

An Analysis of Visuals Inserted in High School English Textbooks in Japan: A Case of “CROWN” and “VISTA” Published by Sanseido

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1. Background of study

Our communication style of today depends heavily on visual information thanks to the modern technology, and teaching learning settings are no exception. School textbooks have become visually richer than those of decades ago, and increasing attention has been paid to taking advantage of the visuals to develop students' "visual literacy" in some foreign countries. In Japan, however, few studies have examined to what extent and how visuals on nationally authorized textbooks developed over years based on accurate data. The purpose of this study is, therefore, to clarify a quantitative and qualitative change in the use of visuals inserted in English textbooks over the past several decades.

2. Method

2.1 Textbooks investigated

Two series of textbooks for first-year high school English, CROWN and VISTA. Their publications of 1972, 1987, 2002, and 2012 were sampled, hence eight textbooks in total.

2.2 Data collection and analysis

Visuals on the textbooks were quantified onto Microsoft Excel by numbering and measuring. The data was statistically analyzed using T test and ANOVA. Every visual was coded according to the type of visuals within the framework of content analysis.

3. Results and discussion

The following findings were obtained as a result of quantitative analysis:

i) The amount of visuals per page has gradually increased since 1972.

The increase in the number of visuals was statistically significant in all the periods ($F(3,1181)=90.093$, $p<.001$), whereas the increase in the area was found statistically significant except for the period of 2002 to 2012 ($F(3,1181)=27.873$, $p<.001$).

ii) Photograph has taken up an increasing percentage in total area of visuals.

In 1972, about a half of the area was accounted for by "illustration" type of visuals. As the textbooks became

more colorful, the area of photograph gradually increased. "Diagram" was the least frequent or prominent type of visuals in all the periods.

iii) The use of visuals differed according to the difficulty level of textbooks after the publications of 2002.

VISTA, which is relatively easier to comprehend than CROWN, contained a larger amount of illustrations both in terms of number and area since 2002. This is due to the essential features of recent VISTA; 1) text presentation by the agency of 'main characters', 2) many pages devoted to grammar explanation with abundant illustrations.

In addition, qualitative analysis revealed that the way of using visuals had been greatly diversified over the decades. In 1972, visuals were inserted only within main reading materials of lessons as supplementary information. Visuals started to come out in the activity sections of the textbooks in 1987, and more diverse ways of using visuals to enhance users' learning process were observed after the publications of 2002 such as 1) icons to indicate a certain type of activity, 2) a 'frontispiece' picture for background knowledge activation, and 3) a table for organizing information.

Although the quantity and quality of visuals inserted in English textbooks have certainly become rich, learning activities that demand learners' in-depth analysis on visuals were rare. It is important to note that visuals can be utilized not only for facilitating students' learning process, but also for stimulating their critical and creative thinking, which is an important component of visual literacy education.

In order to investigate the role of visuals in our learning process more in detail, closer analysis of the relationship between image and text is required. Moreover, further study could be conducted on how teachers and learners recognize, react to, and utilize visuals in actual teaching learning settings.