

## Differences between ELT textbooks and English language corpora: A quick look into the Chilean context.

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### Abstract

This paper aims to compare the differences between formulas<sup>1</sup> taken from dialogues of two international EFL textbooks used in the Chilean context with the frequency of occurrence provided by the English language corpora. The statistical analysis of formulas used to make offers such as *would you like some...? And do you want some...?* and formulas used to make requests such as *Would you mind if...? And would it be O.K if...?* revealed some important discrepancies between these formulas presented in teacher-made textbooks and their frequency of occurrence in the corpora. This latter shows the lack of authenticity of such teaching materials.

**Keywords:** textbooks, authenticity, formulas, frequency, language corpora, Chilean context

### Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo comparar las fórmulas de cortesía extraídas de dos textos internacionales utilizados en Chile para la enseñanza del inglés con sus respectivas frecuencias proporcionadas por corpus lingüísticos del inglés. Para esto, se realizó un análisis de las fórmulas de ofrecimiento: *Would you like some...?* y *Do you want some...?* y las fórmulas de petición: *Would you mind if...?* y *Would it be O.K if...?*. Los corpus lingüísticos indicaron diferencias significativas entre las fórmulas analizadas y la frecuencia de ocurrencia de éstas, demostrando así la poca autenticidad del idioma inglés en los textos de estudios.

**Palabras claves:** texto de estudio, autenticidad, fórmulas de cortesía, frecuencia, lingüística de corpus, contexto chileno.

### 1 Introduction

It is well known that English is considered the language of international communication. It is the language used between native speakers of a different mother tongue other than English, and between native speakers of English and non-native speakers (Mckay, 2002). This widespread notion has emphasised the interest of many non-native language users who had learnt, are learning and will learn English as a foreign language. According to Crystal (2003) this interest has generated a growing number of users which is now difficult to determine. In addition, he also states that English is regard as the language for economic, cultural and technological power. Therefore, the importance of English in certain areas of the world such as East Asia, Eastern Europe and South America is due to the fact that English monolingual companies are being expanded to these areas where English has had low presence.

In Chile, changes in the educational system have been made in order to satisfy the labour market demands. In 1998, the Ministry of Education presented a curriculum reform which

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<sup>1</sup> Schmitt (2000) defines formulas as the string of words that are commonly used to achieve some purpose, e.g., requests: *Would you please...?*

established English as a required subject in primary and secondary public schools replacing French and German as optional foreign languages. Then, the Chilean curriculum has put emphasis on receptive skills (listening and reading) as opposed to productive skills (speaking and writing) so that learners are able to use English in order to process technical written texts, academic lectures and presentations (McKay, 2003).

Moreover, the Ministry of Education provides public schools with local developed textbooks. These textbooks include adapted language, local cultural content and geographical information about Chile so that English can be learnt and used as international language (McKay, 2003). But, the situation in private schools, universities, language schools and international language institutes is different. They opt for international textbooks because language should be less adapted and language learners may be exposed to a more natural and authentic language. However, it has been argued that language authenticity is not always found in textbooks (Carter, 1998; Tomlinson, 2008), but it is found in language corpora (Gries, 2009).

A language corpus allows the analysis and study of language patterns (Gries, 2009) such as the formulas examined in this paper. They were taken from two international EFL textbooks used in the Chilean context: *New Headway Elementary* (Soars, 2006) and *New Interchange Intermediate* (Richards, 2005) and they were compared to three language corpora as the main source of authentic data: the *BYU-BNC: British National Corpus* (100 million words), the *Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)* (400+ million words) (Davies, 2004;2008) and the book based on the *CANCODE corpus Exploring Spoken English* (Carter and McCarthy, 1997).

This paper also includes a brief literature review which covers: a current research on textbooks used in the Southern Cone, the native speaker model in textbooks, the situation of the English as International Language (EIL) and the usefulness of technology and corpora in language teaching. The data and the comparative analysis of the formulas are present in the methodology. The discussion and conclusion are at the end of the paper.

## 2 The Need for Authentic Materials

Tomlinson (2008) made a comprehensive analysis of locally adapted and international coursebooks used in the Southern Cone. He looked at countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay finding the scanty use of authentic material. He also emphasises that they contain “teacher-made texts” especially written for the coursebook as well as simple vocabulary and structures.

An example of “teacher-made text” is the short dialogue taken from one of the international textbook analysed. Here, it is possible to see how unnatural repetitions and complete answers are given when this is unlikely to happen in real life conversation (Tomlinson, 2008).

Tom: What do you usually do in the morning Claire?

Claire: Well, I get up at 7:00 and I have breakfast.

Tom: Do you catch the train to work?

Claire: No, I don't. I always walk to work.

The language employed in the previous dialogue is contrived and artificial, and therefore, unnatural. This may be due to the fact that material writers design dialogues to reinforce or present grammar points, new vocabulary or functional language (Gilmore, 2004). Moreover, dialogues in some coursebooks are based on written examples and on a prescriptive approach to 'correct' English (McCarthy, 1995). This latter, however, could make a foreign speaker with 'perfect' English be considered inappropriate for native English speakers (Brown, G. & G. Yule., 1983).

Another aspect of international EFL textbooks is the promotion of the native English speaker as a role model. This is due to the fact that most of the textbooks focus either on American or British English and textbook writers belong to an English speaking country (Alptekin, 1993; O'Keeffe, 2007). But, copying the native speaker model means to embrace the

native speaker's culture as well (Carter, 1998) which may help learners participate successfully in the target culture (Alptekin, 2002).

However, the idea of a native speaker as a model of teaching may be inappropriate. McKay (2002) points out that it is difficult to determine the native speaker as a model of competence because of the wide varieties of English. She also argues that English should be taught as an international language because of the growing number of non-native users who have been influenced by the cultural hegemony of English, and, as a result, there is a globalised world and English as its primary means of communication (Sweeny, 2006).

English language learners access to this global communication using the existing technology. At the present time, more and more learners own portable devices such as mobile phones or smartphones (among others) with access to Internet. The WWW has enabled them to have closer contact with naturally-occurring language in real time using the video sharing web site YouTube, or other social networks such as Facebook, Twitter or Whatsapp. This type of exposure to real and natural English used by native and non-native speaker, may give them the opportunity to acquire language and to develop strategies for understanding language in different social context (Widdowson, 1998).

Nonetheless, not only these sources describe authentic language, but also a corpus does. Sinclair (1991) argues that corpus based research has improved the description of the language which provides a basis for an improved pedagogy. An example of this is The International Corpus of Learner English, ICLE (Granger, et.al., 2009) which is an error-coded corpus which contains over two million words used by learners of English from different mother tongues and backgrounds. This provides valuable research instances regarding typical error patterns and consequently, teaching material can be better designed (O'Keeffe, 2007).

Corpora have also improved language teaching pedagogy and this is reflected in some language materials such as dictionaries and textbooks recently developed. However, there are some other textbooks which still focus on features of the language because of their degree of teachability (Biber, et.al., 1994). McCarthy and Carter (1995) observed that there are eleven frequent instances of reported speech with say and tell with past continuous in spoken discourse that are not included in textbooks. This leads to think about the statement elicited by McEney and Wilson in 2001 that there are considerable differences between what textbooks are teaching and how native speakers actually use language as evidenced in the corpora.

### **3 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Data**

To find out about McEney and Wilson's statement, the analysis was centred on international EFL textbooks used in the Chilean context. The textbooks analysed were the New Headway Elementary (Soars, 2006) and the New Interchange Intermediate (Richards, 2005). The book based on the CANCODE corpus by Carter and McCarthy Exploring Spoken English (1997) was taken as evidence in the corpora as well as the BYU-BNC: British National (100 million words) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) (400+ million words)

#### **3.2 Analysis**

In order to analyse what textbooks are teaching, the focus was on the frequency of occurrence of the formulas in the BYU-BNC and COCA corpus. Frequency is an important aspect to analyse because it indicates which words or language patterns appear "in circulation" in everyday use among most of the native speakers (O'Keeffe, 2007). Another aspect of analysis is the spoken features which may be shown in dialogues from textbooks. The formula to make an offer would you like some...? is taught at elementary level in situations related to food. The example is taken from the New Headway Elementary (Soars, 2006) Unit 9 Food you like, page 67. M is Daisy's mum and P is Piers.

M: Hello, Piers. Would you like some tea or coffee?  
 P: I'd like a cold drink, if that's OK.  
 M: Of course. Would you like some orange juice?  
 P: Yes, please. I'd love some.  
 M: And would you like a chocolate biscuit?  
 P: Oh, yes, please! Thank you very much.  
 M: You're welcome.

(New Headway Elementary, 2006)

In Carter and McCarthy's book (1997) there is a similar situation in Unit 7 Cooking rice, page 64. The extract presents <S2> a mother and <S3> her son.

14 <S2> D'you want a biscuit?  
 15 <S3> Erm  
 16 <S2> Biscuit?  
 17 <S3> Er yeah

(Exploring Spoken English, 1997)

In both extracts there is a visible difference in the use of formulas between dialogues. The BYU-BNC computes for would you like some...? a frequency of 26 tokens per 2.61 million, and COCA 22 tokens per 0.27 million words. Instead, BYU-BNC shows for do you want some...? 149 tokens per 14.95 million and COCA 17 tokens per 0.21 million words respectively.

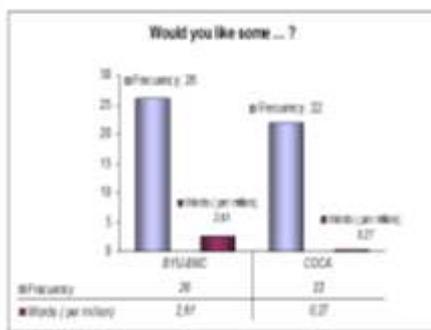


Figure 1

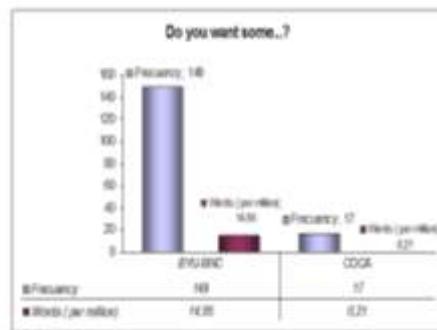


Figure 2

Would you like some...? seems to be a formal manner to make an offer and it may be included in textbooks as a useful functional language to teach and learn. The great frequency of occurrence of do you want some..? suggests that textbook designers should pay more attention to this frequency and integrate it into dialogues with more real and authentic language. The language learner, therefore, will have more chances to be exposed to real everyday language so as to see the differences between real English and dialogues in textbooks (Carter, 1998)

Another aspect to examine is the spoken features found in the dialogues. They are of great importance because they show how native speakers monitor, manage, modify and soften their messages towards the listener in a natural occurring conversation (O'Keefe, 2007). In the former dialogue, there is a lack of spoken features such as back-channels<sup>2</sup> which are present as a response in the second sample. This problem of absence is also supported by Carter (1998) who found out that other spoken features such as discourse markers, vague language, ellipsis and hedges were missing after comparing dialogues from textbooks with real data taken from the CANCODE.

<sup>2</sup> McCarthy (1998) defines them as noises (which are not full words) and short verbal responses made by the listener. Typical back-channels in English are: *mm, uhum, yeah, no, right, oh, etc.*

It is important then that these spoken features should be included in textbooks in order to make the English language learners recognise and distinguish when to engage in a conversation effectively. Otherwise, he/she may be stereotyped or misjudged by the native speaker. McCarthy (1998) points out the relevance of being aware of these spoken features by exemplifying that a Spanish speaker produces irritation and impatience in a British speaker when he acknowledges an incoming talk with what he translates to English as “Yes, yes, yes”! The next example is taken from the New Interchange Intermediate (Richards, 2005) Unit 3, page 16. The unit entitled Could you do me a favour? uses the formulas to make requests Would you mind if..? and Would it be OK if...? in the dialogue between Jana and Rod.

Rod: Hello.  
 Jana: Hi, Rod. This is Jana.  
 Rod: Oh, hi, Jana. What’s up?  
 Jana: I’m going to my best friend’s wedding this weekend. I’d love to take some pictures for his Web site. Would you mind if I borrowed your new digital camera?  
 Rod: Um, no. That’s OK, I guess. I don’t think I’ll need it for anything.  
 Jana: Thanks a million.  
 Rod: Sure. Uh, have you used a digital camera before? It’s sort of complicated.  
 Jana: Uh-huh, sure, a couple of times. Would it be OK if I picked it up on Friday night?  
 Rod: Yeah, I guess so.

(New Interchange Intermediate, 2005)

Although there is a presence of back-channels such as Yeah and I guess so, the requesting formulas followed by the verb in past simple do not occur with much frequency. Would you mind if...? presents a frequency of 4 tokens per 0.4 million in the BYU-BNC and COCA 12 tokens per 0.15 million words. Would it be OK if...? on the other hand, does not appear in the in the BYU-BNC and in COCA shows 12 tokens per 0.15 million words.

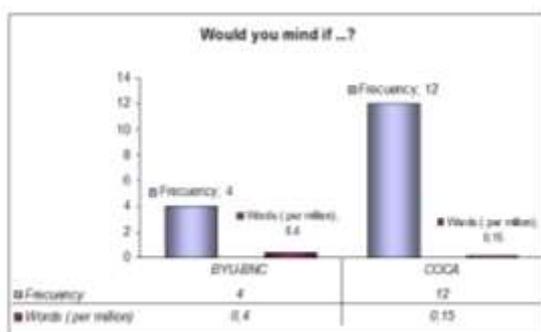


Figure 3

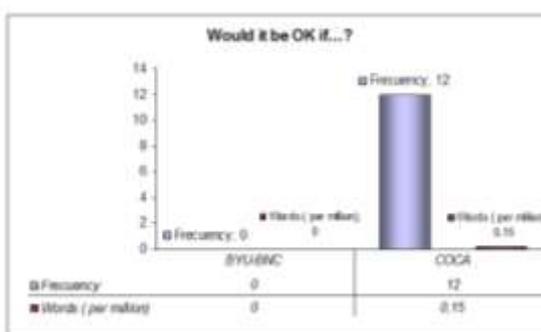


Figure 4

However, the formula to make a request would you mind...? followed by a gerund or infinitive appears with more frequency. The BYU-BNC presented a frequency of 25 tokens per 2.51 million words and COCA 85 tokens per 0.14 million words.

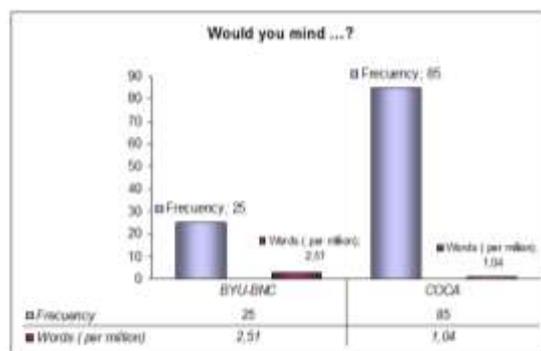


Figure 5

#### 4 Discussion and conclusion

Corpora give helpful information with regard to the authentic language employed by native speakers. The frequency of occurrence of the language patterns analysed in the corpus illustrates the differences between what the textbooks are teaching and how language is actually used by native speakers. With the absence of this authentic data provided by the corpora, the probability for a non-native to sound concocted and stilted is evident and he/ she may be wrongly perceived by the native speaker leading to a non-effective communication.

Granger (1998) suggests that "... textbooks are more useful when they are based on authentic native English". In other words, textbooks including authentic language may help learners not only develop fluency (Beaugrande, 2001) but also achieve a degree of naturalness in the use of foreign language (Fox, 1987). The Touchstone (McCarthy, et.al, 2005, 2006) series is an example of how information from corpora such as patterns of great frequency and discourse markers can be included in coursebook dialogues (O'Keeffe, 2007).

O'Keeffe (2007) also adds that for most pedagogic purposes in most contexts, it is preferable to have naturally-occurring corpus based examples. The EFL instructor, therefore, should enable the learners to notice real and natural language which can be compared with language used in textbooks. This comparison may contribute to the learner's inner motivation because he/she may experience less frustration when trying to comprehend language from sources where real and naturally occurring language can be found.

However, since English is considered the language of international communication, it may appear inappropriate that textbooks include authentic native English. Carter (1998) states that there is a massive amount of roughly 80 percent of non-native speakers who interact in English, and Cook (2008), additionally, claims that the native speaker as a model to imitate may frustrate the learners who realise that they "will never be the same as native speaker". He also argues that monolingual activities in coursebooks prevent the "richness of multilingual use".

There is no doubt that textbooks are indispensable in the process of teaching and learning a language in a foreign context. International and local developed textbooks should recognise the importance of English as International Language (EIL) and they should include not only the variety of cultures around the world (Cotazzi & Jin, 1999), but also authentic language taken from an EFL/EIL corpus as well as situations and "examples of successful L2 users on which students can model themselves" (Cook, 2008) so that the EFL/EIL language learner become culturally and linguistically competent.

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