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| Title      | A quantitative analysis of the English textbooks of five Asian EFL countries: With a focus on the present perfect tense |
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| Citation   | Studies in Language and Textbook Analysis : 119 - 125   |
| Issue Date | 2008  |
| DOI        |   |
| Self DOI   |   |
| URL        | <a href="https://ir.lib.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/00054560">https://ir.lib.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/00054560</a>                       |
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# A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS OF FIVE ASIAN EFL COUNTRIES: WITH A FOCUS ON THE PRESENT PERFECT TENSE

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper we would like to make a quantitative comparison of the English textbooks in Thailand, Mongolia, China, Korea, and Japan from a synchronic perspective. The textbooks were analyzed in terms of the present perfect tense. The investigation has revealed insights into the nature of the EFL textbooks in the five countries. The findings of this investigation can be summarized as follows. First, among the textbook series analyzed in the present study, every series introduced the present perfect for the first time to the second year students in junior high school. However, the five countries were divided into two groups in terms of whether the present perfect tense appears in the textbooks frequently or only occasionally after it was first introduced to the students. In the Thai textbook series, the present perfect does not appear again until senior high school after it is first introduced in Book 2, and therefore we can say that it is limited to a certain unit. However, in the other four countries, the present perfect can be found in several units after it is first introduced to the students. In this context, very few examples of the present perfect can be found in the English textbooks in Thailand. The country with the next fewest examples of the present perfect is Mongolia. As for Japan, in the beginning part of Book 3 the present perfect tense can be found many times, and the last part again involves many examples of them as a review. The Chinese and Korean textbook series contain the largest number of examples of present perfect use. Especially, the reading and exercise sections contain many examples of the present perfect tense. This quantitative data should help shed light on the nature of EFL textbooks and the teaching of English as a foreign language (TEFL).

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on the synchronic analysis of the English textbooks in five Asian EFL countries (Thailand, Mongolia, China, Korea, and Japan).

According to Richard and Schmidt (2002:180), someone who learns English in a formal classroom setting, but whose use of English in daily life is very limited (China, Japan, and Korea, for example), is said to be learning English as a foreign language (EFL). On the other hand, someone who learns English in a setting in which the language is necessary for everyday life (for example, an immigrant learning English in the US) or in a country in which English plays an important role in education, business, and government (for example in Singapore, the Philippines, India, and Nigeria) is learning English as a second language (ESL). Thus, the system of English education is fundamentally different between the EFL and the ESL contexts, so comparison of textbooks from countries with different contexts would have little meaning. In the present study, therefore, we shall focus on the analysis of the English textbooks of the neighbouring EFL countries of Japan. By comparing and evaluating the results of the synchronic analysis, this paper attempts to find useful information for new EFL textbooks and teaching materials.

The grammatical aspect investigated in this study is the perfect tense (especially the present perfect). 'In English the perfect generally refers a) to a state or event that extends up to a point in time, b) to an event that occurred within a time period, and c) to an event that has results which continue up to a point in time' (Richard and Schmidt, 2002:392). As Swan (1986:493) points out, it is not easy to learn to use the present perfect tense correctly. The differences between the present perfect and the past simple are complicated and difficult to analyze, and the grammatical rules are not always very clear or accurate.

So, it is important to consider how such a grammatical point is taught to students through the English textbooks in EFL countries.

## 2. AIM

The aim of this paper is to conduct a synchronic quantitative comparison of EFL textbook texts from five Asian EFL countries, focusing on the present perfect tense. Among the five EFL countries we want to investigate and compare the following points:

- (1) The grade in which the present perfect is introduced for the first time to the students.
- (2) The frequency of the use of the present perfect in the textbooks.
- (3) Can the present perfect tense be found in several units or is its use limited to a certain unit?
- (4) How many examples of the present perfect can be found in each unit?

## 3. METHOD

The textbooks analyzed in the present study included five series of English textbooks from the five Asian EFL countries, i.e., the Kingdom of Thailand, the State of Mongolia, the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Korea and Japan. They were:

Thai textbooks<sup>10</sup>

- (1) Santos, dos Manuel (2003). *Super Goal*, Books 1-4. Thai Watana Panich/ McGraw-Hill. 5 vols. (*ThaiSG*)

Mongolian textbooks<sup>11</sup>

- (1) Ulzijargal, S., Erdenetsetseg, G., Mira, N. & Batjargal, D. (2000). *English 2*. Approved by the Ministry of Science, Technology, Education and Culture. Unpublished. (JH2)
- (2) Hongorzul, S., Erdenetsetseg, Ts., Gumpilmaa, Ch., Ulzijargal, S., Mira, N., Erdenetsetseg, G. & Tsolmon, G. (2000). *English 3*. Approved by the Ministry of Science, Technology, Education and Culture. Unpublished. (JH3)

Chinese textbooks

- (1) People's Education Press & Longman (ed.) (2001). *Junior English for China*. Books 1-3 (*ChinaJ*)

Korean textbooks

- (1) Chang, Young-hee *et al.* (2001) *Middle School English*. Books 1-3, Tusan. (*KoreaJ*)

Japanese textbooks

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

In order to investigate the English textbooks from the five Asian EFL countries, we first collected the English corpora corresponding to the 5-year secondary education for each country (the three books comprising the junior high school textbook series and the two books forming the senior high school series). We then concentrated on the analysis of Book 1 (the textbook used by first year students of junior high school). However, it was found that among the textbooks analyzed in this study, the present perfect is not introduced to the first year students. Therefore, we extended the analysis of the textbook series to Books 2 and 3. Consequently, the textbooks analyzed in the present study are those listed above. In this research, we limited our analysis to the students' textbooks and we did not include their workbooks. As for the tape scripts found in the students' books, we analyzed them as well.

## 4. ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

The approach employed in this analysis was as follows. First, the aforementioned English corpora comprising 5-year secondary education of the five EFL countries were collected, and separate computerized data files were created for each series of textbooks. Thereafter, we analyzed quantitatively as regards usage of the present perfect tense, focusing on Books 1 to 3 (the textbooks for

<sup>10</sup> As for the Thai textbook series, Book 3 does not involve the present perfect tense at all. Therefore, Book 4 (Book 1 of senior high school) was also analyzed for our information.

<sup>11</sup> Book 1 of the Mongolian textbook series was not available so, we analyzed Books 2 and 3.

the first year, the second year, and the third year students of junior high school), which corresponds to the very first stage of introducing the present perfect. The present perfect sentences were retrieved by using the “find” function of the application Microsoft Word 2000.

‘In English the perfect is formed from the auxiliary verb *have* and the past participle. For example, *I have finished*. She *has* always *loved* animals. If the auxiliary is in the present tense, the verb group is described as the present perfect (e.g. *They have eaten*) and if the auxiliary is in the past tense, the verb group is described as the past perfect (e.g. *They had finished*)’ (Richards and Schmidt, 2002:391).

This study focused on the present perfect, therefore we searched for *have*, *has*, *'ve*, and *'s* in the texts. Then we counted the quantity of items which were followed by a past participle. The results of the analyses were then compared cross-nationally, and the significant quantitative differences were qualitatively analyzed in order to shed light on the features and fundamental issues related to the development of EFL teaching materials.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of our quantitative analyses are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

|        | Thailand | Mongolia | China | Korea | Japan |
|--------|----------|----------|-------|-------|-------|
| Unit 1 | 0        | 0        | 0     | 0     | 0     |
| 2      | 0        | 0        | 0     | 0     | 0     |
| 3      | 0        | 0        | 0     | 0     | 0     |
| 4      | 1        | 0        | 0     | 0     | 0     |
| 5      | 0        | 0        | 0     | 0     | 0     |
| 6      | 0        | 0        | 0     | 0     | 0     |
| 7      | 0        | 0        | 0     | 0     | 0     |
| 8      | 0        | 0        | 0     | 0     | 0     |
| 9      |          | 0        | 0     | 0     | 0     |
| 10     |          | 0        | 0     | 40    | 0     |
| 11     |          | 0        | 0     | 9     | 3     |
| 12     |          | 0        | 0     | 14    | 5     |
| 13     |          | 1        | 0     |       | 1     |
| 14     |          | 1        | 0     |       |       |
| 15     |          | 0        | 0     |       |       |
| 16     |          |          | 0     |       |       |
| 17     |          |          | 0     |       |       |
| 18     |          |          | 0     |       |       |
| 19     |          |          | 2     |       |       |
| 20     |          |          | 0     |       |       |
| 21     |          |          | 0     |       |       |
| 22     |          |          | 0     |       |       |
| 23     |          |          | 0     |       |       |
| 24     |          |          | 0     |       |       |
| 25     |          |          | 0     |       |       |
| 26     |          |          | 0     |       |       |
| Total  | 1        | 2        | 2     | 63    | 9     |

Table 1. Frequency of the present perfect (Book 2)



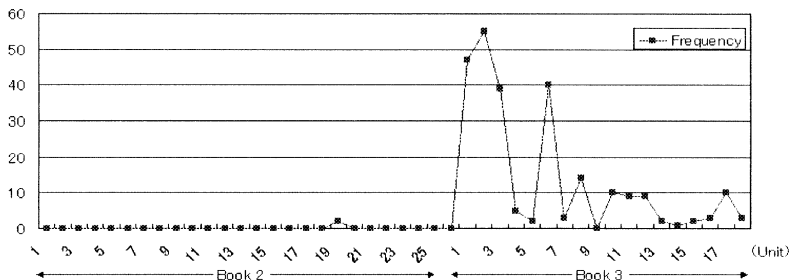


Figure 3. Frequency of the present perfect (China)

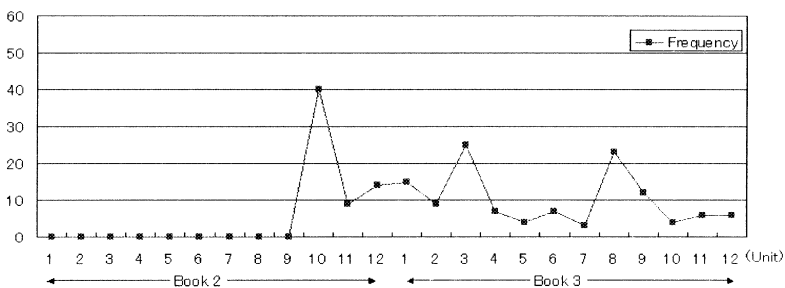


Figure 4. Frequency of the present perfect (Korea)

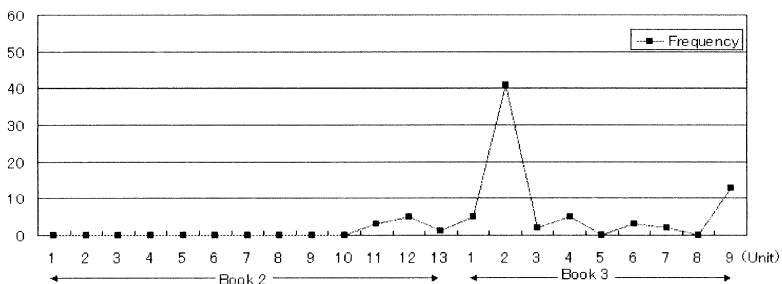


Figure 5. Frequency of the present perfect (Japan)

As mentioned, among the textbooks analyzed in this study, the present perfect is not introduced to the first year students, but rather each textbook series introduces the present perfect for the first time to the second year students in junior high school. After it was first introduced to the students, the Mongolian, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese textbooks teach this tense repeatedly in reading or exercise sections, while in Thai textbook series, the present perfect does not appear again until senior high school.

Specifically, in the Thai textbook series, Book 2 offers only one example of the present perfect tense (in the chant *Sun-Dried Bananas*). The next time the present perfect appears again is in the song *Little Kittens*, in Book 1 of senior high school (see Figure 1). The textbook series is rich in chants, songs, and other activities such as drawing pictures, but the present perfect itself is limited to only a couple of units.

By contrast, in the Mongolian, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese textbooks, the present perfect can be found frequently throughout several units (see Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5). Especially, in the Mongolian

textbook series, explanations and directions are not written in Mongolian. They are all written in English. Examples of these are the following:

Are these similar to the questions you have thought about?

Dictate the following numbers to your partner, then listen and check what they have written.

After you have dictated three numbers, have your partner dictate the other three to you.

It might be one of the explanations for the results that the present perfect can be found in several units.

With regard to the frequency of the present perfect in each unit, once again very few examples can be found in the Thai textbooks (see Figure 1). The above-mentioned chant *Sun-Dried Bananas* involves only the following example: *twenty-one bananas, I've seen!* And only the two following examples can be found in the song *Little Kittens: Oh, Mother dear, come here, come here, for we have lost our mittens. Oh, Mother dear, come here, come here, for we have found our mittens.*

The country with the next to fewest examples of the present perfect is Mongolia (see Figure 2). As stated above, some sentences of explanations or directions involve the present perfect. Other examples of the present perfect are found in reading sections, listening scripts, and exercises.

As for Japan, in the beginning part of Book 3 the present perfect tense can be found very often. First, classroom English, which involves the present perfect, is introduced to students (e.g., I'm afraid I've left my textbook at home). Next, the present perfect is used in the interview game (Let's Play the Interview Game). Then, in Unit 2 the frequency of use rises to its peak. That is because there are a lot of questions for study to practice the present perfect in this unit. After that, the frequency of the present perfect is almost the same as that of the Mongolian textbook series. However, the last part (i.e., review reading section) again includes many examples of the present perfect (see Figure 5).

The Chinese and Korean textbook series contain the largest number of examples of present perfect tense use. For instance, in the Chinese textbook series, the present perfect appears frequently in Units 1, 2, 3, and 6 of Book 3 (see Figure 3). These units involve not only reading materials, but also exercise sections such as Ask and answer, Ask and check, Read and say, and Practice. Through these exercises, students practice the sentence patterns (the auxiliary verb have and the past participle), based on guided repetition or practice. These units also involve some grammatical explanation (in the section called CHECKPOINT), which helps students to practice the aspects of grammar and sentence formation. The large quantity of drills included (pattern practice) may help account for the high frequency in Figure 3.

As for the Korean textbook series, there are three high points for present perfect usage found in Figure 4 (i.e., Unit 10 in Book 2, and Units 3 and 8 in Book 3). A closer look at Unit 10 in Book 2 reveals that this unit involves an activity called 'Find someone who' in the Break Time section. It introduces the Have you ever ...? and Who has ...? patterns as play tools. This game enables students to practice various types of responses based on repetition and substitution, which is often known as pattern practice. Unit 3 in Book 3 introduces the present perfect progressive (e.g., We've been working hard all day). 'The present perfect progressive is used especially for more temporary actions and situations' (Swan, 1986:494). Then, Unit 8 in Book 3 introduces the perfect passive infinitive (e.g., A new hospital has been built near the airport.) Both the present perfect progressive and perfect passive infinitive are not introduced in the Japanese junior high school textbook series. So, Japanese EFL education could possibly benefit from investigation of how these grammatical points are taught in other EFL countries.

Although it was not counted in Tables 1 and 2, the Korean junior high school textbook (Book3) also introduces the conditional with perfect forms (e.g., If you had come, I would have been happy). The Mongolian junior high school textbook (Book3) also introduces the modal auxiliary verb with perfect infinitives (e.g., Take it easy! That might have happened to everyone! It's just bad luck.). This structure has a special meaning in communication: 'it is used for speculating (thinking about what possibly happened) or imagining (thinking about how things could have been different)' (Swan, 1986:390), but the Japanese junior high school textbook series does not deal with this usage. Another grammatical point which is not considered in the Japanese junior high school textbooks is the 'have got' form. In British English, 'when we are talking about states like possession, relationship, illness, etc., the normal spoken (informal) present-tense forms of *to have* are as follows: *I've you've we've they've he's/she's/it's/got*' (Swan, 1986: 283). Although it is not counted in Tables 1 and 2, it should be mentioned here that the junior high school textbooks used in Thailand, Mongolia, China, and Korea do introduce the 'have got' form, which means to possess or own things, illnesses, or ideas. For instance, there are 73 examples found in Mongolian textbooks, 14 examples in Chinese textbooks, 7 examples in Korean textbooks, and 6 examples in Thai textbooks. On the other hand, in

the Japanese junior high school textbooks, examples such as *Roller-skates have got wheels, too.* are not found.

Thus, we were able to examine the textbooks from the five Asian EFL countries. Here it is important to note the linguistic distance between the target language and mother tongue. If the target language is linguistically close to the mother tongue, its acquisition will be easier, and if linguistically distant, it will take more time to acquire the target language. So, when discussing teaching materials in EFL countries, such a linguistic factor might be considered, along with educational, social, economic, and cultural factors.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The findings of the present analytical and comparative study can be summarized in three points. First, as for the grade in which the present perfect is introduced for the first time to students, it was found that among the textbooks analyzed in the present study, the present perfect is not introduced to the first year students. Rather, all of the textbook series introduce the present perfect for the first time to the second year students in junior high school.

Second, regarding the appearance of the present perfect, it can be found in several units from the second to the third year in the Mongolian, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese textbooks, while in the Thai textbook series, it is limited to a certain unit.

Third, concerning the frequency of present perfect usage in each unit, the Chinese and Korean textbook series contain the largest quantity. Especially, the reading and exercise sections each contain many examples of the present perfect. On the other hand, very few examples of the present perfect can be found in the English textbooks in Thai. The country which contains the next fewest examples of the present perfect is Mongolia. As for Japan, in the beginning part of Book 3 the present perfect tense can be found many times, and the final part (i.e., review reading part) again involves many examples of them as a review. It is to be hoped that through repeatedly exposing students to the present perfect tense in their early EFL years, they eventually will come to understand and master this grammatical point.

The results of this analysis need to be closely examined from a comprehensive perspective, taking into account linguistic, educational, social, economic, and cultural factors within the Asian TEFL landscape.

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