

English Textbook Analysis in China, Japan, Malaysia and Thailand: A Focus on Wh-interrogative Questions

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Abstract

This paper reports the simultaneous analysis of English textbooks from China, Japan, Malaysia and Thailand. This study makes a comparison of the frequency of the wh-interrogative questions taught in English textbooks in the above-mentioned countries. The aim is to analyze the corpora to identify some of the differences among the textbooks and to explore the findings which reflect English language teaching curriculum in Japan. Each textbook was first digitized and then analyzed in terms of the wh-interrogatives. The results reveal the following:

In Japan, the wh-interrogatives failed to appear in an organized way in standard EFL textbooks. In Book 2 (6th grade) the new interrogatives (i.e. where, when) are introduced, while why and which are never taught for three years. Especially, the which-interrogative is taught only in Book 4 (JH 2) among the five volumes.

Regarding each wh-interrogative, what is the highest frequency in almost all the textbooks in the four countries. Then the second most frequently taught wh-interrogative from Book 1 through Book 5 is how in Malaysia, Japan and Thailand, while in China where shows the second highest frequency.

1 Introduction

In some Asian countries, such as China, Korea and Thailand, where they teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English teaching at primary schools was introduced much earlier than in Japan.

In Japan, foreign language activities (*Gaikokugo Katsudo*) were introduced, in principle, once a week, for the fifth and sixth grades at all primary schools in 2011. With regard to textbooks, MEXT proposed that teachers utilize the so-called English Notebook (i.e. *Eigo Noto*) at primary schools. Unfortunately, the use of these textbooks

during English lessons is left to individual primary schools to implement.

In this paper, with an emphasis on communication-based teaching techniques in Japan, the wh-interrogative questions taught at primary and secondary schools in Japan are examined. Then, Chinese, Malaysian, Thai, and Japanese textbooks are analyzed and discussed. More specifically, this paper aims to first find how each wh-interrogative question is treated in the above countries in terms of the frequency, and then to explore similarities or differences among the four countries' textbooks regarding the frequency and appearance of each wh-interrogative question.

2 Method

Each textbook was first scanned and then items were analyzed in terms of the frequency of wh-interrogative questions. Also, this research makes a distinction between wh-interrogative questions and relative pronouns or adverbs, based upon the sentence structure and the meaning of the sentence with the target term or phrase. The *Eigo Noto* textbooks used in 'foreign language activities' at Japanese primary schools were analyzed, aiming at investigating the frequency of the wh-interrogative questions. Also, the same process was performed with the junior high school textbook called *New Horizon*. The reason why the particular textbook series was selected is that it is one of the most popular authorized textbooks at junior high schools in Japan. Likewise, Thai textbooks were analyzed with a focus on the same wh-interrogative questions as in the textbooks in Japan. The direct wh-interrogatives analyzed in this research are: what, where, how, who, when, why, and which. Below are the textbooks analyzed in this paper.

(1) *Eigo Noto* textbooks at primary schools in Japan (G 5 and G 6)

- (2) *New Horizon* at junior high schools in Japan (JH 1 through JH 3)
- (3) Primary school textbooks in Thailand (Book 1 through Book 5)
- (4) Primary school textbooks in China (Book 1 through Book 5)
- (5) Primary school textbooks in Malaysia (Book 1 through Book 5)

3 Research & Discussion

3.1 Research Question (1)

Research question 1 asks ‘How is each wh-interrogative question treated among the textbooks in China, Japan, Malaysia and Thailand in terms of the frequency?’ The data were analyzed and the results were discussed.

The frequency of the what-interrogative is the highest among all the interrogatives in the textbooks in China, Japan, Malaysia and Thailand. This implies that the what-interrogative is very frequently spoken or written in communication.

Regarding the where-interrogative, in China and Malaysia the where-interrogative is frequently taught, while in Japan and Thailand the interrogative is never used in the first volume. However, the frequency of *where* in Japan and Malaysia are similar from Book 2 to Book 5.

The when-interrogative graph looks quite similar for both Japan and China (Figure 6). In particular, in Thailand the frequency of the when-interrogative is much lower in all the five volumes.

The frequency of *why* occurrences in these countries looks quite different. In China, the why-interrogative first appears in Book 2 and it is constantly reviewed from Book 3 to Book 5. However, in Thailand the why-interrogative is not taught in either Book 1 or Book 2, but it is treated from Book 3 to Book 5. Looking at the frequency for Japan, there are no why-interrogatives in any of the first three volumes, but it is taught gradually in Books 4 and 5.

3.2 Research Question (2)

Research question 2 asks, ‘Are similarities or differences present among the four countries’ textbooks regarding the frequency and appearance of each wh-interrogative question?’ Consequently, the following research results are revealed.

As for similarities among these countries, the frequency of the what-interrogative is the highest in all of the textbooks. Furthermore, it can be said that the which-interrogative tends not to be taught so frequently from Book 1 through Book 5. The frequency of the how-interrogative is the second highest of all of the wh-interrogatives in Japan, Malaysia and Thailand, and in China it is frequently

taught even if the frequency of how-interrogative is the third highest.

Regarding differences among the four countries, the frequency of each interrogative varies from country to country. For instance, in Thailand the when-interrogative is treated in Books 4 and 5, but it shows quite a small numerical value. Although it depends on the textbook of each country, four countries’ textbooks are diverse in the token of wh-interrogatives. Especially, in China the number of the interrogatives is much larger, compared to the three other countries.

4 Conclusion

In this paper, selected textbooks from China, Japan, Malaysia and Thailand were analyzed and discussed in terms of the frequency of the teaching of the direct wh-interrogative questions. As a result, the following findings were identified.

First, looking at the frequency of each wh-interrogative question, there are similarities and differences among the four countries. For example, the frequency of the when-interrogative from Book 1 through Book 5 in China is quite similar to that found in Japanese textbooks. On the other hand, the where-, how- and who-interrogatives were introduced in a quite different order in these countries.

Next, regarding the consistency of the wh-interrogatives in the textbooks in these four countries, the introduction of the wh-interrogatives in China and Thailand seems to be better organized as a EFL country than in Japan. Like in China and Thailand, the direct wh-interrogative questions in Japanese textbooks should be taught in a continuous way in order for students to improve their communicative skills.

Further research should be promoted to contribute to production of better textbooks and lead to the development of students’ communicative skills.

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