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Author(s)	Uenishi, Koji; Fujiwara, Yoko; Miura, Seishin; Ozasa, Toshiaki
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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE FREQUENCY OF INFINITIVE VERBS IN FIVE ASIAN EFL TEXTBOOKS

Koji Uenishi
Setsunan University

Yoko Fujiwara
Ouchi Junior High School

Seishin Miura
Akita University

Toshiaki Ozasa
Faculty of Management, Fukuyama Heisei University

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the simultaneous analysis of English textbooks from five Asian countries (Thailand, China, Korea, Japan and Mongolia). The motivation behind this work lies in our belief that these analyses shed important light on the content of English teaching as a foreign language. Our study aims to make a comparison of the frequency of infinitive verbs found in the English textbooks of Thailand, China, Korea, Japan and Mongolia. The textbooks were first digitized and then analyzed in terms of one of their use of the infinitive. From the analyses, we surmise that, in terms of the infinitive use, English textbooks in four considered countries were not strictly controlled, whilst the Japanese counterpart was rigidly regulated and controlled, and we conjecture that in Thailand, Korea, China and Mongolia, communication-centered English lessons are undertaken, using less controlled textbooks, while in Japan English tended to be instructed, utilizing controlled, grammar-based textbooks.

1. AIM

The present study aims to make a cross-national comparison of the English textbooks from the cross-sectional perspective. This paper focuses on comparing the frequency of the infinitive verb forms after the addition of a new corpus from the Mongolian English textbook to the corpora of the four countries mentioned above.

2. METHOD

The textbooks analyzed in the present study are five current English textbooks from the Kingdom of Thailand, the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Korea, Japan and the State of Mongolia. They are:

Thai textbook

- Santos, dos Manuel (2003). *Super Goal, Book 1*. Thai Watana Panich / McGraw-Hill. 5 vols. (ThailSG)

Mongolian textbook⁹

- Ulzijargal, S., Erdenetsetseg, G., Mira, N. & Batjargal, D. (2000). *English 2*. Approved by the Ministry of Science, Technology, Education and Culture. Unpublished. (JH1)

Chinese textbook

- People's Education Press & Longman (ed.) (2001). *Junior English for China. Book 1*. 6 vols. (China J)

⁹ Book 1 of the Mongolian textbook was unavailable, so Book 2 was analyzed. For this reason, comparison of the Mongolian textbook with other Asian textbooks should be regarded solely as a point of reference.

Korean textbook

- Chang, Young-hee et al. (2001). Middle School English. Book 1, Tusan, 3 vols. (Korea J)

Japanese textbook

- Shimaoka, T. et al. (1986). Sunshine English Course. Book 1. Kairyudo. 3 vols. (Sunshine)

In Book 1 (junior high textbook) in Korea and Japan, each unit is composed of an introduction and a dialogue, followed by exercises of target grammatical items or functional expressions.

On the other hand, in the Chinese textbook (junior high school level), each unit consists of four to five lessons, including dialogues ('Read and Say' or 'Read and Act'), drills and either a story or an essay.

In the Thai textbook, each unit is consistently made up of the main reading material and sections, such as pair work, grammar, listening, reading and pronunciation. Also, Book 1 contains four reading parts titled Expansion, which seems to be introduced into the textbook, aiming at improving learners' reading ability.

In the Mongolian textbook, each unit has four lessons, and they include diverse activities and questions, based on listening, reading, writing, pronunciation and grammar.

Regarding the infinitives we analyzed, we defined them as follows: the infinitive is, in principle, 'to verb (root)', but in case the connection between 'to' and 'verb' is weaker compared to the connection between 'verb' or 'adjective' and 'to', such as auxiliary verb-like phrases (e.g. be able to; have to; used to), the acceptance of the item as an infinitive was ruled out.

Moreover, our working definition of 'controlled' or 'regulated' is when the infinitive verb structure is taught only in one or two particular lessons, or taught systematically after the first appearance of the grammatical item.

3. ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

In the present quantitative analysis, the five junior high school textbooks of Thailand, China, Korea, Japan and Mongolia were combined to form an English corpus of secondary education. The obtained data were analyzed quantitatively in terms of one of the verbals, To-infinitive. The analysis of the corpora took the following steps: (1) to digitize the English of the textbooks to construct the textbook corpora, (2) to quantitatively analyze the corpora, and (3) to cross-nationally compare the corpora of the textbooks.

In order to explore the frequency of the infinitive in each textbook, we computed the target structures manually by using a tagging technique. In order to clarify the comparison of five Asian textbooks, the number of infinitives in each unit/lesson was divided by the total number of words in each textbook. The ratio (frequency) of words in each unit/lesson is thought to identify the features or differences of the textbooks from the perspective of the grammatical item. Therefore, with regard to a method of indicating the frequency in the graphs, since the numerical values (ratio) were very small, the numbers were increased by ten thousand times to see them more clearly.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the quantitative analysis are shown in Tables 1 through 5. The introduction and interpretation of the English textbooks in the five Asian countries are described in the following sections.

4.1 Thai textbook

From Table 1 we see that the infinitive in the Thai textbook appears rather frequently in the first unit, Unit 1 of Book 1. Also, although the infinitive does not emerge in the first half of Book 1, except for three sections, in the later units the infinitive is frequently written; in particular, the grammatical usage appears very frequently, more than 14, in Units 14 and 17. Even though the grammatical item 'to verb' was used frequently in the textbook, students in Thailand have never been taught the usage as a grammatical item at the junior high school stage. Eventually, the results seem to imply that the textbook was uncontrolled in terms of an even distribution and frequency of the grammatical usage, the infinitive.

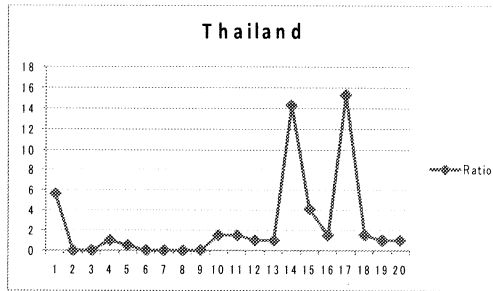


Table 1. Thai textbook infinitives ratios

4.2 Mongolian textbook

In the Mongolian textbook, the infinitive is used more frequently than the Thai textbook. Table 2 shows that the infinitive already exists in Unit 1 and it is presented in every unit on an irregular basis. Specifically, when we look at Units 1 through 10, the grammatical item is taught less frequently in Units 1 through 4 and Units 6 through 9. However, all of a sudden the infinitive is used at a high rate in Units 5 and 10. When it comes to qualitative analysis, like the Thai textbook, the infinitive was not treated as a grammatical item in the textbook. Students in Thailand, on the other hand, seem to be under the situation where they read the text including the infinitive. Finally, since the infinitive appears frequently and irregularly, this implies that the textbook was uncontrolled from the perspective of this grammatical usage, similar to Thailand.

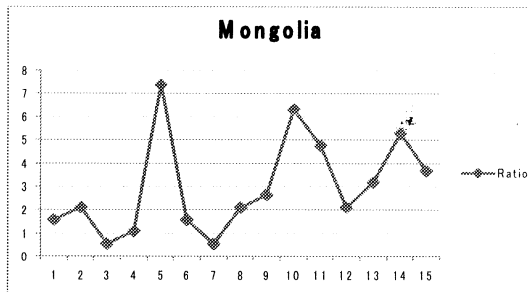


Table 2. Mongolian textbook infinitives ratios

4.3 Chinese textbook

In the Chinese textbook, like the textbook from Thailand, the infinitive appears in Unit 1 and then it is seen around the middle of the textbook, in Units 6, 7, 8 and 9, even though the grammatical item appears only a few times. When it comes to the ratio of the infinitive, on the whole, the infinitive does not seem to be used so frequently in this textbook. With this in mind, the reason why the ratio of the infinitive was low seems to be that the textbook contained more lexical items. With regard to the later units, the infinitive emerges more frequently in Unit 15 than in the other units. Generally speaking, the grammatical item is treated irregularly in the Chinese textbook.

When we look at grammar instruction of the infinitive from the perspective of qualitative research, the infinitive form did not appear in the whole textbook as a specific grammar point. This implies that students in China have never been taught the infinitive as a grammatical item at this stage, like Thailand and Mongolia. Finally, on the whole, we could say that Book 1 was not so strictly controlled and regulated from the perspective of the frequency of the infinitive.

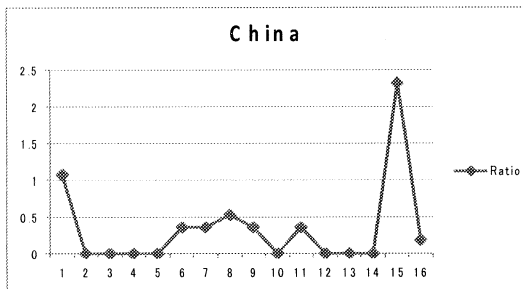


Table 3. Chinese textbook infinitives ratios

4.4 Korean textbook

Regarding the Korean textbook, on the whole, the infinitive is taught rather frequently and the infinitive appears in Lesson 1 of Book 1, like the Thai and Chinese textbooks. The infinitive is seen more frequently as early as in Lesson 2 of the textbook. Likewise, in the later sections the infinitives are shown frequently. Especially, the infinitive emerges at a higher rate, more than 12, in the last two lessons, Lessons 11 and 12.

Qualitatively analyzed, the infinitive was introduced as a grammatical item in the textbook. However, the infinitive was taught to students in a conversation practice, such as 'I want to get a cap,' not as a grammar point. All in all, from the perspectives of qualitative and quantitative analyses of the infinitive, we could conjecture that the Korean textbook was uncontrolled.

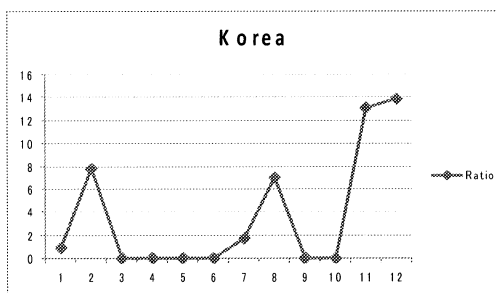


Table 4. Korean textbook infinitives ratios

4.5 Japanese textbook

Table 5 shows that, as for the use of the infinitive, the infinitive has not been presented in Book 1 except for in Lesson 6, in which the grammatical item is seen only as one of the formulaic greeting expressions, 'Nice to meet you'. The infinitive is used rather frequently only in this lesson. From the viewpoint of qualitative analysis, however, the grammatical item was not taught as a grammatical point.

Regarding the Japanese textbook, overall, we should be attentive to the fact that the infinitive has hardly appeared in Book 1, in spite of the frequent appearance of infinitives in the Thai, Mongolian, Chinese and Korean textbooks. This implies that Japanese learners have only briefly been taught the infinitive in the first year of middle school, Lesson 6, but in the upper grades the grammatical usage is treated in more detail.

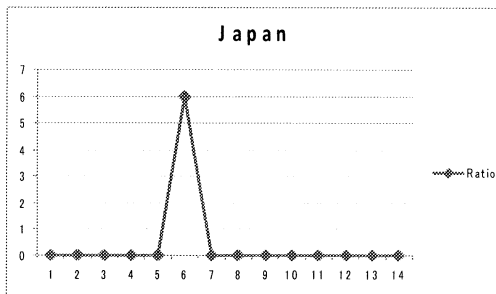


Table 5. Japanese textbook infinitives ratios

4.6 Discussion

As a result, it is inferred that the Japanese textbook was more strictly controlled in terms of the grammatical usage, the infinitive, compared to the other four Asian countries. This appears very characteristic of Japanese textbooks and, in particular, control of grammar teaching has continued in English language teaching in Japan since the Meiji Era. The results of the analysis lead to our surmise that in Thailand, Mongolia, China and Korea, the textbooks were less controlled from the grammatical viewpoint. In other words, we could conjecture that communication-centred English teaching has been done in these four countries, thus using less grammatically controlled textbooks.

On the other hand, in Japan's English education the infinitive has been introduced in class by using controlled language in textbooks, including some communicative teaching. They seem to have been strictly controlled in terms of grammatical usage, albeit at the transitional period from grammar- to communication-centred teaching.

5. CONCLUSION

In the present study, EFL textbooks from five countries in Asia — Japan, Korea, China, Thailand and Mongolia — were quantitatively compared in terms of the frequency of infinitives used in the textbooks. The results of the analysis are summarized as follows:

- (1) Overall, it is inferred that, in terms of the frequency of the grammatical item (the infinitive), English textbooks in the four countries (Thailand, China, Korea and Mongolia) were not so strictly controlled, while the Japanese textbook was rigidly regulated and controlled.
- (2) We would conjecture that in Korea, China, Thailand and Mongolia, English lessons have been done in a communicative way, using less controlled English textbooks. In Japan, on the other hand, English tended to be introduced in class, utilizing controlled language in textbooks. In Book 1 of the Japanese textbook, the infinitive is never taught, except for one formulaic expression, and it is treated in the upper graders' textbooks systematically according to their grade level at school. The findings may be due to the organization of the textbooks themselves along with the English language teaching methodology in each country.

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