

A Corpus-linguistic Approach to the Verbal Realization of “Comforting”

Toshihiko Suzuki

Abstract

In this paper the author undertakes to outline linguistic strategies (i.e. strategies about vocabulary, grammar, and discourse) employed to “comfort” the addressee, through analyses of written responses in questionnaires provided by U.S. university undergraduate students in a research project for the investigation of the tendencies in the language use for this speech act and for the application of the research results to communicative English language teaching and the creation and development of related teaching materials. The main foci of the present study are on strategies at the (1) lexical, (2) grammatical, and (3) discourse levels — along with how linguistic politeness strategies are represented by them. The results of the data analyses have also revealed the effectiveness of the linguistic database of this sort for ELT in providing “natural” and “appropriate” examples of the target speech act “comforting,” employed by native English speakers.

Key words : comforting, speech act, corpus linguistics, application to ELT

1. Introduction

In the author’s current research project, the following two things are pursued: (1) the compilation of English speech acts corpora (SAC); and (2) the attempt to apply the research results to ELT (English Language Teaching) pursuing CLT (communicative language teaching) (cf. Brumfit & Johnson,

1979; Nunan, 1991; van Lier, 1996; Widdowson, 1978, 2003, 2008), with the creation and development of related teaching materials. The cultivation of “pragmatic competence” (Bachman, 1990) is thought to be one of the main subjects in the TBLT (Task-based Language Teaching) (cf. Ellis, 2003) for the CLT (for more detailed description; see Suzuki, 2009a). With regard to (1), the author has collected data from native speakers of English in the U.S.A. and in the U.K. during 2006-2009 about 11 English speech acts (viz. *apologizing, comforting, complaining, complimenting, giving directions, hinting, inviting, offering, requesting, suggesting, thanking*)⁽¹⁾. The application of research results to ELT has been carried out in his and others’ research projects, and their outcomes have been reported in academic presentations and articles (e.g. Suzuki, 2009a; 2009b).

In this research project⁽²⁾, the researcher has been trying to sketch out the lexical, grammatical and discourse strategies of eleven different English speech acts as well as situations and social parameters (i.e. participants and their social relations) attached to them. This paper has specifically been designed for the exploration of such strategies in and for the performance of “comforting,” which has turned out to be a composite of several parallel or sub speech acts.

2. Literature review

This academic survey aims to establish a database of English speech

(1) The following are the speech acts that have been treated in the author’s academic presentations: “comforting” (PAAL 2008), “suggesting” (JACET 2008), “inviting” (PAJ 2008), “apologizing, offering, requesting, thanking” (IPrA 2009).

(2) I would like to express my gratitude to the following researchers and institutions for their kind support for this research project: Prof. Geoffrey Leech (*Lancaster Univ., UK*); Dr. Adelaide Heyde Parsons (*Southeast Missouri State Univ., USA*); Dr. David Price (*SEMO*), Prof. John Campbell (*SEMO*), Prof. Kensaku Yoshida (*Sophia Univ., Japan*), SEMO and Lancaster students who participated in this research, JSPS (*Japan Society for the Promotion of Scientific Research*), and Waseda University.

acts for (1) language description with regard to *speech events* (cf. Hymes, 1962) or *activity types* (cf. Levinson, 1979, 1992) with attached social variables (viz. horizontal/vertical distance between the speaker and the hearer), lexicogrammatical and discourse strategies along with related linguistic politeness strategies for the realization of *rappport management* (Spencer-Oatey, 2000); (2) the production of communicative ELT materials and teaching methods pursuing the CLT, which can provide EFL learners with utterance samples that sound natural and appropriate in the specific context for communication in English.

The relevant literature is to be reviewed in the following sections to describe details of the above.

2.1 Corpus linguistics and pragmatics research

As Suzuki (2009a) explicates, corpus analysis has started to be incorporated in recent studies in pragmatics and discourse analysis (cf. Aijmer, 1996; Adolphs, 2008). The results of the corpus data analyses (e.g. BNC: the British National Corpus; BOE: the Bank of English) have also contributed to the production of ELT materials as they can provide ample authentic samples, as has already been the case with eminent contemporary English dictionaries such as OALD (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary) or LDCE (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English). However, as such corpora have not been particularly designed for the study of speech acts, they are often inconvenient for a comprehensive study of speech acts (cf. Suzuki, 2009a; 2009b). Consequently the author has been undertaking the compilation of his original English SAC with the use of conventional DCTs (Discourse Completion Tests) (cf. Blum-Kulka *et al.*, 1989) and the role-play (cf. Kasper, 2000) to elicit responses employed for the performance of various English speech acts on a large scale⁽³⁾.

(3) As for the strong and weak points of the DCT, refer to the related description in the author's earlier works (Suzuki, 2009a; 2009b), Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig (1992), and Beebe & Cummings (1996).

2.2 Pragmatics for ELT

The “pragmatic competence” (Bachman, *ibid.*) has mainly been addressed in Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) (cf. Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993). For the purpose of the cultivation of learners’ pragmatic ability, “pragmatic components” (i.e. linguistic strategies chosen and employed according to the context, at the lexical, grammatical, and discourse levels) have started to be incorporated in second or foreign language teaching (cf. Kasper, 1997; Rose & Kasper, 2001).

In the recent movement in ELT in Japan, the concept of “language function,” which is quite similar to that of speech acts, has started to be widely included in the junior and senior high school curricula. It is therefore important for the researchers and the practitioners of Applied Linguistics and ELT to study about this field to seek for the way to teach vocabulary, collocation, structure, and formulas to perform English speech acts in an appropriate way.

2.3 The act “comforting” and its components

The speech act “comforting” is supposed to be an *FEA* (face-enhancing act) for H (cf. Kerbat-Orecchioni, 1997: p.14), because S undertakes in the speech event to give advice/instructions, offer help/encouragement, make a proposal etc., for the benefit of H. In this sense, “comforting” is assumed to belong chiefly to Searle’s EXPRESSIVE (1979) and Leech’s CONVIVIAL (1983) because of its *FEA* nature. This *illocutionary act* is unique in a sense, however, in that it emerges as a comprehensive act with several different parallel or sub acts such as *encouraging*, *soothing*, or *sympathizing*.

3. Details of this research project and the data collection procedure

In this section the researcher endeavors to provide detailed information on this research project with regard to the following: (1) the objectives of this

research project, (2) the data collection procedure, and (3) the procedure of data analysis.

3.1 The author’s original Speech Act Corpora (SAC) compilation project

This English speech acts corpora (SAC) compilation project has been designed to establish a database of eleven different English speech acts as explicated in an earlier section. More specifically, the main aims of this project are as follows: [1] to contribute to studies of pragmatics for language description regarding (1a) activity types, (1b) social variables (*P*, *D*, *R*, as defined by Brown & Levinson, 1987), (1c) the effect “formality” and “informality” has on language use, (1d) lexicogrammatical strategies, (1e) discourse strategies, along with (1f) strategies for politeness or “rapport management”; [2] to provide linguistic database concerning above to the ELT in Japan and other countries for the production of teaching materials pursuing CLT.

3.2 Specification of the data collection procedure

This research has been carried out with the support of the **Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research** awarded by **JSPS** (*Japan Society for the Promotion of Scientific Research*) [Subject num.: 18820028 (2006-2008)] and **Waseda University Grant for Special Research Projects** [Subject num.: 2008A-840 (2008-2009); 2009B-083 (2009-2010)].

The data collection was carried out in (1) February-March 2007, (2) September 2007 in Missouri, U.S.A. with 164 undergraduate students of the Southeast Missouri State University (SEMO), all of whom are native speakers of English. The data collection procedure can be summarized as follows.

- Two types of DCTs and role-plays
- DCT 1 requested one group of informants to write what they really said in the past or would say to perform the target English speech acts.
- DCT 2 requested the other group to write up real or imaginary conversations between S and H.
- Both types asked them to describe situations where they actually performed or would per-

form the speech acts.

- Besides these studies with questionnaires, some informants volunteered for role-plays for the audio-visual data collection.

3.2 The data analysis procedure

The data provided by the informants in the procedure specified above were then analyzed according to the following categories and the following ways for this report document.

Situations

Situations described by the informants were classified according to their types and were named by the researcher in order to investigate in what situations this speech act appears.

Lexical and grammatical strategies

The written responses were transcribed and digitalized with PC for an analysis through *Wordsmith* (ver. 5.0) and other types of computer software (*MS Word*, *MS Excel*, etc.). The lexical and grammatical strategies were analyzed with *Wordsmith* concerning the following issues: the frequency of word appearance, collocations or chunks, and the structural features.

Discourse strategies

The whole discourse of the responses in the DCT was divided by the researcher into smaller units according to their function types in the *speech event* (Hymes, *ibid.*). They were classified into suitable types for an analysis of both individual discourse strategies and semantic formulae.

4. The results of the data analysis

This chapter specifies and demonstrates part of the results of the corpus-data analysis, in terms of the following categories: (1) types of situations, (2)

lexical and grammatical strategies, (3) discourse strategies, and (4) semantic formulae.

4.1 Types of situations

This section gives the outline of the situations (or ‘activity types’: Levinson, *ibid.*) where this speech act was performed in this study as shown by Table 4.1.1 (Types of situation), Table 4.1.2, 4.1.3 (Samples) and Figure 4.1 (see Appendices).

As can be seen from the tables and the figure, the act of “comforting” takes place most frequently when S learns that H has lost a family member, someone close, or a pet. It is followed by “Breakup,” in which S finds that H has broken up with his/her loved one and therefore been upset. These two situation types constitute approximately 65% in total: they are the two major situation types in this speech act. It also implies that one is supposed to perform proper comforting in such situations with appropriate strategies at lexical, grammatical, and discourse levels. Consequently, it is thought to be valuable for a learner of English as a foreign language to study in what types of situations this act is performed with the instructions of the words, phrases, and structures that are commonly used in order to act appropriately in such context.

4.2 Lexical and grammatical strategies

This section examines the strategies at the lexical and grammatical levels. Table 4.2.1, the Wordlist (see Appendices), exhibits the lexical items utilized in the data in the order of frequency. The ways the key words (i.e. those ranked high in the list and performing some special functions in this speech act) are used are scrutinized in terms of (1) how they appear, (2) their collocation with other lexical items, and (3) the sentence structure in which they are incorporated.

While such function words as “you” or “I” are not uniquely used in this speech act, it is fairly notable that the copula “be” is very frequently used

here, which is not the case with other acts (cf. Suzuki, 2009a; 2009b). Therefore the way this word is used in this speech act is worth investigating. This section will also examine other key words in the wordlist, which are thought to have special functions in this speech act and do not appear so recurrently in other acts: *sorry, better, okay/OK, know, if*.

[Selected] Lexicogrammatical strategies (collocations / chunks / grammatical arrangements)

Through an analysis with *Wordsmith* 5.0, the main patterns in the use of the words above have been revealed as follows:

A) *BE*

Table 4.2.2 Selected collocations of *BE*

N	L3	L2	L1	Centre	R1
1	IT'S	GOING	TO	BE	OKAY
2		IT	WILL		OK
3		EVERYTHING			ALRIGHT

The above table demonstrates the three major patterns in which *be* is used in this act. It is preceded by “it’s going to,” “it will,” and “everything will,” all of which indicate the future time. It is followed by “okay/OK” and “alright.” What can be inferred from these facts is that S attempts to present “brighter future,” so to speak, in order to provide H with the possibility of better future condition than that at present.

B) *SORRY*

Table 4.2.3 Selected collocations of *SORRY*

N	L3	L2	L1	Centre	R1	R2	R3	R4
1	I	I'M	SO	SORRY	TO	HEAR	ABOUT	YOUR
2		AM	I'M		ABOUT	YOUR	LOSS	YOU
3		I	REALLY		FOR			
4			VERY					
5			AM					

Some notable patterns have also emerged here concerning the way the word *sorry* is used. It has strong connections with the words in the above table, making such collocation as [*so/really/very sorry*], [*sorry about/for*], [*sorry to hear about*]. The simplest pattern at the sentence level is *I’m sorry about your loss*. The adverbs *really* and *very* are commonly used to emphasize S’s sympathy towards H.

C) **BETTER**

Table 4.2.4 Selected collocations of *BETTER*

N	L3	L2	L1	Centre	R1	R2
1	YOU	YOU	MUCH	BETTER	PLACE	NOW
2		IN	A		THAN	
3		SO	FEEL			
4			GET			

The word *better* utilized in this speech act has the following function: presentation of better future or better option or condition to soothe and encourage H. The phrase *in a better place* is especially used for a person who has lost someone close or a loved pet in such a sentence as *He is in a better place now*. This expression may probably be rooted in the teachings of Christianity, in which the afterworld is believed to be “a better place” than “this world.”

D) **OKAY/OK**

Table 4.2.5 Selected collocations of *OKAY/OK*

N	L3	L2	L1	Centre
1	GOING	WILL	BE	OKAY
2		ARE	IT’S	
3		TO	YOU	

These two forms of the same lexicon, when combined, can be ranked 4th (63 times) in the Wordlist. Therefore this expression can be regarded as one of the primary key words in this speech act. The phrases made up with this

word are: *going to be okay*, *will be okay*, *are you okay*, *it's okay*, as can be seen from the above list. The first two expressions are used as “encouragement” by showing H a bright future. The third can be taken as an expression to show S’s willingness/readiness to attend to H’s trouble by asking his/her condition. The last phrase is thought to be functioning as a “soother” for H.

D) **KNOW**

Table 4.2.6 Selected collocations of *KNOW*

N	L2	L1	Centre
1	LET	I	KNOW
2		ME	

In this speech act the word *know* is used in particular ways as observed in Table 4.2.6, namely *let me know* and *I know*. The first expression is functioning as “offer of support” with another phrase *if [you need / there’s] anything*. The second phrase is showing S’s sympathy by noticing/understanding H’s trouble.

E) **IF**

Table 4.2.7 Selected collocations of *IF*

N	Centre	R1	R2	R3
1	IF	YOU	NEED	ANYTHING

One main pattern of the use of *if* has been found as above. Other minor variations in the concordance list are such as follows: *if there’s anything (I can do)*, *if you need me*, *if you want*. S attempts to ask or confirm H’s need of support in a polite way by the use of conditional *if* clause.

4.3 Discourse strategies

This section examines the discourse level strategies employed by the American university undergraduate students for the performance of “comforting.” In order to investigate (1) what types of strategies were utilized and (2) how many times each of them appeared, “semantic tagging” (i.e. coding

according to the function of each utterance unit in the discourse) was executed.

The Table 4.3 (see Appendices) is a summary of the strategies in the order of frequency. The following parts describe the features and characteristics of the eight most frequently employed strategies (appearing 50 times or more) – except “addressing” and “interjection”⁽⁴⁾ (The reason for the exclusion is described under Table 4.3.) – in order to sketch out some tendencies of this speech act at the discourse level.

4.3.1 [P] soother

- (a) *These things happen.*
- (b) *There are plenty of other girls out there.*
- (c) *He is in a better place now*
- (d) *It's all right*
- (e) *It's not your fault*
- (f) *It's OK*
- (g) *There are plenty of other fish in the sea*
- (h) *Things always happen for a reason*

Utterances of this type are thought to relieve H's hurt or sad feeling. Fundamentally this strategy is supposed to be the *Head act* (cf. Blum-Kulka *et al. ibid.*), and it seems to be the reason why it was used most frequently employed by the informants.

4.3.2 [F] encouragement

- (a) *everything is going to be fine*
- (b) *It will be ok*

(4) As for the distinction between “addressing” and “interjection”, the former is applied to words or phrases which are used to get H's attention (e.g. *Mandy, Hey, Hey Steph*), while the word “interjection” is used when an interjectional expression is used to show S's own emotion (e.g. *Oh, Oh my gosh, Well*), not to address H.

- (c) *It's going to be okay*
- (d) *Now you know what try-outs are like and if you want to try-out next year you will know what to expect*
- (e) *Things will all work out in the end*
- (f) *you are going to be ok*
- (g) *you will do better next time*
- (h) *You will find another guy who you like 10 times more than Michael*

While “soothers” are used to relieve H’s feeling, “encouragement” offers H the better future. One grammatical characteristic the utterances above have in common is an expression that represents future time (*will* or *be going to*). The phrase *you can* is used to show that H has an ability to do so and *you will* is employed to indicate H’s future action for the betterment of the situation.

4.3.3 [R] sympathy

- (a) *I am really sorry about your loss*
- (b) *I am so sorry things didn't work out between you two*
- (c) *I'm so sorry to hear that*
- (d) *I'm very sorry to hear about your grandma*
- (e) *I know how you feel*
- (f) *I know this is hard and you're upset*
- (g) *I understand that you miss your family and friends*
- (h) *It must be hard for you*

One notable expression used to show S’s sympathy towards H is “I’m/am sorry.” The Japanese EFL learners should learn the use of this phrase for this speech act, besides that for “apologizing.” Other key expressions are *I know*, *I understand*, *It must be*, all of which are supposed to represent S’s understanding (of H’s difficult situation).

4.3.4 [B] advice

- (a) *cheer up,*
- (b) *Don't cry.*
- (c) *Don't worry about it!*
- (d) *I am telling you to break up with her.*
- (e) *Just give him time and he will call you.*
- (f) *Just hang in there*
- (g) *just keep your head up honey*
- (h) *just let it go.*
- (i) *just think of all the happy and good times you had together!*
- (j) *Work hard and get better.*
- (k) *you have to get over her.*
- (l) *you just have to believe in yourself.*

One notable feature that this strategy has is the use of the imperative mood as can be seen above. This structure is not frequently used in some other speech acts, which intrinsically take on imposition on H and therefore needs mitigation. However, there are cases where the imperative mood is used effectively in order to offer something beneficial for H, in such speech acts as *giving advice* or *offering*. Intensification or clarity represented by this structure, instead of redress or indirectness, can be taken as a commonly used strategy for *rappport management* as defined by Spencer-Oatey (*ibid.*). It also appears that one reason the imperative form is preferred in the speech act of comforting is its “strong impact.” The “strength,” “force,” or “clear direction” may well function as *encouragement* for H. The negative word *don't* is use to encourage H by “prohibiting a negative thing” as in *Don't worry* or *Don't cry*. Furthermore, as can be seen, the adverb *just* is frequently employed to indicate an easy, simple and straightforward solution to the problem.

As for other structures, *I am telling you...* and *have to* in the declarative have been found. These also have rather strong connotation and are usually

avoided when mitigation is necessary.

4.3.5 [K] offer of support

- (a) *Can I do anything to help you get feeling better?*
- (b) *I am here for you.*
- (c) *I will be here for you always when you need to talk or just want to hang out.*
- (d) *I'll help you study next time.*
- (e) *If there is anything I can do, let me know.*
- (f) *If you need anything, call me.*
- (g) *if you need me to I'll drive down and go shopping*
- (h) *Is there anything I can do to help?*
- (i) *we will find your keys.*

The utterances of this type are another strategy to encourage H. With regard to basic grammatical structure, declarative is used as the key propositional content is *I + help + you*. The phrases to ask about the necessity of support, *if there is anything* and *if you need anything*, are commonly used formulaic expressions in this strategy. As another equivalent structure, the interrogative (e.g. *Can I...? Is there anything...?*) is employed to ask about H's will.

4.4 Semantic formulae

This section demonstrates and explicates how each strategy is combined with another or other strategy/ies to constitute a whole semantic formula for the achievement of a speech act, as Table 4.4 displays (see Appendices). While people in some cases use one single utterance to perform a speech act, they utilize more elaborated combinations of utterances or formulas to show their intentions, emotions or consideration for others. It is therefore significant to study about sub-strategies incorporated in a sequence as well as core parts (or “head act”) to learn about what we need to think about and take

care of in expressing our intentions.

The following parts reveal most frequent combination types (appearing five times or more) in Table 4.4: “KR” and “R” are omitted because they can be subsumed under a bigger combination category “AKR.”

4.4.1 “P” type

Situation	Remark	Strategy Classification	T	C
Natalie’s dog dies.	Fluffy didn’t feel any pain.	soother	P	P
	He is in a better place now.	soother	P	
	Just because you can’t see him and play with him, doesn’t mean you can’t love him anymore.	soother	P	
When I moved away from house to go to college.	I know we just will miss you so much.	soother	P	P

*T = Type; C = Combination

The strategy type “P” (*soother*) is very commonly used to provide “ease of mind” for H. This sub-act can be in one sense recognized as “Head act” in this speech act, as “soothe” is supposed to be a synonym of “comfort.” However, on the whole, this speech act is also frequently performed by several different sub-acts other than this one. There are some cases, as can be seen from the list above, the act of comforting can be carried out without this pseudo-head-act as well. This is indeed the reason why the author has decided to regard this strategy as one of the parallel strategies, despite its function as a main “comforting device.”

Typical sentence structure of this strategy is declarative. This is because S undertakes to comfort H by giving his/her observation, opinion, feeling, etc. in a positive way.

4.4.2 “AKR” type

Situation	Remark	Strategy Classification	T	C
My friend's sister died.	Hey	addressing (voc/intj/etc)	A	AKR
	I'm really sorry to hear about your sister.	sympathy	R	
	If you need anything let me know!	offer of support	K	
A friend's mom died.	Brandon,	addressing (voc/intj/etc)	A	AKR
	I am really sorry to hear about your mom.	sympathy	R	
	If there is anything I can do, just let me know.	offer of support	K	

*T = Type; C = Combination

The strategy R (sympathy) is the one that can be used even on its own. In this sense it is one of the main parallel strategies. On the other hand, K (offer of support) is used with other strategies as “supplementary” strategies in most cases. “Addressing” is used to show friendliness or attitudinal warmth prior to the performance of various speech acts in the U.S. (cf. *positive politeness* as defined by B&L, *ibid.*). In the combination of these, S first shows understanding of the situation and his/her commiseration towards H and then makes an offer of help. This discourse sequence often appears especially in the “Death” type situation. This is another piece of valuable information for EFL learners in that it allows them to understand and become able to use what are thought to be appropriate discourse strategies in some particular context.

4.4.3 “BF” type

Situation	Remark	Strategy Classification	T	C
My friend got F in math exam.	Don't be so nervous.	advice	B	BF
	You can try again.	encouragement	F	
	You'll get good score next time.	encouragement	F	

Stressed out college buddy has a headache.	Take some medicine and lie down for a bit.	advice	B	BF
	It'll make you feel better,	encouragement	F	
	and don't forget Spring Break is coming up.	advice	B	
	so hang in there!	advice	B	

*T = Type; C = Combination

This combination of *advice* and *encouragement* can be a powerful support for H in the sense that the clear guidelines for solving a problem or overcoming it are presented. As one notable feature of this combination type, the imperative mood has frequently been observed. As stated in an earlier section, this structure is assumed to have “strong impact” and this should be one reason that it is used to give H power to conquer hardship.

5. Conclusion and future directions

As can be seen in the results of the data analysis in the earlier sections, some notable features and tendencies in the linguistic strategies – at the lexical, grammatical, and discourse levels – for the performance of “comforting” have been sketched out. Although the data consists totally of the American university undergraduate students, it has ample examples that could make a contribution to linguistic studies. Furthermore, these results are thought to be also beneficial for English language teaching pursuing the CLT.

With regard to the speech act of “comforting,” it has been confirmed that several different parallel or sub speech acts and their combinations are usually employed to give comfort to H, viz. *soothing*, *encouraging*, *sympathizing*, *giving advice*, *offering S's support*.

Further data collection in other English-speaking countries such as UK or Canada with more various data collection methods (e.g. retrospective interviewing, natural conversation observation, a multiple-choice questionnaire) would make more contribution to the study of pragmatics and ELT. Also, exploring existing large-scale corpora (e.g. BNC, BOE, LLC) could let us

understand more about how to keep a good balance between authenticity and controllability of research data, as suggested by Schauer & Adolphs, (2006: p.119). It is hoped that these issues would be addressed by the further development of this linguistic research project; viz. the growth of the size of corpora, the adoption of other data collection methods, the exploration of other corpora, and analyses of ELT materials, to name just a few.

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Appendices

Table 4.1.1 Types of situations

Type	Classification	Num	Per
A	Accident	2	1.44%
B	Breakup	44	31.65%
C	Death	46	33.09%
D	Difficult situation	17	12.23%
E	Failure in test	7	5.04%
F	Sickness/Injury	9	6.47%
G	Unfavourable event	14	10.07%
	Total	139	

Figure 4.1

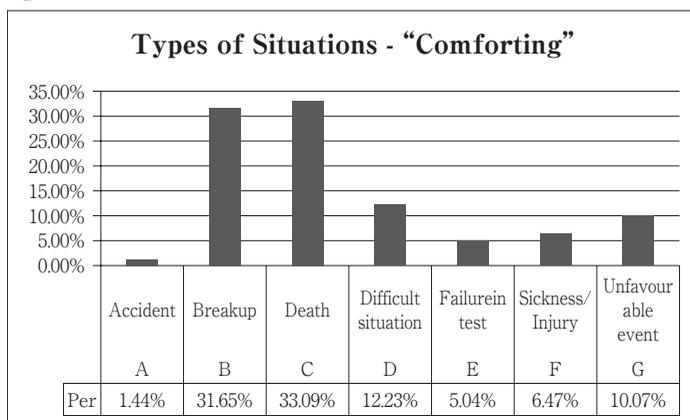


Table 4.1.2 Samples of "Death" type: Description of the situation

1. My friend has had a relative die.
2. Comforting friend after death in family
3. My friend just lost her dog.
4. my friend's mother just died
5. someone you know dies
6. My friend lost his grandfather.

Table 4.1.3 Samples of “Breakup” type: Description of the situation

1. My friend is crying and tells me her boyfriend broke up with her.
2. Roommate sad because boyfriend broke up with her.
3. My friend is mad about a girl.
4. My friend’s boyfriend just broke up with her.
5. A friend and her boyfriend broke up.
6. My friend just lost her grandpa of cancer.
7. My best friend and her boyfriend broke up.
8. My roommate broke up with her boyfriend.
9. My friend just lost her boyfriend.
10. Comforting a friend who just got dumped by their boyfriend.

Table 4.2.1 Wordlist

N	Word	Freq.	N	Word	Freq.
1	YOU	187	34	THE	21
2	TO	88	35	GET	20
3	I	80	36	GOING	19
4	BE	58	37	HEY	19
5	WILL	51	38	HIM	19
6	IT	48	39	OF	18
7	YOUR	45	40	THAT	18
8	SORRY	43	41	HEAR	17
9	A	42	42	OUT	17
10	ARE	40	43	WORRY	17
11	BETTER	40	44	ALRIGHT	16
12	FOR	38	45	NOW	16
13	IS	38	46	TIME	16
14	OKAY	38	47	BUT	15
15	ABOUT	37	48	EVERYTHING	15
16	I’M	36	49	ALWAYS	14
17	DO	31	50	TALK	14
18	IT’S	30	51	ALL	13
19	KNOW	30	52	GOOD	13
20	AND	28	53	HE	13
21	IF	28	54	HER	13
22	DON’T	27	55	HAVE	12
23	IN	27	56	LET	12
24	JUST	27	57	REALLY	12
25	NEED	27	58	WELL	12
26	CAN	26	59	WHAT’S	12
27	SO	26	60	FEEL	11
28	OK	25	61	FIND	10
29	ME	24	62	NEXT	10
30	THERE	24	63	NO	10
31	AM	23	64	WANT	10
32	ANYTHING	23	65	WHAT	10
33	HERE	22	66	WRONG	10

Table 4.3 *Discourse strategies – strategy classification*

Type	Strategy classification	Freq	% (1)	% (2) ⁽⁵⁾
P	soother	91	17.27%	21.26%
A	addressing (voc/intj/etc)	74	14.04%	
F	encouragement	73	13.85%	17.06%
R	sympathy	60	11.39%	14.02%
B	advice	53	10.06%	12.38%
K	offer of support	51	9.68%	11.92%
H	enquiry about situation	37	7.02%	8.64%
I	interjection	25	4.74%	
L	praise of H	15	2.85%	3.50%
E	criticism of H's opponent	10	1.90%	2.34%
S	wish for betterment	9	1.71%	2.10%
G	enquiry about H's need	7	1.33%	1.64%
Q	suggestion	7	1.33%	1.64%
M	reinforcement of encouragement	5	0.95%	1.17%
O	reinforcement of s's support	3	0.57%	0.70%
D	comment of H's situation	2	0.38%	0.47%
J	offer of solution	2	0.38%	0.47%
N	reinforcement of S's offer of support	2	0.38%	0.47%
C	clearance of H's guilt	1	0.19%	0.23%
	<i>Total 1 (all)</i>	527		
	<i>Total 2 (excluding "addressing" and "interjection")</i>	428		

*The alphabets in "Type" show the order of strategies in the alphabetical order.

(5) Percentage 1 (%(1): obtained from Total 1) indicates the proportion including all the strategies and Percentage 2 (%(2): obtained from Total 2) represents that excluding "addressing" and "interjection." "Addressing" and "interjection", which include vocatives, interjectional expressions, conventional words or phrases for greetings, etc., are not specifically used in this particular speech act – they are commonly used in most speech acts. Therefore it is better to exclude this type in order to concentrate more on core components specific to the target speech act.

Table 4.4 Semantic formulas (Combination of discourse strategies)

N	Combination	Freq.
1	KR	11
2	P	7
3	R	7
4	AKR	6
5	BF	5
6	BFP	4
7	ABP	3
8	FKP	3
9	FP	3
10	FR	3
11	HK	3
12	HS	3