



# College Graduate Desire Suggestion-Making Tips

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# What are Speech Acts?

- Speech acts are “the ways in which people carry out **specific social functions** in speaking such as apologizing, complaining, making requests, refusing things/ invitations, complimenting, or thanking” (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010, p. 6).

# Well-researched Areas in Pragmatics

- Speech acts are “**the most rigorously researched areas** in pragmatics” (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010, p. 6).
- “...speech acts have been well-studied, research findings about them are readily applicable to instruction” (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010, p. x).

# What is pragmatics?

- ...pragmatics links linguistic forms and the ways in which they are used **in a social context** to perform a communicative act.
- The field of pragmatics studies aspects of language systems that are **dependent on the speaker, the listener, and the context** of an utterance.

(Taguchi & Roever, 2017, p. 1)

# Important Aspects in Pragmatics

- “...according to Cohen (1996), sociocultural knowledge about **when** to perform a speech act and **which one** is **appropriate** in a **given circumstance**” (Koester, 2002, p. 168).

# Appropriateness in Language Use

- Pragmatics focuses on “...the relative **appropriateness** of the utterance **within a given context** (Why did you say it that way in this context?)...” (Purpura, 2004, p. 76).

# Appropriate Language Use (Koester, 2002)

- As McCarthy (1998, p. 19) points out, there has frequently been an overly **simplistic** tendency to equate speech acts with certain linguistic formulae, for instance to teach learners how to give advice, they may receive a list of phrases such as: You should...; Why don't you...?; If I were you, I'd...; You ought to... (p. 168).
- Such lists tend to obscure the fact that **not all these phrases may be appropriate in every situation...** (p. 168)
- ...teaching of speech acts has often focused on **such lists of phrases** in isolation from any discourse context. (p. 169)

# Speech Acts & L2 Learners

- Speech acts are “culture specific and language specific”  
(Cheng, 2012, p. 149)



- L2 learners need to be taught “which expression” is appropriate “in which particular situations”. Otherwise, they cannot learn appropriate language use.



# Teachable & Learnable

- “...there is no question that pragmatics is **teachable**” (Taguchi & Roever, 2017, p. 214)

# Preparation for the Course

- An elective course for college juniors & seniors
- Study politics & economics / sociology & psychology
- Business English + Pragmatics (speech acts)



- Collected business English textbooks
- Which speech acts do young Japanese business persons actually need in the real world?
- Do young Japanese business persons really need pragmatics when they use English at work?



# Research Questions

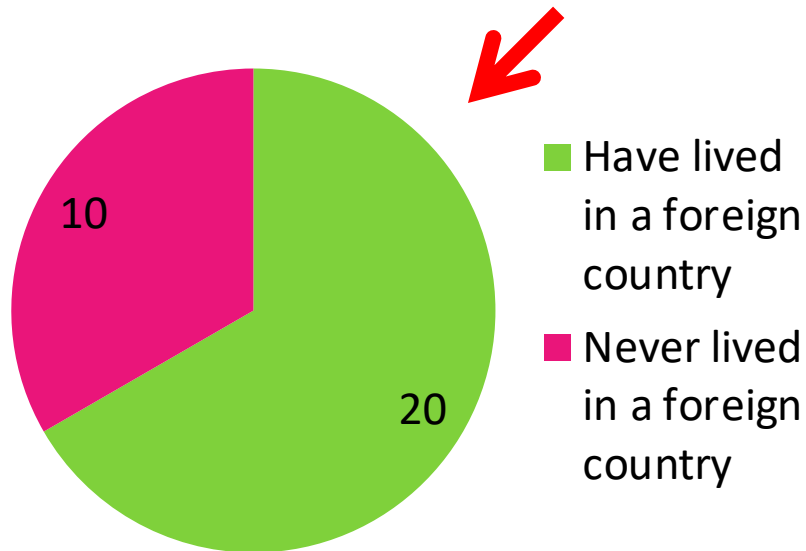
1. Should we really teach pragmatics in college English courses in Japan?
2. Which speech acts should we teach in college English courses in Japan so that our students will benefit when they enter the real business world?
3. Do business English textbooks published in Japan contain instructions of speech acts that young Japanese workers need to perform at work? If yes, how many entries do they have? Also, what percentage of textbooks contain them?
4. Do speech act entries in business English textbooks contain enough context information so that L2 learners can understand which expression(s) they should use “in which particular situations”?



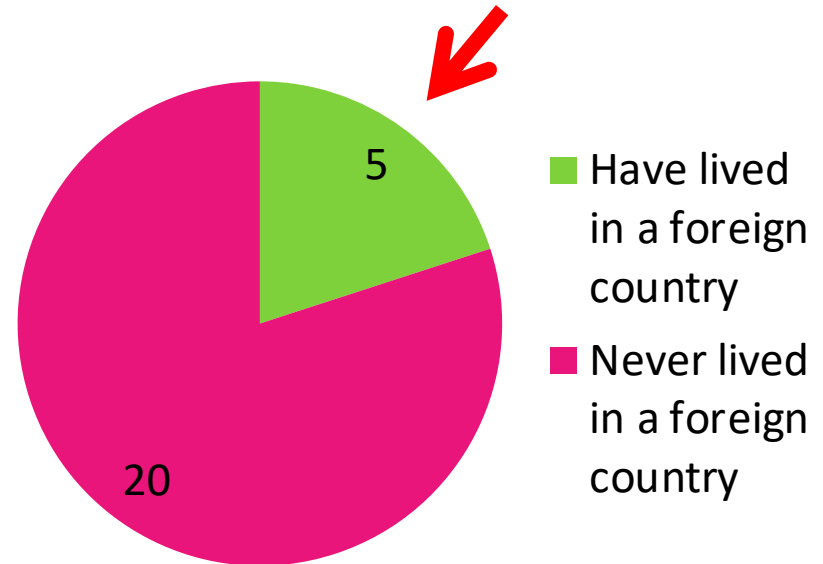
# Participants

# Experiences of Living in a Foreign Country

Female Japanese Workers (n = 30)  
(1-11 year working experiences)

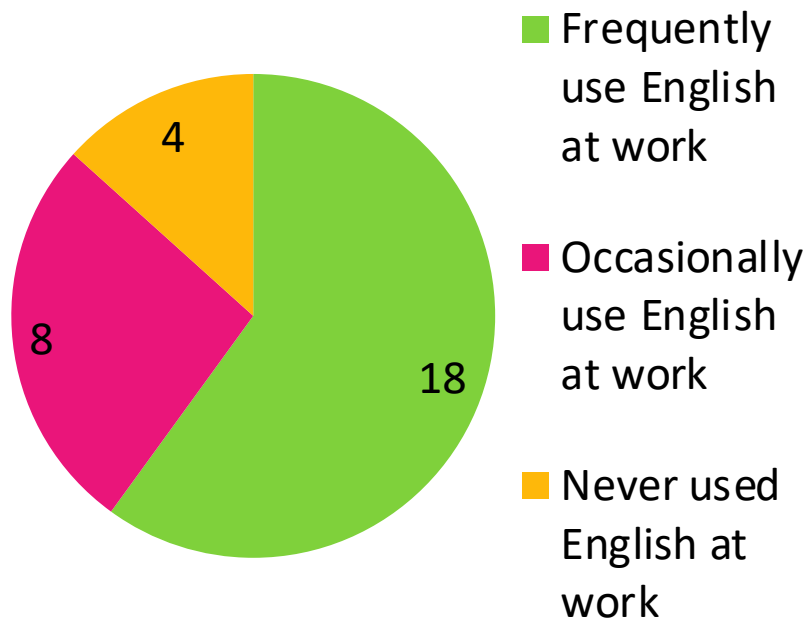


Female Students (n = 25)  
(24 college seniors + 1 graduate student)

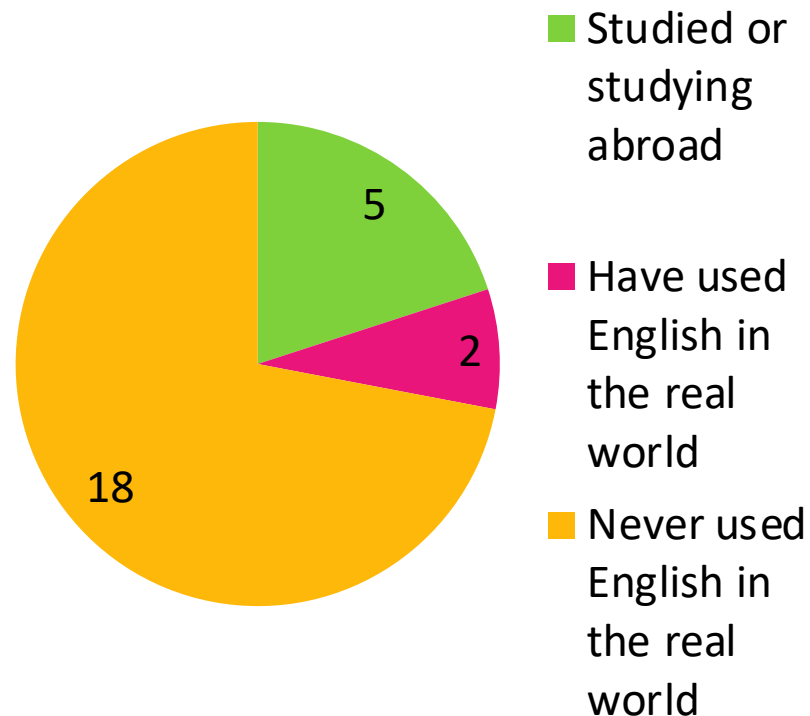


# Experiences of English Use in the Real World

**Working Young People (n = 30)**



**Students (n = 25)**





# Research Methods

# Questionnaires

Questionnaires (in Japanese) were sent:

- Through Facebook Messenger
- In January – February in 2020
- To **157** Facebook friends who the presenter taught at the high school.
- Received responses from **30** working young people and **25** students.



# Step 1: Questionnaire

- Age, experiences of living in foreign countries, the length of full-time working experiences, use of English at work

Q. 1: What should Japanese college students study in English courses so that it will be beneficial for them when they start working full-time in the real world?

Q. 2: Which of the following English functions would you recommend Japanese students study in college English courses so that it will be beneficial for them when they start working full-time in the real world? They are requests, invitations, advice, suggestions, apologies, opposition, refusals, complaints, compliments, and thanks.

## Step 2: Additional Questionnaire

Q: Many of the participants chose “suggestions” as a function which they would recommend Japanese students study in college English courses. In what exact situations do you perform “suggestions” in English at work?

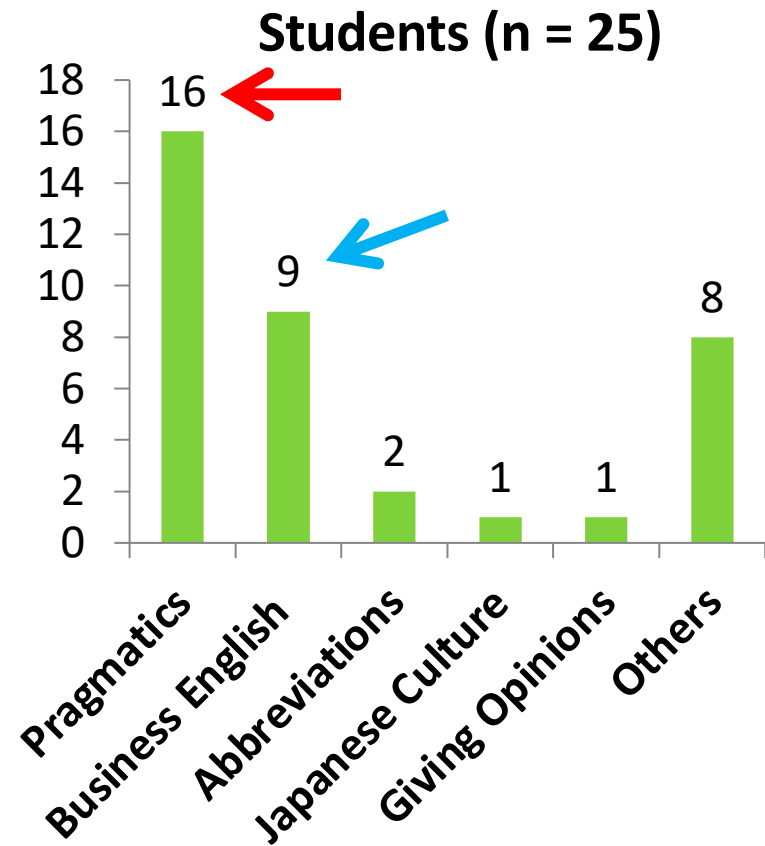
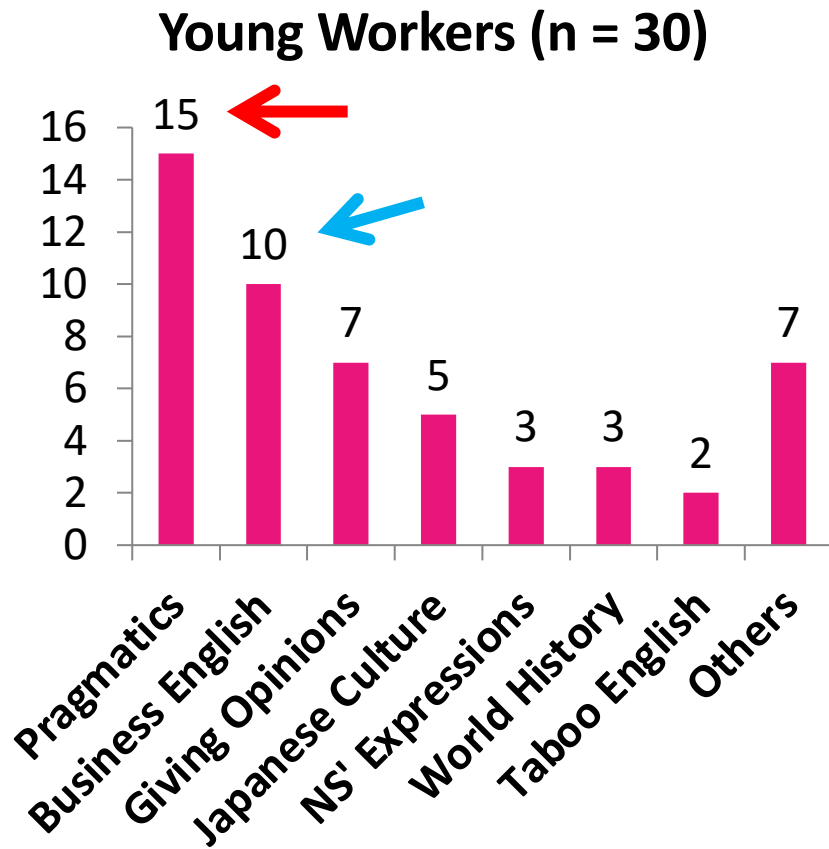
# Step 3: Analysis of Textbooks

1. Collected **22** business English textbooks.
  - **17** textbooks published by 4 major **International** publishers
  - **5** textbooks published by 3 major **Japanese** publishers
2. Analyzed 22 business English textbooks.
  - (1) Marked all speech act instructions and **counted the number** of them for each speech act (requests, invitations, advice, suggestions, apologies, opposition, refusals, complaints, compliments, and thanks.).
  - (2) **Examined each speech act** in terms of whether the instructions included enough information so that L2 learners could understand how to perform them appropriately.

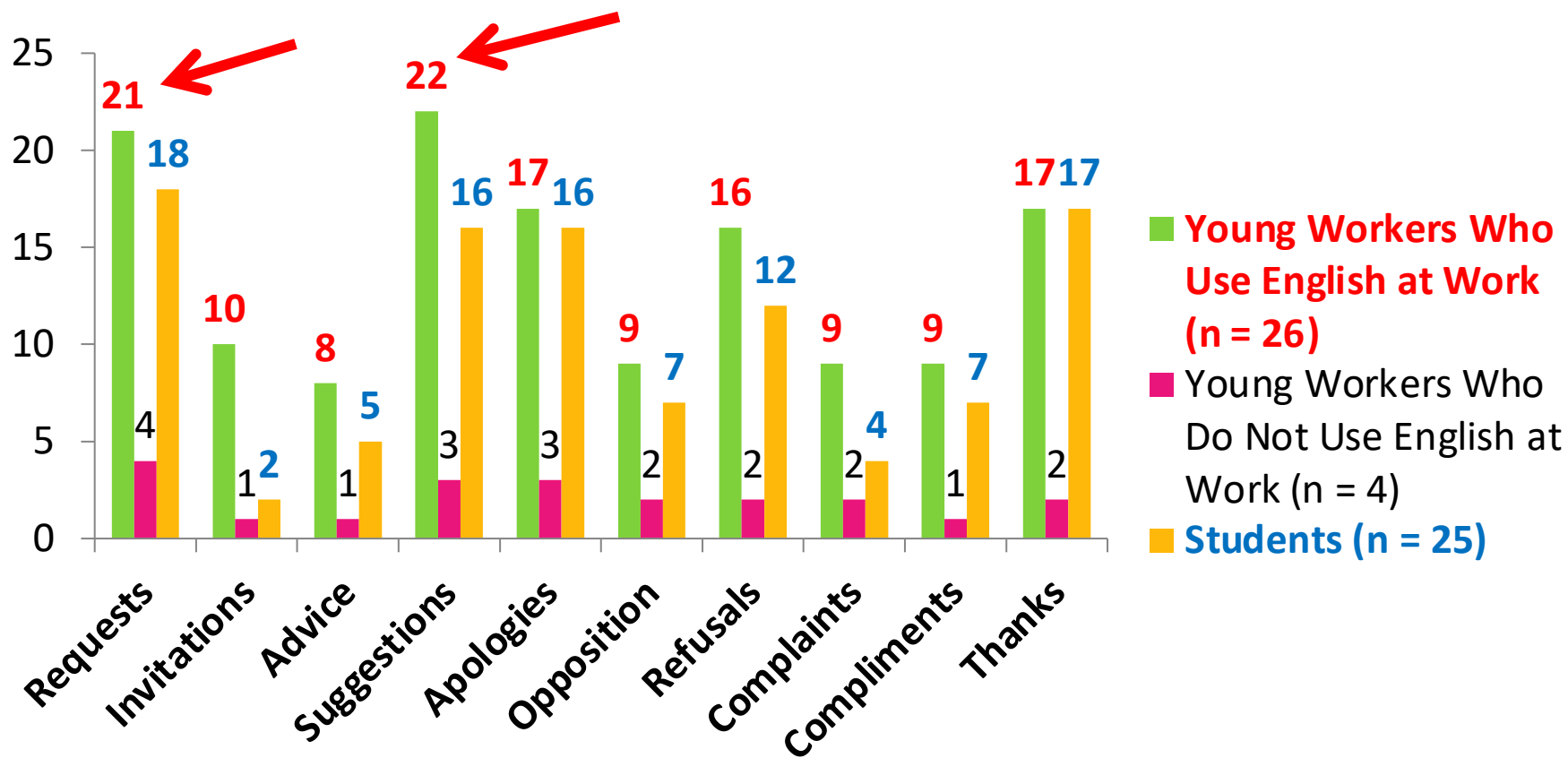
A background image of cherry blossoms in full bloom, with white and light pink flowers on dark branches. The image is slightly blurred, creating a soft, dreamy atmosphere. A light blue rectangular box is overlaid in the center, containing the text "Results & Discussion".

# Results & Discussion

RQ1 Q. 1: What should Japanese college students study in English courses so that it will be beneficial for them when they start working full-time in the real world?

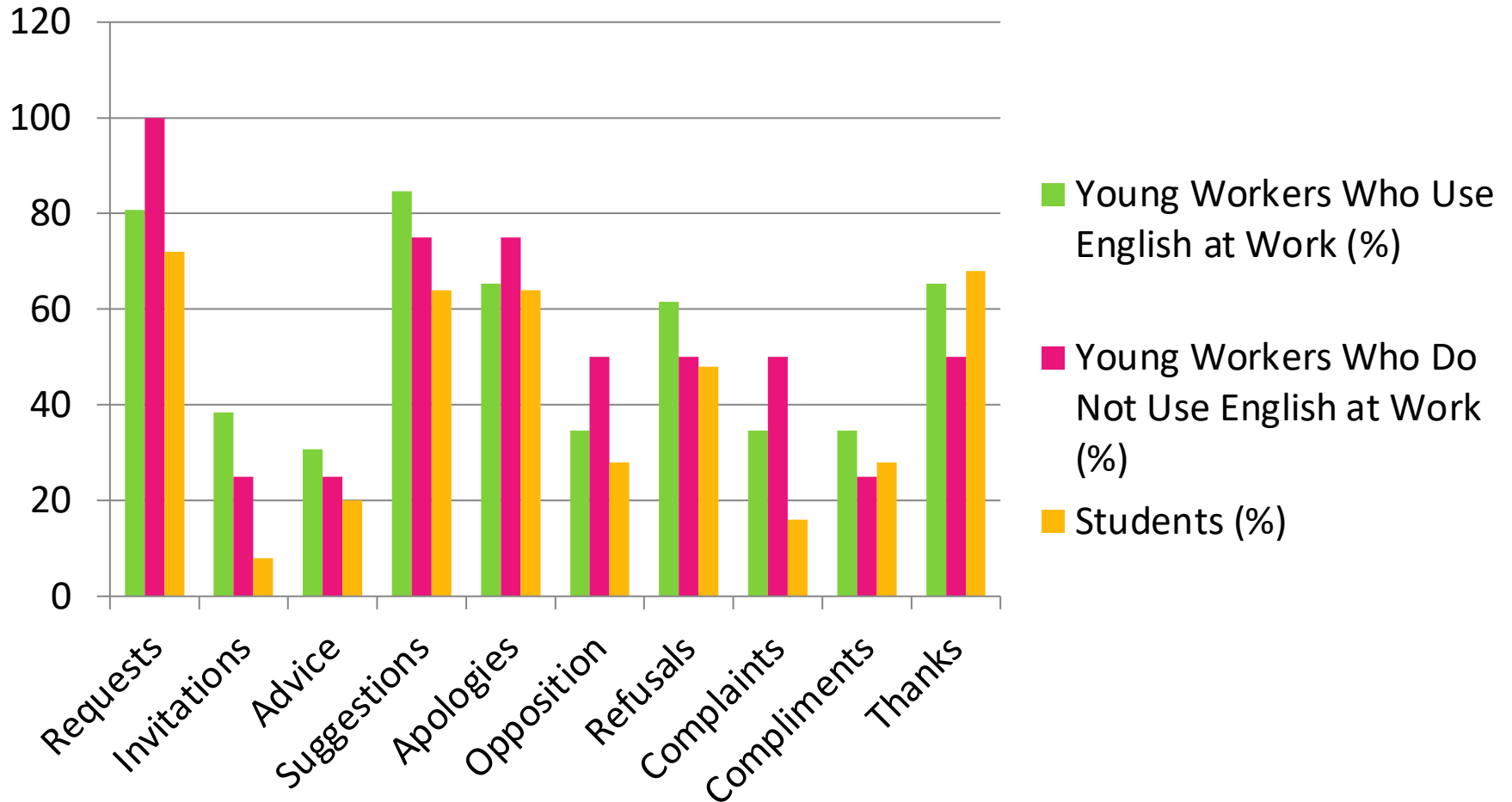


RQ2 Q. 2: Which of the following English functions would you recommend Japanese students study in college English courses so that it will be beneficial for them when they start working full-time in the real world?



## RQ.2

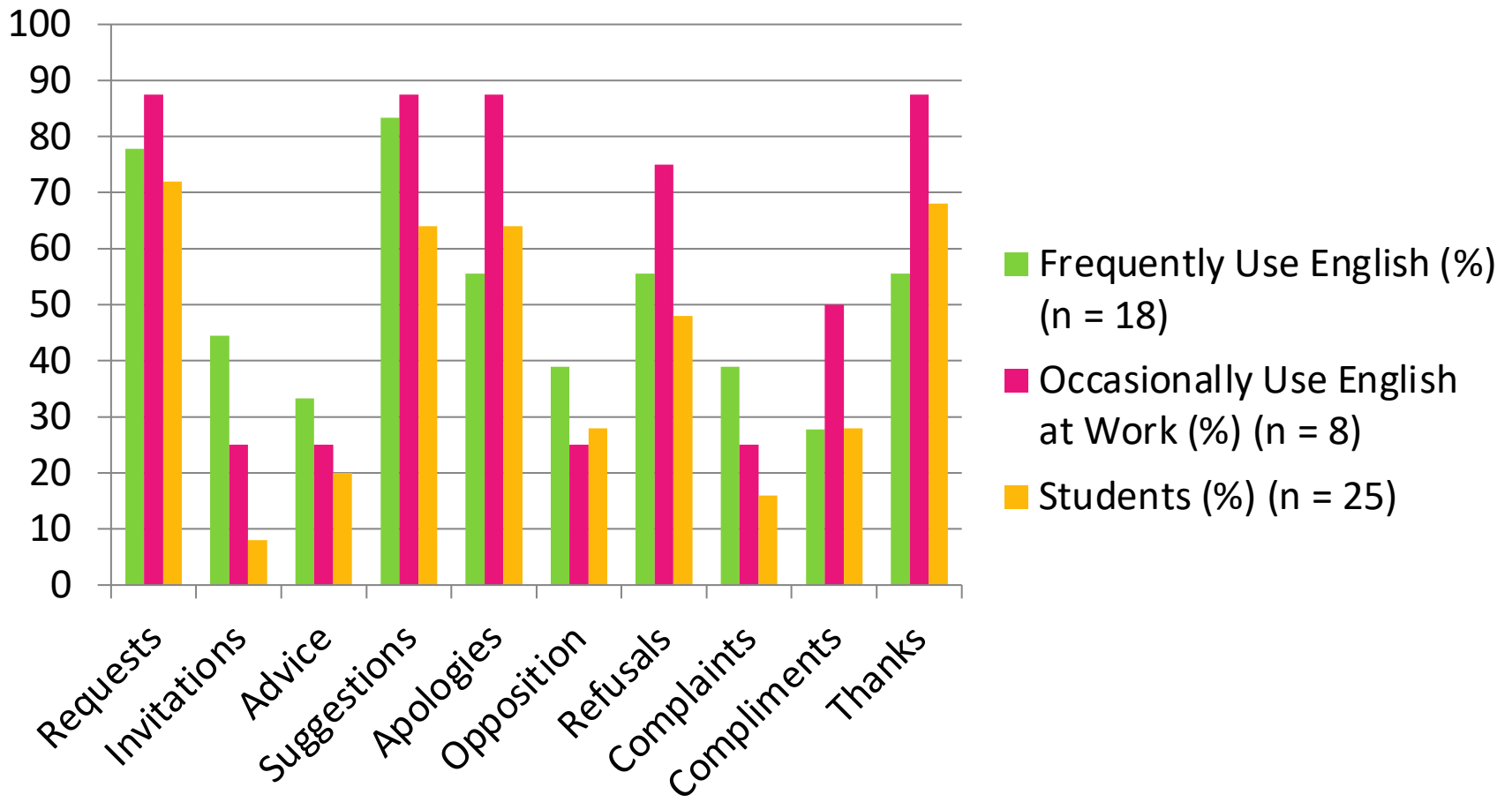
### Q. 2 Which Speech Acts Young Japanese Workers Recommend College Students to Learn at College



## RQ 2

Which Speech Acts College Students Should Study at College?

Workers Who **Frequently** vs. **Occasionally** Use English at Work (%)





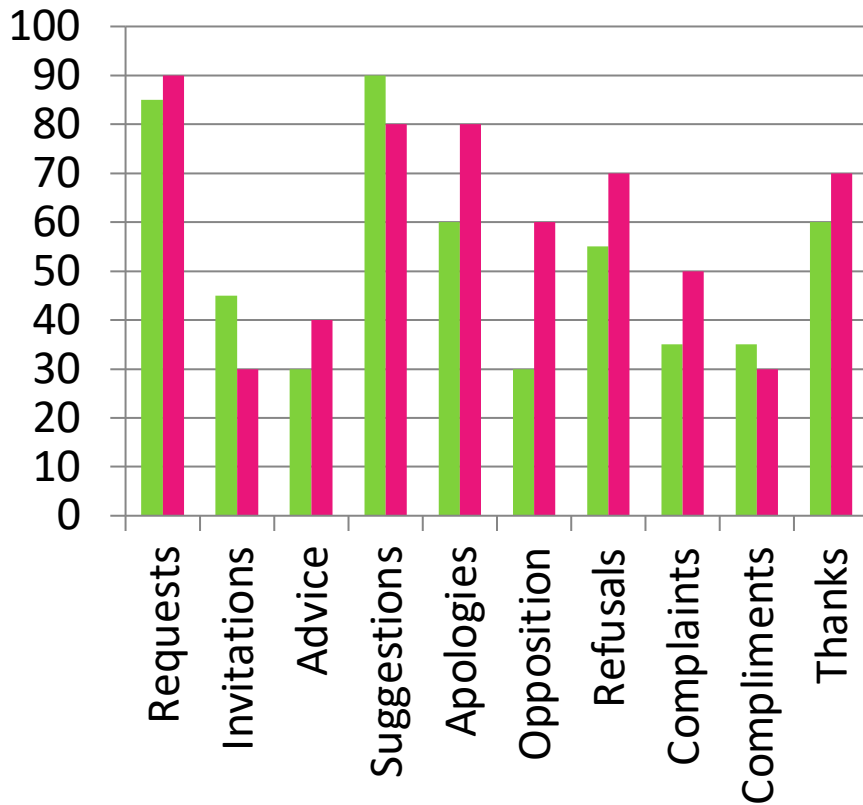
RQ2:

Which Speech Acts College Students Should Study at College?

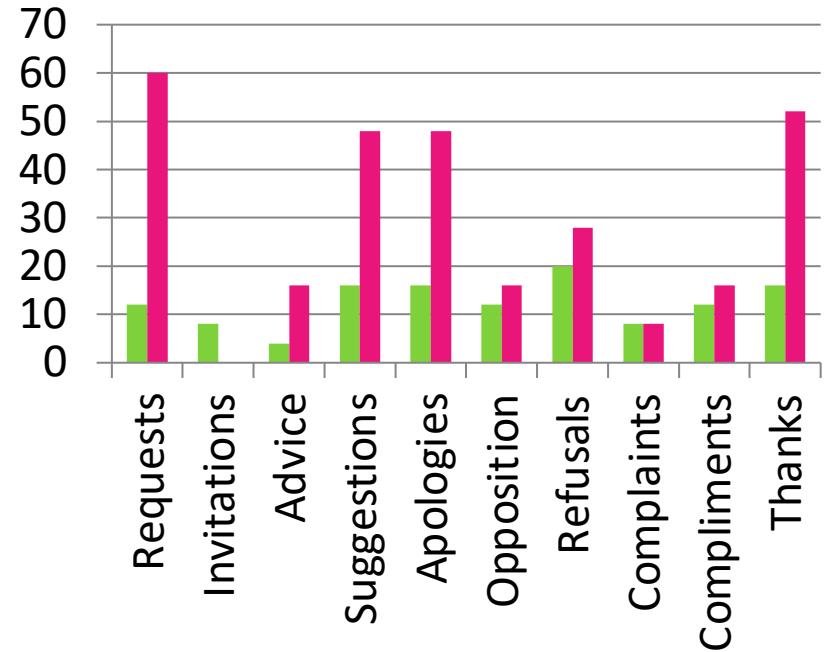
**Have Lived Abroad vs. Never Lived Abroad**

**Young Workers**

**Using English at Work (%)**

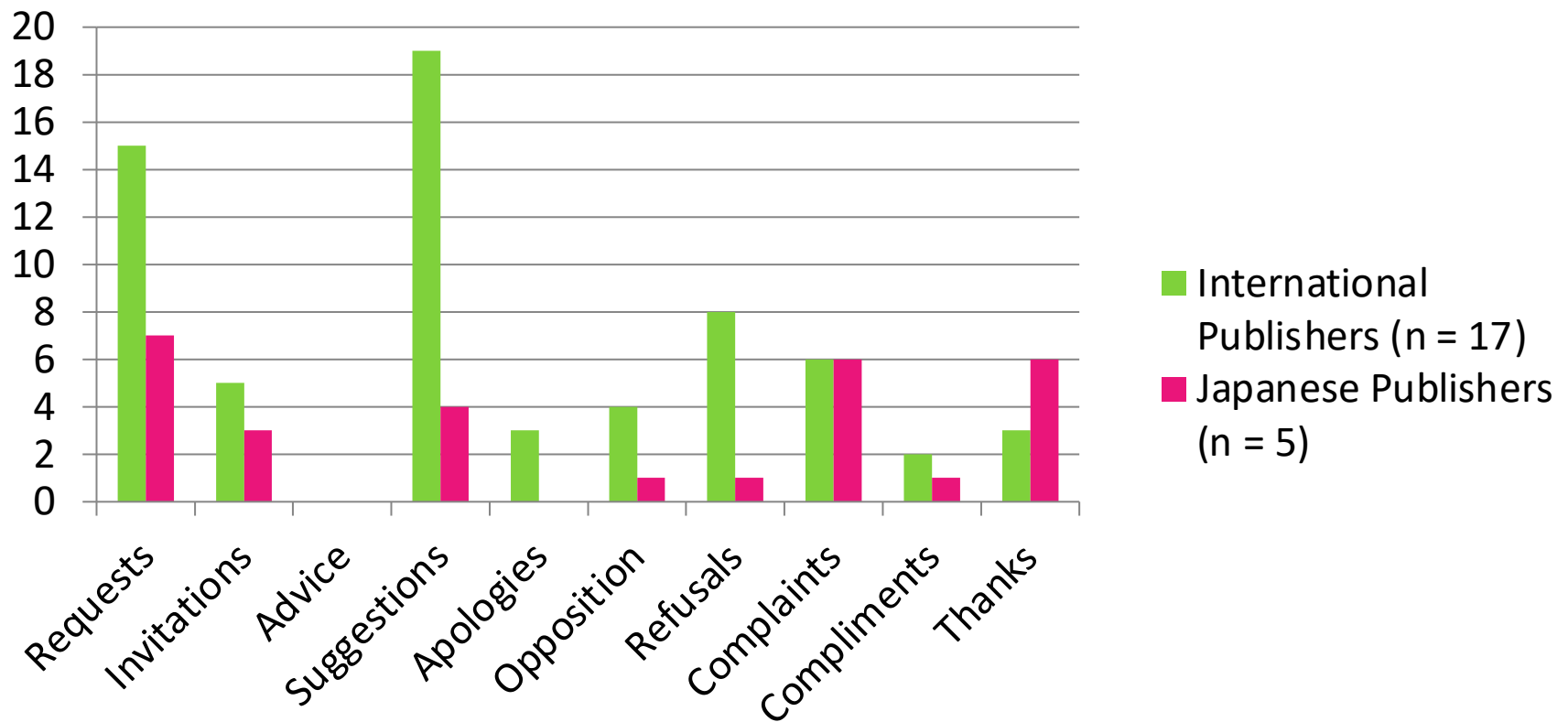


**Students (%)**



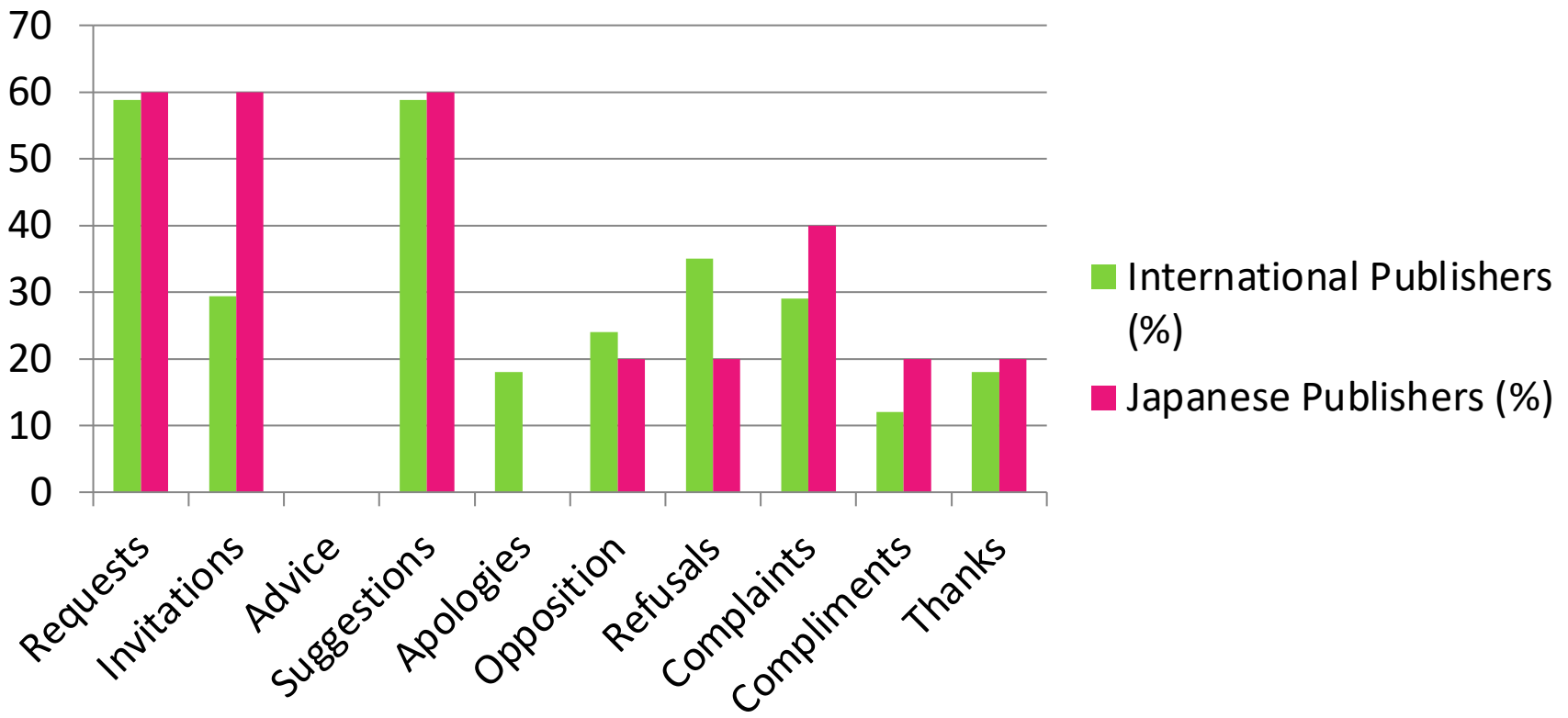
### Research Question 3

Do business English textbooks contain instructions of speech acts that young business persons need to perform at work?  
If yes, how many entries do they have?



## Research Question 3

Do business English textbooks contain instructions of speech acts that young business persons need to perform at work? What percentage of textbooks contain them?



(4) Do speech act entries in business English textbooks contain enough context information so that L2 learners can understand "which expression(s)" they should use "in which particular situations"?

### Suggestions (International Publishers)

Among the 19 exercises (and instructions) in the **international major publishers'** business English textbooks to teach "suggestions":

- Six of them are **simple travel suggestions**.
- Most exercises are **mechanical practice** of only one expression such as "How about...?" and "Can I suggest that...?".

# Suggestions (International Publishers)

- In four of them, a big list of expressions is given but there is no information about “when” students can use to “who”.
- Three of them were provided with structures of suggestions but there is no information about relationships between interlocutors and that about situations.
- Four of them were provided with information of interlocutors (e.g., boss, team members) but there is no explanation of which expressions are appropriate in what situations.

# Suggestions (Japanese Publishers)

- Among four entries to teach **suggestions** in **Japanese publishers'** business English textbooks:
- One is provided with information of **the situation** but there is **no** information about **relationships between interlocutors**. Four expressions are given but **no** information about **which expression is appropriate in what situation**.

# Suggestions (Japanese Publishers)

- Two textbooks provide some **sociocultural information** about some expressions (e.g. “You had better” and “You should” is quite strong). However, there is **no** detailed information about **which expression is appropriate in what situation**.
- One textbook focuses on the **politeness level** (formal, semi-formal, casual) of each expression. **Structure** of some speech acts are given. Information about the **interlocutor** and **situations** are also given. However, most of the conversations are **between people in the same status**.

# Requests

- Most textbooks published by both international publishers and Japanese publishers **only teach that “Could you...?” and “Could I...?” are more formal than “Can you...?” and “Can I...?”** and have students practice them.

Some textbooks **do not explain any differences among expressions** (e.g. “We use Could you..? Or Can you...? to ask someone to do something.”) and just have students practice them.

- Only one textbook published by a Japanese publisher provides information about the politeness level of each expression, relationships with interlocutors and situations.





# Conclusion & Implications

RQ1: Should we really teach pragmatics  
in college English courses in Japan?

Yes!

RQ2: Which speech acts should we teach in college English courses so that students will benefit when they enter the real business world?

- About 80% of **young Japanese workers** who **frequently used English at work** suggested that college students study speech acts, especially **suggestions** and **requests**.
- More than 87% of **young Japanese workers** who **occasionally used English at work** suggested that college students study **major speech acts** at university. They may feel anxiety about performing speech acts.
- **Students** who were about to graduate from college suggested that college students study **requests, suggestions, apologies, and thanks** but their pragmatics awareness was **not as high as** that of their seniors who had already worked in the real world.

RQ3: Do business English textbooks contain instructions of speech acts that young business persons need to perform at work?

If yes, how many entries do they have?

Also, what percentage textbooks contain them?

- “Suggestions” and “requests” that young workers who use English at work suggested students study at university were contained in about 60% of the examined 23 business English textbooks both published by international publishers and Japanese publishers.

RQ4: Do they give enough guidance to L2 learners so that they can understand which expression(s) they should use in which particular situations?

- Most textbooks just give L2 learners a list of expressions and **do not** provide them with enough instructions about **which expressions should be used to who and in which situation.**

Few exercises include enough information about relationships between interlocutors nor detailed situations.

# Conclusion

- Young Japanese workers who use English at work have realized the importance of pragmatics. They seem to have acquired some pragmatic abilities by trial and error and recommend that students study it in college English courses. Therefore, **English teachers should incorporate pragmatic instruction in their English instructions.**

# Conclusion

- However, business English textbooks which are supposed to teach practical English skills to adult L2 learners do include some instruction of speech acts but **do not include necessary information** to teach them.

To develop pragmatic abilities, L2 learners need to know **which expression** can be used for **who** and **in which situation**. Publishers should include this kind of information in tasks and exercises in their textbooks.

# Final Comment

- “We should...make our pragmatics research findings relevant to the needs of professionals (such as business people) who work and communicate across cultures, and try to help them prepare more effectively for such work” (Spencer-Oatey, 2010, p. 212)



A close-up photograph of cherry blossom branches. The branches are dark brown and covered with numerous white and light pink flowers. Some flowers are in full bloom, showing five petals and yellow centers, while others are still buds. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light blue and white, suggesting a bright sky.

**Thank You for Listening**

# In What Situations Do Young Japanese Workers Use Suggestions?

- When we have a new project, I suggest schedule, scope, and fee to my customers.

(プロジェクトの新規案件でプロジェクトの内容(スケジュール、スコープ、フィー)を顧客に提案する。)

- I make suggestions during discussions.

(ディスカッション中に意見を述べる。)

- I listen to my clients' problems and suggest solutions.

(クライアントが抱える問題を聞き、改善策を提案する。)

# In What Situations Do Young Japanese Workers Use Suggestions?

- I currently work for a music label in London and am in charge of promoting and marketing music to the Japanese market. It is important for me to suggest our ideas and what we would like to do. Especially in emails, we need to clearly communicate our ideas and what we want to do. However, we should avoid expressions which sound like we are forcing them to accept our ideas. Therefore, we need to learn polite English expressions. In emails, if we literally translate Japanese expressions, it sometimes sounds very aggressive to Westerners due to cultural differences.

(今はロンドンの音楽レーベルで日本のマーケット向けへの音楽のプロモーションやマーケティングを担当しています。仕事のメールでも常にアイデアやこちらのやりたいことを提案することが重要になります。メールでは特に明確に伝えなければなりません、メールで提案する際にはこちらのやりたいことを押し付けるような言い回しは避けなければならないので、丁寧な提案の言い回しなどを学ぶことが必要になると思います。(メールだとキツイ言い回しになってしまったり、日本のメールの言い回しだったり文化の違いから、欧米圏の人から見るとメールがとても攻撃的に見えてしまう...ということがあるので...))

# In What Situations Do Young Japanese Workers Use Suggestions?

- I am a consultant for tax practices. Therefore, I explain current situations and risks. Then, I suggest strategies to solve the problems and need to plan a project.

(私は国際税務のコンサルタントをしておりますので、現状の概要やリスク等を説明した上で、それを解決する戦略やプロジェクト化の必要性を説明し、提案します。)

- I think students learn polite expressions and levels of politeness at school but I sometimes wonder what level of polite expressions I should use to my clients based on our relationships. Therefore, if college students learn polite expressions with concrete situations, I think it will be useful for them when they start working in the real world.

(また、学校生活の中で、丁寧な表現やレベル感を教えてもらうことはあると思いますが、業務上どれくらいの関係性の相手にはどの程度の丁寧さが必要なのか迷うこともあるので、具体的なシチュエーションで教えてもらえると大学生の方々も今後の社会人生活に役立つのではと思います。)