

# Examining Closing Sections in “Oral Communication I” Textbooks

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## 1. Introduction

Pragmatic competence is an indispensable ability to interact successfully in a language community. It is required in most of our daily life communication; when we talk, we must draw on the knowledge since even small talks require it. However, many studies on pragmatic competence have indicated that the pragmatic of native speakers (NSs) and learners are different, as Schmidt and Richards (1980) pointed out that “even greetings and leave-takings show differences,” and that the disparity may lead even to communication breakdowns. In other words, language learners must improve pragmatic skills to communicate naturally and effectively.

One of the reasons for the difference suggested in previous studies is the limited and insufficient input for the learners. Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) suggested two reasons that may result in the difference in development of pragmatics between native speakers and non-native speakers (NNSs); “the availability of input”, and “the salience of relevant linguistic features in the input from the point of view of the learner” (p234). Kasper (1997) among others pointed out that the learners often do not get enough input in the institutional settings, and House (1996) showed that sometimes instruction might even have negative influences. In addition, several studies have found that language teaching course books published worldwide do not provide enough and accurate information in terms of pragmatic knowledge (Boxter & Pickering, 1995, Scotton & Bernstein 1988, Candall & Basturkmen, 2005), resulting in providing inadequate input for the learners.

Bardovi-Harlig, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan, and Reynolds (1991) proposed the following four steps to integrate pragmatically appropriate input into English classrooms (p5).

1. identification of the speech act
2. data collection and description
3. text and materials evaluation
4. development of new materials

As the “step three”, they actually evaluated major ESL textbooks on “closing conversations” in the

study and found that the closings in those textbooks provided insufficient information as a whole. They then suggested some valuable suggestions for classroom activities and materials to raise pragmatic awareness of language learners.

In Japan, English is taught as a foreign language, and most often, the students do not use English at all in their daily lives. Their input is limited to the one from their English classes with usually non-native teachers and from the textbooks authorized by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). The role of the textbooks is very important considering the situation. However, as Akutsu (2006) have indicated, authorized textbooks in Japan do not always provide enough or accurate information in terms of pragmatic aspects of the language, as is the case with other ESL textbooks.

In this study, I will investigate closing sections in "Oral Communications I" textbooks, which are used in Japanese high school English classes, to see how and how much closing sections are presented. Although the above study by Bardovi-Harlig et al. (1991) provided us with the beneficial information on the lack of input, they did not give detailed explanation about what constituted "complete closing" in their study, nor did they qualitatively analyze the expressions and conversations appeared in the textbooks as their study's main concern was to give suggestions for more authentic and better materials for ESL classrooms. There will be two sections in my study. One is on the amount; investigating if the textbooks have adequate number of presentations of closings. The other is about the quality; investigating if the contents used for the closing sections are authentic and natural enough, based on the findings from previous studies on closing sections. In some previous studies on instruction of pragmatics, transfers from the teachers' and textbooks' cultures and languages were found (Candall & Basturkmen, 2005). Therefore, characteristics of closings in Japanese will also be introduced to see if there is any trace of transfer in the textbooks.

## 2. Background of this study

### 2.1 Learners' development and teaching of pragmatic competence

There have been many studies on interlanguage pragmatics during the last two decades, and there are different claims about the relationships between learners' development in pragmatics and the other linguistic skills, such as listening, reading, and writing. Several research have shown that grammatical ability or general language proficiency scaled by standardized tests, such as TOEFL, do not necessarily guarantee the person's pragmatic ability (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1991, 1993). Others have pointed out that pragmatic competence sometimes lags behind grammatical competence (Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985), and yet others have claimed that the

competence does improve as the learner’s overall proficiency improves (Koike, 1996). These studies suggest that pragmatic competence should be scaled separately, and may be and should be taught independently.

Another important finding is about teaching of pragmatics. Previous studies indicated that explicit instruction benefits learners better than implicit one (Kasper, 1997, Kasper & Rose, 1999, House, 1996, Tateyama, Kasper, Mui, Tay, & Thananart, 1997). With explicit instruction about pragmatics of a target language, learners can improve their skills effectively. This means that the roles of instructors and teaching materials are very important. However, Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei (1998) found in their research on pragmatic awareness that teachers in EFL contexts tend to score pragmatic errors less serious than the teachers in ESL contexts. In other words, EFL teachers do not always see the gravity of the failure. In addition, as mentioned earlier, textbooks are not always adequately concerned about pragmatic aspects. Then, with insufficient textbooks and with teachers who do not appreciate pragmatic errors, it may be improbable for foreign language learners to get appropriate instruction or input for its development.

## 2.2 Textbook research

Textbooks are very important sources of information for foreign language learners, and it is more so in Japan where English is not used in daily lives and taught as a foreign language. There have been several studies on pragmatic aspects dealt in ESL textbooks, and as a whole, the researchers claimed that the contents as well as the presentation had some problems in respect to pragmatic acquisition (Bouton, 1996, Candall & Basturkmen, 2004, Akutsu, 2001).

The first problem pointed out in previous studies is that the amount and contents of pragmatic strategies are not sufficient (Bouton, 1993). Second, the ways of presentation are not appropriate for acquisition. Candall and Basturkmen (2004) reviewed several major textbooks for English for Academic Purposes and pointed out that the conventional approach to improve pragmatic skills was “present learners with lists of ‘useful expressions’ for various speech acts”, and that they “usually neglects to who when and for what purposes it is appropriate to make a speech act, and which expressions would be appropriate in a particular situation” (p38-39).

Through the investigation on direction-giving using conversation analysis, Scotton and Bernstein (1988) also indicated both of the problems above. They asked 216 university students “How do I get to the Vet Clinic from here?” and observed their response and overall structure of the exchanges. They then compared the results with the dialogue patterns in ESL textbooks. Regarding the elements of the exchange, they found that there are usually four major parts in natural direction-givings; the opening sequence, the direction, the pre-closing, and possibly a closing. In many of the

textbooks, however, there was only the direction part. They also found that in natural conversations, the direction part often included questions used as orientation checkers and comments, while few dialogues in the textbooks included these components. On the other hand, although closing pairs, “thank you” and “you’re welcome”, almost always appeared in the textbooks, more than half (56%) of the direction-givers did not responded to the direction seekers’ “thank you” in the experiment.

As for the structures, Scotton and Bernstein found some differences between the ones in natural dialogues and those in the textbooks again. In the textbooks, directions were given almost always in one structure, bald imperatives, such as “Turn right at the first corner”, and “Go straight”. However, the students usually used more than one structure to instruct, and bald imperatives consisted only 41% of the instruction.

They concluded that the patterns in the natural conversations show that the learners need to have the ability to distinguish the necessary and unnecessary information, such as comments and fillers, as well as to anticipate and react to complicated structures. The learners also have to expect that they will interact with the direction givers, not just listen to the instruction. Scotton and Bernstein indicated that the textbooks lacked some very important information, and suggested that they include more parts and more complicated structures in the conversations of direction-givings, saying “(u)nless classroom materials contain the international and peripheral parts characteristic of real direction-giving, the learner will have little chance to develop selective listening skills” (p372).

Another study to mention is the one by Bardovi-Harlig, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan, and Reynolds(1991), in which they inspected closings in major ESL textbooks. In order to investigate if the textbooks accurately present natural closing sections, they employed some data from the study by Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1989), where they showed even highly advanced learners of English had difficulty in recognizing, initiating, and responding to closing moves by NSs during academic advising sessions.

Bardovi-Harlig et al. (1991) defined a felicitous closing as “a closing composed of the three parts; the terminal exchange, the preclosing, and the shut-down.” The terminal exchange is a pair used to terminate conversation, and it is the bare minimum for a closing:

Terminal exchange	A: Good bye.
	B: Bye.

The preclosing is a pair often used to verify that the speakers finished talking:

Preclosing	A: OK.
	B: All right.

Terminal exchange      A: See you.  
   B: See you later.

Before the preclosing, speakers may shut down the topic:

Shutting down the topic    A: OK. Got it.

Preclosing                      B: Good. OK.  
   A: OK. See you then.

Terminal Exchange         B: See you.  
   A: Bye.

Bardovi-Harlig et al. (1991) stated that “closings which are overly brief or overly extended may make learners appear rude, by seeming either abrupt or hard to ‘get rid of’” (p6), and pointed out that the ability to recognize these elements is important for learners because shutting-down and preclosing are the last chances for them to continue the conversation successfully.

They analyzed 20 ESL textbooks, checking if they have “complete closings” or not. They found that only 12 textbooks included at least one complete closing. Only one textbook had them on consistent basis. They reported that the dialogues often ended before reaching the closing section and suggested the reason was that the purposes of the dialogues: the dialogues were made to introduce new grammatical structures, not to show natural and complete dialogues. They argued this tendency resulted in the insufficient amount of the model dialogues on closing sections.

### 2.3 Studies on closing

Schegloff and Sacks (1973) studied closings in conversations using conversation analysis as their method. They argued that a conversation “does not simply end, but is brought to a close”, and that a closing is the way “how to organize the simultaneous arrival of the conversationalists at a point where one speaker’s completion will not occasion another speaker’s talk, and that will not be heard as some speaker’s silence” (p289). Just stopping to talk doesn’t bring about a closing; it may be interpreted as a pause during the conversation or something born because of the conversation, such as anger or sullenness. The interlocutors need to notice the move and cooperate to finish the talk. Schegloff and Sacks introduced the concept of a “closing section” and explained the complicated structure of a closing. They divided the section into “preclosing” and “closing”, with some moves in-between, such as arrangements.

Clerk and French (1981) further developed the study by Schegloff & Sacks and divided a closing section into three; topic termination, leave-taking, and contact termination. They listed the five roles of the leave-taking phase as follows; 1: summarize the content of the contact they have just had, 2: justify ending their contact in this time, 3: express pleasure about each other, 4: indicate

continuity in their relationship by planning, specifically or vaguely, for future contact, and 5: wish each other well (p4). The concept of leave-taking is now widely accepted by the scholars studying closing and utilized in the studies including cross-cultural closings (Okamoto, 1990, Onodera, 1982).

## 2.4 Studies on closings in Japanese

There have been several studies on closings performed by NSs of Japanese, and some cultural differences have been reported. Okamoto (1990) divided the organization structure of Japanese closings into two components: pre-closing and leave-taking. She then compared the contents of leave-taking phases performed by Japanese speakers and the contents by Americans. She pointed out four major differences in Japanese closings (p148-149):

1. They use more “punch lines” or jokes.
2. They gave messages, such as “please say hello to your family member”. It was not seen in the data by the Americans.
3. They do not express joy, such as “It was nice talking to you”, which is often found in American data.
4. The word “sayonara” is not used in Japanese data, while English speakers often use “good-bye”.

Although there are some problems in her data, such as no quantitative details shown in the study, her study indicated that there are some cultural differences in the closing section.

Onodera (1992) also compared closing sections in Japanese performed by Japanese speakers and in English by Americans. She pointed out that “apologies” are often used all through the closing section by Japanese, while no apologies appeared in the English data. In addition, “expressions of happiness” or “wishing for each other” were common strategies used by the Americans although those strategies were seldom used by the Japanese speakers.

Takami (2002) analyzed telephone conversations between Japanese intimates, and further investigated the differences. She divided a closing section into three components: leave-taking, preclosing, and terminal exchange. She found that leave-takings often take a long time (average 3.6 moves) because they usually contained a few different moves and repetitions. Major contents of the phase were “wishing each other’s health”, “promise of future contact”, “message”, and “gratitude or apology”. She argues that the speakers “confirm that they are both working to finish the conversation and to reassure their continuing relationships” (p81) in the phase and explained that is the reason for the length. Using Brown and Levinson’s concept of negative face and positive face (1987), she suggested that Japanese speakers cooperate with each other to finish the conversation and not to threaten each other’s faces. The leave-taking, as well as the preclosing and the terminal

exchange, plays an important role during the process as a norm of interaction, she claimed. All of these studies confirm that Japanese closings have some different characteristics from the ones by Americans.

### 3. Method

The present study investigated all the closing sections in the dialogues used in “Oral Communication I” textbooks. Oral Communication I is one of the three courses in Oral Communication subject in high school English curriculum. One of the main goals for the course is to provide the students with English skills to “respond appropriately according to the situation or purpose”, according to its “*naiyo*” or “contents” described by MEXT. Oral Communication is the only subject which is specifically allotted to speaking aspect of English language curriculum.

First, I picked up the dialogues which include closing sections; only complete dialogues were picked up for the purpose of this research, that is, incomplete dialogues with blanks, which often appear for the listening tasks, or closing expressions without any other dialogues, often found in sections like “useful expressions”, were not included.

There are two parts in this study. The first part is the amount: a quantitative analysis of the closings in the textbooks. The second part is the analysis of the contents and expressions. In the first part, the amount of the closings was investigated;

- (1) the total number of dialogues with (a) closing section (s)
  - a. in all the textbooks
  - b. in each textbook
- (2) the total number of “complete closings”, other types of closings and partial closings
  - a. in all the textbooks
  - b. in each textbook

A “closing” here means the section with expressions which can be considered as terminal exchanges, such as “good bye” or “see you”, as it is the minimum phrase consisting a closing. There were many lines which included possible pre-closings or shutting down the topic phases. In many cases, however, dialogues just ended before terminal exchanges, and it was impossible to know if the conversation actually ends or not. Following the study by Bardovi-Harlig et al. (1991), these lines were not counted since what is investigated here is “closing” sections, and we cannot know if the dialogue finishes or not without at least a terminal exchange. A “complete closings” means a closing section consisted of the three components; shutting-down the topic, pre-closings, and terminal exchanges. Closings with only one or two components were included in other types of

closings.

The second part is the contents. In order to see what kind of contents constituted the closing sections, I categorized each closing section's components into groups according to the contents categories adopted from the study by Okamoto (1990). As her study indicated the characteristics of Japanese closing sections, it also enables us to compare the difference of contents between Japanese and English closing sections.

## 4. Data and analysis

### 4.1 Amount

As in Table 1, only eight textbooks out of 18 presented "closings" at least once. The total number of dialogues with closing was 16. Of the eight textbooks, three presented only one dialogue, three presented two dialogues, one presented three and one presented four dialogues. As Bardovi-Harlig et al. (1991) pointed out, many of the dialogues finish before the terminal exchanges because the purpose of the dialogues is to introduce new topics or expressions. There were many other possible pre-closings and shutting down of the topics without terminal closings, but they were not included. The result was worse than expected, since as many as ten textbooks did not have any "closings".

The total number of "complete closing", closings with "shutting-down the topic", "pre-closing" and "terminal exchange", in all the textbooks was 11. The number of the "complete closing" in each textbook was also minimal as expected. Only five textbooks had closings with the three components. Two textbooks presented closings of only "terminal exchanges" type. Three had pairs of "pre-closings" and "terminal exchanges". As the previous studies on closings showed that all of these three components usually consist a natural closing, even though the names for the components may vary depending on the scholars, language learners should be benefited from this complete model the most. However, the number of closings consist of the three components were very small.

There were eight dialogues with "partial closings" with no complete pair, such as the one with only one terminal speech with no response or one preclosing with one terminal speech. In many cases, the lack of the other pair occurs when a dialogue finishes as soon as the closing starts, as seen in the following excerpt.

Megumi: What kind of music do you play?

Bob: Rhythm and blues, Beatles songs, and Japanese pop songs.

Megumi: Great! Can I come and see you next time?

Bob: Sure. Next Saturday at two in the AV room.



Table 1. The amount of Closing Sections

	Closing Total	terminal	pre-closing + terminal	Shutting +pre-closing + terminal	Partial
Birdland	0				
Daily	0				1
Departure	0				
Empathy	0				
Expressways (adv)	0				
Expressways	0				
Hello, there!	0				2
Interact	2			2	
Mainstream	2		2		
On Air	2		1	1	
Open Door	1	1			2
Planet Blue	1			1	
Sailing	0				
Screenplay	0				
Select	1	1			1
Step	4			4	1
True Colors	0				
Voice	3			3	1
	<b>16</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>

Megumi: Thanks. See you then.

(end of conversation)

(excerpt from “Hello, there!”)

It is likely that the last sentence “See you then” is followed by a reply by Bob in natural conversation, but the dialogue do not include the speech.

These results show that generally speaking, closings are not well-presented in the textbooks in terms of the amount. Although there were textbooks with complete closings, there were more textbooks with no closing section at all. It seems that the many of the writers do not particularly pay attention to how to present closing sections. With no models to complete closings, it is obviously very difficult for learners to learn how to do one. We can also see that there are differences between the textbooks, although they are all approved by the Ministry.

## 4.2 Contents

As mentioned above, Bardovi-Harlig et al. (1991) demonstrated that the closings presented in ESL textbooks often lacked “complete closings”, but they didn’t amplify a “complete closing” in the study; they just described it as “what we consider complete closings”. In order to show the contents of closing sections in the textbooks, I adopted and modified the categories of contents suggested by Okamoto (1990). I also added one category to them for the purpose of this study, and I will explain about it later in this section.

Although Okamoto divided the closings into two phases, preclosing and leave-taking, and listed possible contents for each phase, the contents can be used for the other phase, too, as pointed by Takami (2002). In this study, therefore, sentences in both pre-closing and leave-taking phases were categorized according to their contents. The 12 contents by Okamoto (1990) are; 1: using summary expression, 2: summarizing the content of the conversation, 3: expressing result of the conversation, 4: Confirming the actions brought about from the conversation, 5: talking about the topics they previously talked about, 6: using the punch line, 7: talking about the external circumstances (speaker’s and the other party’s interest), 8: promising future contacts, 9: expressing gratitude / apology, 10: wishing health and good luck, 11: replaying message, and 12: expressing “goodbye”.

As mentioned earlier, Clerk and French (1981) listed the five roles of the leave-taking phase. Most of them overlap the categories above by Okamoto; “summarize the content of the contact they have just had”, “indicate continuity in their relationship by planning, specifically or vaguely, for future contact”, and “wish each other well” are almost the same, and “justify ending their contact in this time” can be interpreted as Okamoto’s “talking about the external circumstances”. However, Okamoto did not find any components indicating “express pleasure about each other” in her study of Japanese closing sections, and she did not list it as one of the categories. Therefore, I added a category, “express pleasure about each other” as the last category, number 13.

Table 2 is the list of groups of contents and sentences/expressions in the textbooks categorized into the groups. The categorization was done by the sentence. Nine of the 13 contents were found. Except for “expressing good-bye”, which is used for terminal exchanges, and therefore not counted here, the most used were “summary expressions (seven times)”, followed by “promising future contacts (six times)”, “talking about external circumstances”, and “expressing gratitude / apologies” (five times each). The appearance of the “apology” is interesting, since it is considered one of the characteristics of Japanese closing as previous study indicated (Onodera, 1992). It could be a negative transfer from the Japanese norm. “External circumstances” were used by the far most often when going into the closing section. This may be explained by the fact that the dialogues are

Table 2. List of contents and sentences/expressions used for them found in the textbooks

contents			expressions in the textbooks
1	using summary expression	7	OK (3) / Good / Right / All right / Got it
2	summarizing the content of the conversation	0	
3	Expressing result of the conversation	0	
4	Confirming the actions brought about from the conversation	1	I'll do that.
5	Talking about the topics they previously talked about	0	
6	Using the punch line	0	
7	Talking about the external circumstances	5	I can't ask you to stay too long / I have to run / It's almost six. I'm afraid I must be going / I must go now / Oh, the bell's ringing
8	Promising future contacts	6	See you then(2) / See you at lunch time / See you then at one / See you on Sunday / I'm looking forward to seeing you. Yeah, me, too.
9	Expressing gratitude / apology	5	Thank you (2) / Thank you for calling / Thanks for your help anyway / Thank you but I'm sorry I must go / Thanks
10	Wishing health and good luck	1	Anyway, have a good time. You, too
11	Replaying message	1	Please say hello to everyone for me.
12	Expressing goodbye	15	Bye (13) Good-bye (2)
13	Expressing pleasure about each other	2	Anyway, nice to meet you, Shota., Nice to meet you, too.

written, not spoken, and so they need to express the desire to finish the conversation very clearly. However, they could still achieve the same goal by using a more subtle strategies, such as saying “well” or “OK”. However, I didn’t find any “well” used for the pre-closing move. It would be beneficial for the learners to know how to use these small words, as they have been proven to be one of the most frequently used pre-closing phrases in natural conversations in English.

Three expressions were used for the other three categories; “confirming the actions brought about from the conversation”, “wishing health and good luck”, and “replaying message”. It should be noted that only one textbook used “wishing health and good luck” in the closing section although it is also a major content of closings in natural English closings. Another point to mention is “replaying message”. The previous studies have shown that it is not a strategy used by English NSs, but the one used by Japanese.

No dialogues in four categories were found; “summarizing the content of the conversation”, “expressing result of the conversation”, “talking about the topics they previously talked about”, and “using the punch line”. As all of these can be long and complex, and as they can be difficult for high school students, the lack is understandable to some extent. However, it should be reminded that “summarizing the content” is one of the major ways to signal a closing and the learners can be benefited from the information.

There was a pair of closing sentences which was included in the last category of the list: “Anyway, nice to meet you, Shota.” and “Nice to meet you, too.” As I mentioned earlier, the contents are frequently used by English NSs, but not by the Japanese. Unfortunately, only one textbook included “express pleasure about each other”. Considering the fact that the strategy is not usually used in Japanese conversations, and it is a very common strategy for the NSs, more textbooks should include it.

## 5. Conclusion

The amount of presentation, as well as the contents, seems to have much room for improvement. The amount was extremely small, both in total and in each textbook. There was also some difference in the amount among the textbooks. The contents also had some problems with possible transfer from Japanese norms and they could be sources of teaching-induced pragmatic failure. Comparing the contents of the closings in the textbooks and the ones described in the past studies, I found two noticeable characteristics. First, the variations used in the textbooks were different from the ones in the natural conversation data. There was only one pair of “expressing pleasure about each other,” which is one of the most frequently employed strategies used in the closings by Americans. There was no “well” used as a signal to move into a closing in the textbooks, which is also an important expression in natural conversation. Second, there seem to be some possible transfers from the Japanese norms. A sentence of “giving messages” strategy was found, the strategy often found in Japanese conversations, but not in the closings by NSs of English in previous studies.

A closing happens in every natural conversation. However, it seems difficult for learners to get enough information or instruction to successfully complete the action. Textbook writers and instructors should pay more attention to pragmatic aspects of a language to provide the indispensable input.

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使用した検定教科書

*Birdland Oral Communication I.* 京都：文英堂

*DAILY Oral Communication I.* 奈良：池田

*Departure Oral communication I.* 東京：大修館

*Empathy Oral Communication I.* 東京：教育出版

*Hello there! Oral Communication I.* 東京：東京書籍

*Interact Oral communication I.* 東京：桐原書店

*MAINSTREAM Oral Communication I.* 大阪：増進堂

*On Air Communication I.* 東京：開拓社

*Open Door to Oral Communication I.* 京都：文英堂

*Oral communication Expressways I. Advanced Edition.* 東京：開隆堂

*Oral communication Expressways I. Standard Edition.* 東京：開隆堂

*Planet Blue Oral Communication I.* 東京：旺文社

*Sailing Oral Communication I.* 大阪：啓林館

*SCREENPLAY Oral Communication I.* 愛知：スクリーンプレイ

*Select Oral communication I.* 東京：三省堂

*Step Oral Communication I.* 東京：旺文社

*True Colors Oral Communication I.* 東京：数研

*Voice Oral communication I.* 広島：第一学習社