



## AN ANALYSIS OF ASKING OPINIONS IN THE TEXTBOOK AND CORPORA

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**Abstract**

*The study examined the occurrences of asking opinions in the textbook and the ones in the British National Corpus (BNC). Because the expressions in the textbook occur in isolation, it does not give sufficient context in which the expressions occur. For instance, there are no strategies that the speakers use to make the hearers understand their questions. According to Relevance theory, the speakers tried to give relevant input to the hearers in order to obtain the goal of communication (Wilson & Sperber, 2008). Therefore, the present study analyzed expressions of asking opinions in BNC to provide what strategies the speakers use in order to make the questions relevant for the hearers. A corpus-assisted discourse study was conducted to find the strategies. The strategies were analyzed on the light of Relevance theory. It was found that some expressions were not found in BNC. The speakers applied several strategies namely introducing, asking more questions, giving options, and elaborating. They provide relevant information when asking questions. When the speakers did not get hearers' opinions, they tried to give more information or options to elicit hearers' responses.*

### INTRODUCTION

As a source of learning materials, a textbook plays a significant role in learning a foreign language. The language presented in the textbook functions as a model for the students. The students get exposed of those models. The learning activities are designed to make the students notice the models. Then, the students get input. Having such input will be useful for the students to produce language. Thus, there is a need for the learning material used in the class to be as authentic as possible in order to equip the students for real communication. The use of authentic language in the language learning will give benefits for the students (Walsh, 2010). The students might observe how the speakers use phrases and construct discourse in actual language use. They also will find how the speakers use fixed or semi-fixed expressions in delivering meaning for communicative purposes.

To provide authentic language in the classroom, a corpus study can be applied. There are some corpora available on the internet. The users can access the data in the corpora online. Some features of a corpus study is counting frequency, finding collocates, and analyzing the concordance lines. Analyzing corpus will be fruitful for designing syllabus, choosing methods and materials, developing test, doing evaluation, and deciding contents of grammar (Cheng, 2010). Doing a corpus analysis will be useful for teachers because they get access to authentic texts and the language they use represent the language used for communication (Römer, 2009). Not only giving access, they also can obtain information of the language such as the pattern and distribution. For instance, they can observe that one word tend to occur with particular word. Furthermore, they can get information whether the word tend to occur in formal speech or casual conversation.

Some studies have been conducted to compare the language in the textbook and the one in a corpus. Analyzing words and phrases with metaphoric language in the textbook has been conducted (Skorczyńska Sznajder, 2010). A third of words and phrases in the textbook were not found in the corpus. They do not use in actual language use. Moreover, a study of

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expressions that function to give agreement in the five textbooks found that only seven percent of the expressions in the textbook that occur in the corpus (Seto, 2009). The textbooks tend to present long phrases as expressions to give agreement. However, in the actual use, one-word expressions occur more often than the long ones. These studies show that the language presented in the textbooks which functions as the models for the students do not represent the actual use of language. It is intriguing to investigate whether in the case of the textbook used in Indonesia the similar results exist.

The present study deals with a textbook for learning English used in a private university in 2017. It provides language use in various settings. The language of the textbook represents two registers namely academic and work settings. The language used in academic settings such as writing a summary and doing presentation can be found. The language of work setting such as having a job interview and doing negotiation can be seen in the book. Furthermore, it covers some expressions of spoken language that were used in doing business. One of the expressions presented in the textbook functions to ask opinions. Asking opinions can be categorized as speakers' way to get information. It has a transactional function. The participants in the conversation exchange information. Questions have some major functions (Brown, 2010). Some of them can be found in asking opinions namely requesting new information and claims which have been mentioned. In asking opinion, the speakers utter the questions in order to know interlocutors' opinions. The purpose of the questions is to obtain speakers' opinions. The speakers need to formulate the questions in such a way to achieve the purpose of communication. It can be said that they must make the questions as relevant as possible to the hearers in order to help the hearers give the best responses. This idea conveys the principle of Relevance theory.

Relevance theory discusses utterance interpretation. The speakers create the utterances as relevant as possible to lead the hearer grasp what he means. Through the utterances, the speakers give input which can be useful for the hearers to make inferences. The hearers make connection of the schemata and the input to draw the conclusion on what the speakers actually intends. The speakers, thus, try to support this process by attracting hearers' attention and provide input that is easier to process. They only yield utterances that are worth to listen for the hearers. Their main aim is to make the hearers recognize all information that they provide. When they realized that all necessary information is provided for the hearers, they will stop give the information (Blackmore, 2003; Rühlemann, 2006; Wilson & Sperber, 2004). To be able at the level of optimal relevance, it depends on context, the speakers themselves, and the cultural factors (Piskorska, 2017). This principle maintains the continuity of communication.

Another study that applies Relevance theory was conducted to analyze teacher talk. It was found that the teacher widened students' cognitive environment in order to give benefits for the students and the teacher. The students can understand the teacher easier while the teacher does not need to spend more effort on making the students understand his message. The teacher directed the students to have more sufficient contextual effect so they spend less effort to process teacher's utterances (Xu, 2010). It can be said that the principle of relevance involves two parties. It is in line with the findings of an analysis of Relevance theory in citations. The author used citation by considering what relevant for the author and the reader. Providing citations is author's ways to develop authority and trust from the readers. The authors try to be effective in citing by selecting information that is most suitable with their own schema. Furthermore, it must give benefits to the readers to process what authors state (White, 2011). Referring to Relevance theory, it can be said that to investigate how expressions of asking opinions function in the interaction, it is necessary to study the expressions in dialogues. They do not occur in isolation.

In the textbook, the expressions do not occur in a conversation in which interaction of speakers and hearers can be seen clearly. They appear in isolation. There is no context provided. Therefore, the responses namely utterances of giving opinions were not found. Finding this phenomenon, I realize that the book needs to be improved by providing the context of the dialogues of asking opinions. To do so, it is necessary to study discourse of asking opinion in the natural setting. To access the language used by the speakers for communicative purposes, a corpus can be used as the source of exploring language used. Examining data in the corpus also gives us opportunity to see the stimuli that the speakers give and the way the hearers interpret them by giving the responses (Andersen, 2014). Comparing and contrasting the language in the textbook and the one in the corpora are rarely found in Indonesia. Since this study concerns on a discourse study, analyzing concordance lines become the main feature. The concordance lines present information related to the context of the conversation. Not all corpora give a wider use of concordance lines. For instance, the concordance lines are just lines in which the keywords occur. For this reason, not all corpora are appropriate to be applied for a discourse study. One of the corpora that is appropriate is British National Corpus (BNC). To access BNC, it is possible to use the corpus managed by some universities. The one provided by Brigham Young University does not give a wide concordance lines as the ones operated by Lancaster University.

The present study focuses on investigating whether the expressions of asking opinions in the textbook is used in a communication by checking the occurrences in the corpus. Such study has never been used in the case of textbooks published in Indonesia. The occurrences in the corpus show that the expressions are used in actual language use. The expressions also must occur in the context. In sufficient context, we can see what the speaker says to ask opinions and the responses he gets from the hearer. Through this context, moreover, we can see whether the speakers use the expressions for asking opinions or not. Moreover, the present study provides what the speakers in the corpus do to make the questions relevant to the hearers. This information is useful to build dialogues in the textbook become more communicative.

A preliminary study of this textbook analysis has been conducted to investigate the frequency, the positions, the characteristics of communication, and the other possible expressions to ask opinions. It suggests *how do you feel, in your opinion, and do you have an opinion* to be included as the expressions of asking opinions (Mutiarra, 2018). Therefore, the present study focused on the expressions presented in the textbook and the ones proposed in the preliminary study.

Based on the discussion above, the study focused on answering the following questions: (1) Do the expressions of asking opinions in the textbook and the ones proposed in the preliminary study occur in BNC?, (2) If so, do they function to ask opinions?, (3) What are speakers' strategies to make the questions relevant to the hearers in BNC?.

The study sheds light on the study of discourse of asking opinions in the textbook. To the best of my knowledge, discourse study of particular expressions was never conducted. A result of this study gives benefit to materials development. The material developer can present the expressions of asking opinions in a more comprehensive way. The expressions occur in dialogues which represent discourse in natural setting.

## METHODS

A corpus-assisted discourse study was applied to analyze the texts. The present study used main elements of corpus linguistics namely seeking for the frequency of the expressions and then analyzing the concordance lines (Romero-Trillo, 2013). This study investigated the expressions function to ask opinions in the textbook and the ones proposed in the preliminary



study. The textbook is for internal use in a private university in Jakarta. The title is Student’s Handbook for Business English Subject. It was written by a non-native speaker of English. The expressions in the textbook occur in the dialogue setting. They functions to prepare the students for doing conversation. The following expressions of asking opinions are listed in the textbook: *As far as you know, ... ?*; *What do you think?*; *What is your opinion ...?*; *What is your point of view ...?*; *What can you say ...?*; *What is your comment ...?* The preliminary study suggests some other expressions namely *How do you feel ... ?*; *In your opinion, what ...?*; and *Do you have an opinion ... ?*. The expressions mentioned above were analyzed.

First, the occurrences of those expressions were checked in British National Corpus (BNC). BNC has 100 million words. It consists of spoken and written texts. Ninety percent of its composition is written text and the ten percent is spoken text. Spoken text consists of non-formal and formal language. Those expressions were put in a corpus query. The frequencies of the occurrences were listed. Second, analyzing the concordance lines was conducted to investigate whether those expressions function to ask opinions. Third, concordance lines analysis was applied to know speakers’ strategies in making the questions relevant to the hearers. In doing the analysis, the concept of Relevance theory was used (Wilson & Sperber, 2008). In other corpus studies that dealt with strategies in discourse, this step was conducted. The strategies of how the issues of refugee, asylum seeker, immigrant, and migrant were represented in the media was conducted by analyzing concordance lines of selected keywords (Baker et al., 2008). The other concordance line analysis focused on examining what strategies were used to represent national identity (Prentice, 2010).

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Some expressions occur in BNC and some were not found. *What do you think* has the highest frequency. It is the most common expression to ask opinions in the actual use. The result can be seen in the following table.

Table 1: The frequency of the expressions

Expressions	Frequency
<i>As far as you know, ... ?</i>	6
<i>What do you think?</i>	506
<i>What is your opinion ... ?</i>	0
<i>What is your point of view ... ?</i>	1
<i>What can you say ...</i>	6
<i>What is your comment ... ?</i>	0
<i>How do you feel?</i>	89
<i>In your opinion ... ?</i>	14
<i>Do you have an opinion?</i>	0

A close examination of the concordance lines analysis has been conducted to check whether the expressions were used to ask for opinions. There are six occurrences in which *as far as you know* occur to ask questions. It, moreover, was not used to ask opinions. It functions to explore what one knows about certain issues. The dialogue below was taken from BNC.

- A: As far as you know, was your uncle in any financial difficulty?
- B: I shouldn't think so for one minute but I don't know for certain.

Opinion is “a view, judgment, or appraisal formed in the mind about a particular matter” (“Merriam-webster dictionary,” n.d.). Speaker A asked speaker B about what he knows not what he views. As a response, speaker B told speaker A what he knows.

Moreover, *how do you feel* can function to ask one's opinions or feeling. Therefore, in 89 occurrences, some of the expressions are used to ask feeling as in the following example.

A: And we've been told that we'll only get between a naught and one point five percent increase at the most. Which is what we were given last year.

B: So how do you feel?

A: Not very happy.

Speaker B asked speaker A's feeling after speaker A gives some background information. It is not intended to ask A's opinion about the topic that is being discussed.

The speakers used some strategies to provide relevance information to the hearers namely introducing, asking more questions, giving options, and elaborating. They applied the strategies to make the hearers comprehend the topic of the talk and based on the information that the hearers have, they can give appropriate opinions.

### **Introducing**

The initial step before asking opinions is to introduce the topic in which the speaker provides relevant information for the hearers to be able to comprehend the topic and make inferences. The expressions of asking opinions were produced when the speaker thinks he provides all information that is useful to make the communication run smoothly.

The speaker introduced the topic (Clinton was coming). In addition, he also mentioned some information related to the topic namely the relationship of Clinton's coming and the Russian government. Then, he asked two questions to get hearer's opinion.

A: *Clinton was coming, in effect, from the Russian government. How do you feel about that? How do you respond to that?*

The speaker tried to make the first question clear by giving the second question. He added the second question to anticipate than the hearer does not understand what he means in the first question.

The speaker introduced the topic i.e. hearer's experience doing teaching. He, then, continued the talk by discussing career. This is done to sum up all of the hearer's career experience whether teaching or working as a chemist or biochemist. He directed hearer's attention to all aspects of the career. Moreover, he connected this topic with gender issue. Therefore, the hearer can give the most relevant response.

A: *You've done some teaching at Sussex. How do you feel about your career as a chemist or biochemist, as a woman as well?*

B: *Well I don't think that it's primarily being a woman that affected my career.*

Speaker B responded it by directly connecting the issue of gender and career.

Introducing the issue also can be done by checking the fact. After the speaker got confirmation, he asked for an opinion.

A: *You do her and her mum's hair then?*

B: *Yeah.*

A: *What do you think of Sharon's hair?*

B: *Eh?*

A: *Sharon.*

B: *Well I cut it last week but erm.*

Speaker A made sure that speaker B cut Sharon's hair. Once, he realized that he is correct, he asked about speaker B's opinion. He connected the fact that speaker B cut Sharon's hair and speaker B's opinion of Sharon's hair. He directed speaker B to give his opinion of this issue.

Speaker A introduced the topic in detail as follows:

A: *We've seen training, there have been four major steps for training and the first of which is actually to identify training needs. So before we start doing anything at all we actually do some identification of trainees. What do you think this actually involves? Those that have seen it before.*

B: *Oh right.*

A: *Or for those who haven't seen it before.*

A: *What do you think identifying training is all about?*

Speaker A mentioned four major steps in training is used to give more information about the training. He, then, asked hearer's opinion. The hearer gives a respond but it is not his opinion. To get hearer's opinion, speaker A asked again.

### **Asking More Question**

Speaker A got hearer's opinion. However, he dug up more information by asking more questions. In the next question, he made sure the truth of the answer. Then, in the second question, the topic of the dialogue is extended by discussing the trees around the tulip. In the beginning, the topic is tulip only.

A: *Dear, what do you think about this tulip thing?*

B: *Erm I'm not all that impressed.*

A: *Aren't you? What about the trees around it do you think they should stay?*

B: *Yes. I think I like the trees yeah I think they look all right but I just don't like that, that ornament thing or whatever it is.*

In the other case, speaker A asked another question directly after he uttered the first question. He did not wait for hearer's response to produce the second question. He made the question more specific by asking the sign.

A: *Right, what do you think might happen if a baby's getting chilled, what signs do you think might you notice?*

B: *Blue.*

### **Giving Options**

Speaker A gave his personal comment on speaker B's performance. Then, he, asked his opinion by saying *how do you feel*. He also added the other question to make the hearer understand better what he meant and what he expected the hearer would tell.

A: *Okay I think you're doing very very well on the fractions actually how do you feel? Do you think you know what they're about don't you.*

B: *Yes.*

Speaker A asked two questions. The first one is more general than the second one. The respond of the first question is only *hmm*. Because speaker A had not heard the opinions, he asked the second question. In this question, he directed the idea to make the hearer easier to give a response. He also made his expectation became easier to understand. He would like to know whether the hearers think Stoke Newington's score is crap or not.

A: *Ally, come here. Ally, what do you think of Stoke Newington's score?*

B: *Hmm!*

A: *Don't you think it's crap?*

C: *I'd say good.*

In another case, speaker A asked two questions. The second question was produced directly after the first question. He produced the second question because he realized that the hearer got difficulty to answer the first question. Like in the previous case, he made the question more specific and directly gave options to contrast tonic water and lemonade.

*A: I like the tonic water as good as wi-- , ah, with the Martini! What do you think? Do you think it's better than lemonade?*

*B: Well it's nice!*

Speaker A contrasted two countries namely Switzerland and Scotland. He began with a general question. Then, he elaborated some aspects of these countries. He gave more options in contrasting those countries. He asked hearer's opinion after all. He gave the series of differences in contrasting two countries to make the hearers have ideas in what aspects these countries should be contrasted.

*A: Now, what's the difference between Switzerland and Scotland is it, is it that the Swiss have more money?, is it that the Swiss are more body conscious, is it that the Scot's are more puritanical, they think that there are more important things to think about, what do you think?*

*B: Yes I think that the Scot's are more puritanical and also I, I had three babies, erm I was pregnant out there and I flew back to Scotland to have them and the difference between going to a Swiss gynecologist and seeing a doctor here was incredible.*

In another case, the speaker uttered two questions. The second question is more specific than the first one. The speaker used it as a way to make the hearer know what makes him confused. It makes the hearer easier to give the most relevant respond.

*A: What do you think Dinda? Should I take this one?*

*B: Erm.*

*A: They've still got it. It's the last one.*

It is possible that speaker A asked opinions as a respond of what speaker B said. It seems that he disagreed with B. He, then, asked the reason to speaker B. He asked opinions of the other. In doing so, he produced two questions. The first one is general. Then, the second question occurs and carries a specific idea.

*A: Okay now what have you got there?*

*B: I don't think that's right.*

*A: Why don't you think that's right? Mm, what do you think Kelly? Do you think that looks right?*

*C: No.*

In a different case, several questions were produced. The first question is general. The second question seems like an offer. Speaker A suggested that more milk is needed. He, then, tried to elicit the response by saying *yes, mm*.

*A: Come and have your pudding. What do you think to the rice pud, is it ... do you want any more milk on there? Yes? Mm?*

*B: The top's a bit hard, the crust.*

It is also possible for the speakers to ask with a specific question first. Then, he continued with more general question. In this question, speaker A gave opportunity to express his opinion. Speaker A's initial thought is about whether this business chap stay or not. By giving the next question, he opened a wider possibility.



A: *Do have this business chap staying all of Sunday or what do you think?*

B: *I don't know, I mean we can either take him up to.*

### **Elaborating**

Speaker A gave a clear explanation by telling a detailed case to make the hearer grasp his idea. After that, the question of asking opinion was given.

A: *Andrew, is there a feature in this plan called waiver of premium, what these means to you is that if you're off ill for a long period of time, through accident, ill-health, whatever, Abbey will actually still pay them for you, until you're well again. How do you feel about that?*

B: *It sounds good.*

Speaker A tried to be informative as possible. He also gave probability of what might happen. Therefore, speaker B can imagine the worst case.

The question of asking opinions also can be given in the initial position of the conversation. Then, a detailed elaboration of the issue was given.

A: *How do you feel about that? About all that, all those premiums you've paid and you're fifty one, and all of a sudden you've got nothing at the end of it?*

B: *I can't say I've ever worried about it, I just thought I'd look at it when I got there.*

In another case, speaker A elaborated by giving clarification shown by *I mean ...*. He tried to make his idea as easy as possible to be understood. He also connected his idea with speaker B's statement (*you just said ...*).

A: *How do you, how do you feel about the future now, I mean we've heard various people say interest rates must come down — you just said interest rates must come down, but when do you realistically think they could come down?*

B: *Well, er the CBI and other bodies are pressing for them to come down at once, er John Major has said it's only a question of time.*

It could be that speaker A began the conversation by describing the issue. Even, he gave a reason of particular phenomenon. He, then, continued with a specific question to make speaker B realized about the issue. He, then, asked an opinion. He gave another question in which he directed speaker B to his specific question.

A: *Now, normally in this programme when we talk about womens' magazines, people are inveighing against them because they carry various advertisements that they find offensive or exploitative, but are women's magazines actually erm, performing quite a useful job by filling in the gaps that that schools and parents are, are failing to address? What do you think? Any, yes?*

B: *I think they're a very dangerous mode of education because ...*

It also happens that speaker A began his talk by making connection to speaker B's statement. He continued his talk by asking an opinion. He, tried to make his question became clear by saying *I mean ...*. He avoided misunderstanding. He, moreover, still gave the hearer to express his idea by asking *or what*.

A: *Mm, right now, now you mention that you phoned the police about when you had your purse stolen, erm are y-- have, what do you think of the police presence around the flats? I mean is it helpful, or, or what?*

B: *Non-existent. And if it is, I mean they don't do much.*



In another case, speaker A began the conversation by complaining. He showed his dislike on fee involved in all preparation. After that, he asked speaker B's opinion. He also added another question that is more specific.

A: *Well it's a bit of a lie actually er there's a fee involved in all the preparation and all the work I've done er and what do you think the fee's worth? How much do you think it's worth?*

B: *Well I don't know, you didn't mention this earlier did you?*

In the other case, speaker A asked an opinion about Halloween. Speaker B gave a respond that shows that he did not understand what the speaker meant. Thus, he, asked. Speaker A gave relevant information by connecting some facts related to speaker A.

A: *What do you think about Halloween by the way?*

B: *Halloween?*

A: *Yeah.*

B: *Well*

A: *As a Christian, you said you were a Christian, Halloween is er the celebrating the devil,*

B: *Yeah*

The expressions *What do you think ...*, *How do you feel ...*, and *In your opinion, ...* are more necessary to teach because they have higher frequency in BNC. The strategies used in BNC also can be applied to make the dialogues in the textbook more natural. Providing those strategies means give models to authentic language use for the students. Once the students apply the strategies, they try to build relevance to the hearers. They try to make the conversation flows smoothly. The hearers understand their questions and are directed to give relevant information. Thus, the purpose of communication can be achieved.

## CONCLUSION

Several expressions in the textbook were found in BNC. *What do you think* has the highest frequency. *As far as you know* does not function to ask opinions. While *what is your opinion*, *what is your comment*, and *do you have an opinion* do not occur in BNC. When the speakers ask opinions, they introduce the topics, ask more questions, give options, and elaborate. All of them are conducted to provide all necessary information. It makes the hearers able to provide the best responses in which the speakers need. It is in line with the principle of Relevance theory. It suggests materials developers to present expressions in the dialogues. Thus, strategies that the speakers use to make themselves easier to be understood can be observed by the students. By doing so, learning materials will present the actual use of language. Future research can focus on developing learning materials in which the strategies mentioned above occur in the dialogues of asking opinions.

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