

# Comparison of Pedagogical Grammar in Picture Books and English Textbooks

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Research has suggested that Extensive Reading (ER) is effective at improving the English proficiency of EFL learners. Takase and Otsuki (2011) reported that students in repeater courses increased their English proficiency by reading numerous Leveled Readers (LR), the Oxford Reading Tree (ORT) series, in particular, at the beginning of the course. In the light of this research, exposure to an abundance of natural English used in LR has been shown to be valuable to the improvement of EFL learners' English ability. In this study, a detailed description of the English contained in the ORT is given. The comparison between the English in Japanese school textbooks and the ORT revealed that the ORT not only provides language used in natural context, but also introduces grammar items by adopting an inductive approach. It seems that these methods helped learners enhance their working knowledge of English, which affected their post-test.

Extensive Reading has been gaining popularity over the last decade, and more instructors are adopting this method in their English curriculum. Research shows that ER contributes to learners' improvement in their English proficiency at many different types of institutions, including secondary schools (Yasufuku, 2011), technical colleges (Nishizawa et al., 2010) and universities (Takase, 2008). Takase and Otsuki (2011) implemented ER in their repeater courses at a university. According to the report, there were two main reasons why students became repeaters. First, they were not able to pass tests or fulfill class requirements. Second, their attendance was not sufficient because they found English lessons in the previous academic years difficult to follow, and thereby they were discouraged to attend classes. Both reasons were attributed to their low English proficiency. According to a questionnaire survey of the participants, their low proficiency in English was attributed to secondary school English lessons, where the goal of the study was passing university entrance examinations, and the mainstream teacher-centered lesson style. Thus, they had already had negative or even painful experiences of English before they entered university, and were already reluctant or unmotivated to study English.

By comparing the results of pre- and post-tests with the EPER (Edinburgh Project on Extensive Reading) cloze test, Takase and Otsuki (2011) found that their ER course had been effective in enhancing

their students' English proficiency. They reported that repeaters in their ER courses succeeded in reading numerous easily comprehensible English books in a semester. Moreover, mostly notably, the learners enjoyed reading books, and overcame the negative experiences from their earlier stage of English study. There were several guidelines of the implementation of ER that contributed to the improvement in the repeaters' English ability and the change in their attitudes towards English, such as providing time for Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), and own choice of easily comprehensible books. The ER material that was used, shared with the above-mentioned studies (Nishizawa et al., 2011; Yasufuku, 2011), was focused on in this study.

The purpose of the study is to investigate why reading L1 children's picture books motivated university students, as well as secondary school and technical college students, to read and improve their English proficiency. Accordingly, the research question arises: what are the differences between L1 children's picture books and junior high school English textbooks in Japan? To address this question, comparisons are made between school textbooks which are widely adopted at junior high schools in Japan (*New Crown* and *Columbus 21*) and Leveled Readers (Oxford Reading Tree series), in terms of the introduction of particular grammatical features and vocabulary.

## Comparison of English in ER Material and Textbooks

### Two Types of Material for Studying English

School textbooks in Japan are authorized by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Particular grammatical structures and vocabulary are then prescribed for pupils to learn at secondary schools. Moreover, although the arrangement of the lexicogrammatical items is not a prerequisite, there is actually a fixed order to introduce them at each grade. The limited availability of grammar and vocabulary leads to awkward settings in which English expressions are used clumsily in school textbooks.

Stories from the ORT series were originally written for school pupils in the UK. The characteristics of books from the ORT series are summarized as follows: (1) they are used at primary schools in the UK; (2) the stories are arranged from stage 1 to 9 (238 books in total); (3) fixed characters appear; (4) they are delightful stories with an interesting plot in natural English; (5) the same vocabulary and sentence structures appear repeatedly; (6) vivid descriptions of life in the UK can be found. The differences in learning approach between these two types of material are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Description of English in Textbooks Authorized by the Japanese Government and the ORT**

School textbooks	ORT
Explicit introduction of grammatical features and vocabularies	Repeated and recycled presentation of grammatical features and vocabularies
Unnatural context	Storyline and context provided with "experience of the whole story" (Tanaka, 2011)
Deductive approach of grammar learning	Inductive approach of grammar learning

One of the major differences seems to lie in the way of learning: deductive and inductive approaches. In school textbooks, each unit introduces grammatical features which are new to learners. Learners are supposed to reinforce their grammatical knowledge through the subsequent exercises, for example, where the question sentences are taken out of context. In contrast, the ORT contains no explicit grammatical

explanation. In each book, the story simply develops, during which particular grammatical features, words and phrases recur. Learners are exposed to the use of them in contexts embedded in the whole storyline. In other words, the input that the learners receive is from actual use. Thus, school textbooks provoke explicit learning, whereas the ORT promotes learning through implicit learning. Although it is still controversial, there are some reports that implicit learning of L2 grammar is possible (Ellis, 2005; Williams, 1999, 2005; Williams & Lovatt, 2003). In the following two sections, a comparison is made between the presentation of grammar and vocabulary in school textbooks and the ORT series.

### Grammar

As a comparison of particular grammatical features between school textbooks and the ORT, the introduction of the present perfect in school textbooks (1) and the ORT (2 and 3) is examined.

(1) Ken: Thank you very much for this interview, Ms Kileo.

Ms Kileo: I'm glad to talk with you.

Ken: May I ask you a few questions?

Ms Kileo: Of course.

Ken: When did you come to Japan?

Ms Kileo: In 2002. I **have lived** in this town since 2003.

Ken: So you **have been** in this town for several years. How do you feel about your life here?

Ms Kileo: I like it. The people are very kind.

*(New Crown 2, p.10)*

(2) "Well done, Biff!" said Chip.

"Kim and Chang **have got away!**"

"I hope we **get away**, too," said Biff.

*(ORT 7 The Willow Pattern Plot, p.31)*

(3) They saw the man with the greenhouse.

"We are sorry about the broken glass," said Chip, "but could we have the key?"

"Sorry," said the man. "I **sold the key** to the junk shop to help pay for the glass."

The children went to the junk shop. They

told the lady about the key and asked her if she had it.

"Sorry," said the lady. "I **have just sold it.**"

(ORT 7 The Lost Key, p.15-16)

The important point to note is that present or past tense forms of the same predicate are observed in the neighboring text of all three extracts. For instance, in the excerpt (2), the present perfect *have got away* of the predicate *get away* is presented along with the present tense form *get away*. This is the case with (3), whereby the present perfect *have just sold it* appears with its past tense form *sold the key*. In these examples, the present perfect is contrasted with the present and past tenses.

### Vocabulary

The verb *climb* is generally translated into the Japanese verb *noboru* "climb up". The Japanese translation of the word only focuses on upward movement, as found in an example in (4), (5), and (6) from two different school textbooks. Subsequently, the five examples in (7) and two examples in (8) are from two stories in the ORT.

- (4) Kahu went up to the old whale and said,  
"Come, Father. You must live. We must live."

She **climbed on** him.

(*New Crown 3*, p.41)

- (5) One day, a mouse **climbed up** on to a lion's back.

(*Columbus 21 1*, p.122)

- (6) In 2006, Dr. Sankai **climbed a mountain** in the Alps with some disabled people.

(*Columbus 21 2*, p.41)

- (7) Wilma **climbed on** the wall.

(ORT3, *A Cat in the Tree*, p.3)

Wilma **climbed up** the tree. (ibid., p.4)

Wilma **climbed down**. (ibid., p.9)

Wilma's dad **climbed the tree**. (ibid., p.10)

Wilma's dad **climbed down**. (ibid., p.15)

- (8) There were lemon trees in the garden. Nadim and Chip **climbed into** one.

(ORT 7, *The Willow Pattern*, p.24)

Chip and Nadim **climbed down from** the lemon tree. (ibid., p.30)

From the examples in (7) and (8), it is made obvious that the verb *climb* does not always indicate upward

movement. It should also be noted that this verb is presented as many as five times in a book of 16 pages (*A Cat in the Tree*, 79 words in total). This high concentration of the same word is a characteristic of the ORT. Waring (2009) argues that words can be learnt through being encountered twenty times. Moreover, the word often reappears in other volumes (e.g., *The Willow Pattern*). Through numerous encounters with the verb *climb* in different contexts with pictures, it seems learners should be able to understand the main meaning of the word. It is not a one-to-one translation between English and Japanese, which will lead to learners being enabled to manipulate the word in their own communication.

### Conclusion

As the repeaters' improvement of their performance in the EPER test (Takase & Otsuki, 2011) shows, it seems that learners who did ER are trained to acquire a working knowledge of English through an abundance of contextualized English input. All questions in the EPER test examine grammatical knowledge, and as it is a cloze test, context is provided with the questions. Repeaters then seem to have learnt how messages are formed in particular contexts. In other words, it seems that they learnt grammar and vocabulary in use through ER.

As discussed above, the deductive introduction of lexicogrammar observed in school textbooks would be economical as the information is presented explicitly. It, however, remains doubtful whether explicit learning can contribute to helping learners communicate in English in a particular context. Considering the performance by students in higher education, it is clear that deductive teaching in which English is presented out of context has limitations in enhancing learners' working knowledge of English. Contextual aspects of lexicogrammatical knowledge, which would be gained through inductive learning such as ER, need to be taken into English education. It could be suggested that ER be introduced at an earlier stage of English study; that is, at secondary schools. As a result of the combination of inductive and deductive learning, students in higher education would be able to use English for their study, such as by reading articles in the subject area.

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