. 2000). The second purpose is to analyse the discourse completion data collected from Korean middle school students(50 students) and university students(50 students). The third purpose is to suggest the discourse syllabus as a more appropriate model to cultivate communicative competence in Korea.

2. METHOD

2.1 Subjects

The subjects of this study consist of 50 middle school students and 50 university students. The middle school students were in the second year and the university students were the freshmen who were attending my classes.

2.2 Material

1) Discourse Completion Task's Data

The Discourse Completion Tasks (hereafter DCT) consists of 33 questions (see Appendix A). They were extracted from randomly selected middle school English textbooks.

2) EFL Textbooks

The data concerning EFL textbooks was based on the analyse of middle school English textbooks. This study adopted six books for middle school students published on the basis of the 7th national curriculum.

2.3 Procedure

This study was conducted based on the following procedure:

First, I analysed the expressions for thanking, apologizing, and requesting and offering strategies presented in English textbooks.

Second, these expressions were classified according to the strategies presented in Aijmer(1996).

Third, I analysed the results of discourse completion tasks carried out by 50 middle school students and 50 university students and compared them with the results from English textbook analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study will be discussed in two parts: textbook analysis results and DCT analysis results.

3.1 Results of Textbook Analysis

I selected the expressions for four language strategies(thanking, apologizing, requesting and offering) and classified them into categories according to Aijmer(1996)(see Appendix B).

1) Thanking

The results of thanking strategies can be shown in Table 1. This indicates that the thanking strategies presented in Korean middle school textbooks are limited. Korean English textbooks present *a* for the most cases(98%) and strategies *c* and *g* for 1% each. We didn't find the other strategies for thanking in middle school English textbooks.

TABLE 1
Thanking Strategies

| Strategies (Aijmer, 1996) | Textbooks (%) |
|---|--|
| <i>a</i> thanking somebody explicitly | Thank you (45) Thanks (32.6) Thank you for ... (10.2) Thanks a lot (6.1) Thank you very much (4) Thanks for ... (1) Fine, thanks (1) |
| <i>b</i> expressing gratitude | 0 |
| <i>c</i> expressing appreciation of the addressee | That's very kind of you. (1) |
| <i>d</i> expressing appreciation of the act | 0 |
| <i>e</i> acknowledging a debt of gratitude | 0 |
| <i>f</i> expressing one's gratitude | 0 |
| <i>g</i> expressing emotion | Oh, thanks. (1) |
| <i>h</i> commenting on one's own role by suppressing one's own importance | 0 |

2) Apologizing

As we see in Table 2, the most frequently used strategies for apologizing are strategy *e*: demanding forgiveness (83.7%), strategy *d*: expressing regret (10.8%), strategy *k*: acknowledging responsibility for the offending act (2.7%), and strategy *f* (1%). These results show that apologizing strategies are concentrated in just one or two categories.

| Strategies (Aijmer, 1996) | Textbooks (%) |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| <i>a</i> explicitly apologizing | 0 |
| <i>b</i> offering one's apologies | 0 |
| <i>c</i> acknowledging a debt of apology | 0 |
| <i>d</i> expressing regret | Sorry (5.4) I'm so sorry (5.4) |
| <i>e</i> demanding forgiveness | Excuse me (83.7) |
| <i>f</i> explicitly requesting the hearer's forgiveness | I beg your pardon (1) |
| <i>g</i> giving an explanation of account | 0 |

| | |
|---|---------------------|
| <i>h</i> self-denigration or self-reproach | 0 |
| <i>i</i> minimizing responsibility | 0 |
| <i>j</i> expressing emotion | 0 |
| <i>k</i> acknowledging responsibility for the offending act | It's my fault (2.7) |
| <i>l</i> promising forbearance from a similar offending act | 0 |
| <i>m</i> offering redress | 0 |

TABLE 2 Apologizing Strategies

3) Requesting and Offering

The results of analysing the requesting and offering strategies are shown in Table 3. From this table we can see the same results as in the thanking and apologizing analysis. It tells us that the percentage of occurrences is higher in strategy *a* : *ability*(21%), strategy *h*: *the-question*(18%), strategy *k*: *permission question*(18%), strategy *e*: *need*(12%), and *f*: *obligation*(12%). So "Can you ... ", "How about ... ?", "Why don't you ...?", and "Let's..." are the most frequently used expressions for requesting and offering strategies by Korean EFL learners.

**TABLE 3
Strategies of Requesting and Offering**

| Strategies (Aijmer, 1996) | Textbooks (%) |
|------------------------------|---|
| <i>a</i> ability | Can you come to the party? (21) Can you help me? Can I talk to Min-ho? |
| <i>b</i> consultation | 0 |
| <i>c</i> willingness | Shall we play baseball?(3) |
| <i>d</i> want | 0 |
| <i>e</i> need | I want to buy a new computer (12) I want to buy a shirt |
| <i>f</i> obligation | We(You) must obey the traffic laws (12) We have to wear a coat outside the house |
| <i>g</i> appropriacy | You should exercise more (3) |
| <i>h</i> wh-question | How about visiting Gyeongju? (15) Why don't you keep a diary? (3) |
| <i>i</i> hypothesis | 0 |
| <i>j</i> appreciation | 0 |
| <i>k</i> permission question | May I have some water? (18) May I take your order? |
| <i>l</i> possibility | 0 |
| <i>m</i> preference | We'd better stay in line (3) |

| | |
|----------------------|---------------|
| <i>n</i> performance | 0 |
| <i>o</i> state | 0 |
| <i>p</i> naming | 0 |
| <i>q</i> existence | 0 |
| <i>r</i> other | Let's ... (9) |

The results of English textbook analysis show that the four language function strategies are concentrated in certain categories. Aijmer(1996) suggested various categories for thanking and apologizing, and requesting and offering strategies, but English textbooks used in Korea presented only certain categories. Therefore, these concentrated categories do have some significant effects on EFL learners' discourse competence. To improve the communicative competence of Korean EFL learners, English textbooks must suggest more varied strategies for language functions.

3.2 Results of DCT (Discourse Completion Tasks) Analysis

In order to evaluate the discourse competence of the subjects, DCT were devised based on middle school English textbooks. The subjects were asked to fill out short background questionnaire and answer DCT.

1) Thanking Expressions in DCT

Table 4 shows the relative frequency of thanking expressions in DCT. As we see in this table, the percentage of correct answers in thanking strategies is 42% for middle school students and 43.14% for university students. We found no significant difference between middle school students and university students.

TABLE 4
Relative Frequency of Thanking Expressions in DCT

| Function | Realization | Correct Answers in DCT(%) | |
|----------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| | | Middle School Students | University Students |
| Thanking | Thank you | 42 | 43.14 |
| | Thank you very much | | |
| | Thanks a lot | | |
| | Thanks | | |

2) Apologizing Expressions in DCT

Table 5 shows the relative frequency of apologizing expressions in DCT. The percentage of correct answers in apologizing strategies for middle school students is lower than that for university students. The relative frequency of correct answers in DCT is very similar to the analytic results of English textbooks.

TABLE 5
Relative Frequency of Apologizing Expressions in DCT

| Function | Realization | Correct Answers in DCT(%) | | | |
|-------------|-------------|---------------------------|------|---------------------|------|
| | | Middle School Students | | University Students | |
| Apologizing | Excuse me | 36 | 27.3 | 44 | 33.3 |
| | I am sorry | 40 | | 54 | |
| | I'm afraid | 6 | | 2 | |

3) Requesting and Offering Expressions in DCT

Table 6 represents the relative frequency of requesting and offering expressions in DCT. In this table, we can see that the percentage of correct answers for middle school students is higher than that for university students. This reveals that Korean university students show little improvement in their discourse competence and the period of English education doesn't directly effect their communicative competence. The relative rankings of correct answers for requesting and offering are also very similar to those in the textbook analysis. For middle school students, "May I...?", "Can I ...?" are the most correctly used expressions. For university students, "May I ...?" and "Will I/Shall I?" are the most correctly used expressions.

TABLE 6
Relative Frequency of Requesting and Offering Expressions in DCT

| Function | Realization | Correct Answers in DCT(%) | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|---------------------------|------|---------------------|------|
| | | Middle School Students | | University Students | |
| Requesting & Offering | May I ... | 72 | 48.8 | 48 | 33.7 |
| | Can I ... | 63 | | 39.3 | |
| | Let's ... | 31 | | 20 | |
| | Will I / Shall I | 45 | | 44 | |
| | How about | 33 | | 17 | |

The results of the DCT analysis shown in table 4, 5, and 6 reveal that Korean learners use very limited variations of thanking, apologizing, requesting and offering expressions. This tendency may arise from an influence of the textbooks widely used in Korea on the ground that the frequency order of expressions in the DCT data are very similar to that in the textbook data.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

4.1 Conclusions

As a result of this study, we can find the following facts.

1) The strategies of the four language functions in EFL textbooks are very limited comparing with those categories suggested in Aijmer(1996).

2) Korean EFL learners use limited strategies and expressions for thanking, apologizing, requesting and offering functions. And among the percentage of correct answers for DCT, we can't find any great difference between the percentage from the middle school students and from university students, which means that the duration of English learning in Korea is not closely related with the possibility of success in EFL learning.

3) The frequency order for expressions in the DCT data is similar to that in the textbook analysis data. This fact implicates that English textbooks can play a very important role on English learning and teaching, which suggests the necessity of publishing English textbooks appropriate for Korean EFL context.

4) In order to improve the communicative competence of Korean EFL learners, it is not sufficient to present the list of communicative functions and expressions which have been presented since the 6th national curriculum. In addition to present a list of communicative functions and expressions, we need to teach Korean EFL learners how to select useful strategies for four language functions: thanking, apologizing, requesting and offering.

5) In the previous study(Chang, 2000, p.243), some suggestions were made about how to develop English textbooks more appropriate for students' needs and English learning and teaching situations. These suggestions are like these:

Grading: we need to make language activities graded more harmoniously from the 1st through the 3rd grades.

Variety: the results show that four language activities need to be made varied.

Integrating with other language skills: the results of four language skill analysis show that the language skills presented in English textbooks is rarely integrated with one another. It is desirable to investigate four language skills in order to make textbooks more adequate for developing communicative abilities of Korean students.

6) The syllabus design plays a very important role in the construction of English textbooks. In order to improve English textbooks appropriate for cultivating communicative competence of Korean students, we need to improve the syllabus designs(Chang, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002). The syllabus design of Korean curriculum history has been improved continuously and significantly. The 7th national curriculum has the multi-layered syllabus design, so this fact reflects that the syllabus design has been improved very much from the 6th national curriculum. But we need to develop the components of multi-syllabus model and take the discourse components of syllabus design into consideration.

In order to solve the problems pointed out as the results of this study, a discourse syllabus can be suggested as a substitute for the communicative syllabus model.

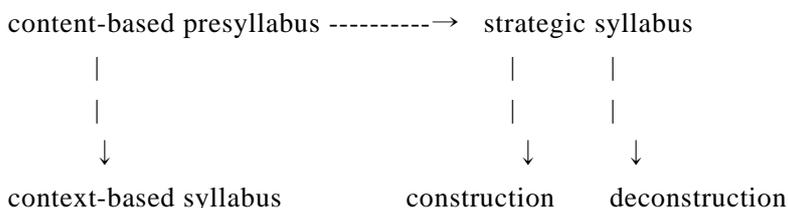
4.2 Suggestions : Discourse Syllabus

Through the history of English education in Korea, the syllabus model has been changed: from the 1st to the 5th national curriculum, grammatical syllabus were adopted. From the 6th national curriculum, notional-functional syllabus plus grammatical syllabus model were adopted as a substitute for communicative syllabus (Chang, 2001, pp.1-15).

But as we can see from the results of this study, it is not sufficient to demonstrate isolated lists of speech functions, rather we need to chain together of functions or speech acts as inseparable from the creating of larger patterns and genres in discourse (McCarthy & Carter, 2001). So this study suggests discourse syllabus as a model appropriate for the 8th national curriculum.

One highly innovative approaches to incorporating an integrative view of discourse into the syllabus is provided by Aston(1988). FIGURE 1 presents the discourse syllabus model Aston proposed(McCarthy & Carter, 2001, p.59).

FIGURE 1
Aston's discourse syllabus model



Aston tries to get to grips with the problem of creating the contexts for interactive discourse in the classroom. He proposed a set of strategy-headings that can act as a sort of filter between the language group and its need and the specification of tasks. According to McCarthy & Carter(2001), Aston suggested strategy-headings like these :

Genre-related strategies:

What are the media and modes that the learners will encounter?

What genres are likely to be most useful?

What patterns of interaction are most useful?

Coherence-related strategies:

What aspects of topic management, turn-asking, etc, will be involved?

What types of cohesion?

Politeness strategies:

What aspects of face will need to be addressed?

What forms of address will be involved?

How important will reciprocity be?

Planning strategies:

What sorts of anticipatory strategies will be useful?

Will special conditions for reference apply?, etc.

Convergence strategies:

Informational or cognitive convergence:

What aspects of categories such as theme, mood and modality will be involved?

Affective convergence:

What adjacency-pair types (solidarity routines, problem-sharing, agreement-disagreement) are likely?, etc.

Repair strategies:

What are the risks of communicational problems or cultural misunderstandings?

Is repair likely to be largely self-repair, or more global, negotiable repairs?

Repair strategies may involve politeness, which in itself involves cultural awareness and problem of convergence, and so on.

For example, "asking favors of others" is thus conceived as a "genre" rather than as a function or speech act, and involves not only speech-act realization at the micro-level, but also a strategic level involving politeness strategies (face), planning (opening), convergence (reinforcing), and so on. That kind of acting involves the following sequences: signals of opening, explaining the problem, asking, minimizing, reinforcing, acceding, thanking.

So the discussion about the discourse syllabus can suggest the following conclusion: the awareness of discourse and a willingness to take on board what a language-as-discourse view implies can make us better and more efficient syllabus designers, task designers, etc. The approach for the discourse competence and discourse syllabus can help us to be more faithful to what language is and what people use it for. Also this study can help to improve the discourse competence of Korean EFL learners.

In English learning and teaching area, the discourse approach to language teaching is emphasized recently. Considering this trend in English language teaching, we need to not only devise the discourse syllabus, but also consider the discourse approach to EFL context in the near future.

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APPENDIX A

Discourse Completion Tasks

Have you ever been to overseas? (Yes / No)

Which country were you in?

How long were you there?

Have you ever learned English outside school? (Yes / No)

Fill in the blanks.

*** At the store ***

A: How much is it?

B: It's 15,000 won.

O.K. I'll take it. Here's 20,000 won.

A: (1). Here's your change.

Susan: Who's this man?

Inho: He's my dad.

Susan: Is he a police officer?

Inho: No, he isn't. He's a pilot.

Susan: He's very handsome.

Inho: (2)

A: This flower is for you.

B: (3)

A: Do you know the way to the theater?

B: No. I have to ask.

(4), where is Hanmadang Theater?

A: Let me see. Turn left at the drugstore, and go straight for two blocks.

It's next to a dress shop on your right.

B: (5).

A: You're Welcome.

A: Oach!

B: Oh, (6). It's my fault.

A: That's all right.

B: (7)! Where are you from?

A: Brazil

B: Your country has a very strong soccer team!

A: (8).

Tom: (9). How do I get to the library?

Woman: Go, straight for two blocks and turn left. It's on your left.

Tom: (10).

Woman: You're welcome.

Mrs. White: Hello?

Minho: Hello. (11) I speak to Linda, please?

Mrs. White: (12), she's out right now. Who's calling?

Minho: This is her friend, Minho.

Yumi: (13) I sit here?

man: No, (14) you can't. I must clean it.

A: (15), where is the drugstore?

B: Go straight for one block. It's on your left.

Mike: Wow! There's a long line.

Sora: Yeah. (16) stand in line.

Mike: Look! Someone is sitting in line.

Sora: He shouldn't do that.

Mike: (Going up to him.)

(17). Please don't do that.

A: I'm giving a party on Sunday. (18) you come to the party?

B: Sure, (19). What time does the party start?

A: It starts at six o'clock.

A: (20) I speak to Ann?

B: This is Ann speaking. Who's speaking?

A: This is Minho. Ann, we're going on a picnic.

(21) you join us?

B: Sue, I'd like to.

A: It's a lovely day. (22) go on a picnic.

B: That's a good idea. Where shall we go?

A: (23) the Han River?

B: That sounds great.

Sujin: What are you going to do this weekend?

Minho: Nothing special.

Sujin: (24) we play basketball?

Minho: Sounds great!

Tom: What time shall we make it?

Linda: (25) ten o'clock?

Tim: Good! And where shall we meet?

Linda: (26) meet at the bus stop.

A: What are you going to do this Saturday?

B: I'm going to play baseball. (27) you join us?

A: Great. I like baseball.

Mr. Brown: Jenny, (28) you help me?

Jenny: Sure. What is it?

Mr. Brown: (29) you set the table for me?

Jenny: O.K.

A: (30) I help you?

B: Yes. I'm looking for a book for my friend.

A: (31) this one?

B: O.K. I'll take it.

Susan: (32) you help me with my homework?

Inho: Sure. What is it?

Susan: I'm writing about the capital of France.

It's difficult.

Inho: I see.

A: (33) having a rest?

B: That sounds good!

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