

VAI TRÒ CỦA HÌNH ẢNH TRONG SÁCH GIÁO KHOA DẠY TIẾNG ANH Ở VIỆT NAM

THE ROLE OF IMAGE IN VIETNAMESE TEXTBOOKS FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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(tiếp theo số 11(229)-2014)

How could the selection of images be improved to enhance their role as a resource for students in understanding and formulating their responses to this topic? Firstly, from a representational perspective, since the main issue in the text seems to be the impact of animal habitat destruction, one wonders why a conceptual image of an apparently pristine, intact rainforest is depicted. It would be possible to show actional images of forests being logged with the human actors and their machines depicted and such images may well include direct depiction of habitat destruction. The major issue of elephant poaching is not canvassed in this text, but again, instead of, or in addition to, the actional image of the elephant walking in a man-made enclosure, it would have been possible to show images of elephants that had been killed for their tusks and perhaps conceptual images of piles of tusks for sale. From an interpersonal or interactive perspective the depicted animals are in distant view, their frontal plane is not parallel to that of the viewer and they are 'observe' images rather than 'contact' images since the animals gaze is not directly at the viewer. So the images are interpersonally remote from the viewer and do not afford any kind of pseudo interpersonal interaction with the viewer. If the purpose of the images were to engage the readers' emotional response and empathy for the animals then close up, contact images with their frontal planes parallel to the viewer would have been more effective choices. Compositionally the arrangement of the images in Figure 1 seems quite dysfunctional. The circular framing of the monkey image and its positioning bring a certain salience to this

image in relation to the other two, and yet, it is not at all clear why this image would be salient. The positioning also seems to suggest some significance to the framing of this image composite in this way, and yet what the significance is remains unclear. Compositional alternatives, perhaps also with alternative images, might, for example juxtapose pristine rainforest with depictions of forest logging and elephant poaching with images of captive breeding programs. A more strategic analysis of potential image selection in the light language teaching purpose of this segment of the unit would facilitate an improved design for this section of the textbook and provide an enhanced resource for teaching and learning.

The unit on Conservation in the advanced version of this textbook contains only three images and these are positioned at the beginning of the unit as shown in Figure 2.

The three conceptual images are of a beach; a denuded forest; and a dead elephant. Superimposed on these images are the labels: 'a. water pollution', 'b. Forest destruction' and 'c. Wildlife extinction'. Then superimposed over part of the three images is the star flash containing a list of three corresponding solutions: '1. Control the cutting down of trees', '2. Ban wildlife poaching and trading', '3. Clean up beaches'. Students are asked to match solutions with the pictures. From a representational perspective these images make a very limited contribution to the meanings being addressed on this page. There is nothing about the image of the beach that suggests water pollution. A 'google' search readily provides images explicitly depicting polluted beaches, which could have been used here. The image showing the destroyed forest does not

indicate how such destruction occurred and what is depicted here might well be the result of a natural event, such as a forest fire. Again a 'google' search reveals many images on the world wide web (www) showing the human agents engaged in forest destruction through various means including, bulldozing, logging and burning. The image of the dead elephant contains no clue to connect this with poaching. As discussed above, in relation to the standard textbook, there are many images available that do explicitly establish the connection between dead elephants and poaching and trading. In fact, in Figure 2, it is only the superimposed label on the image of the beach that conveys the meaning of pollution. The students can successfully match the picture with the 'solution' if they know the meaning of the word 'beach' and match this with the picture – without engaging in any thinking about pollution or conservation at all. To successfully match the image of the dead elephant with the 'solution', all the students need to do is to match the occurrence of the word 'wildlife' superimposed on the picture and also occurring in the 'solution'. In this case the image does not necessarily have any role in the learning task – and the students do not even need to know what the word 'wildlife' actually means, they just need to be able to match the two occurrences of this word. Similarly the image of the forest destruction can be matched with the 'solution' without engaging the students in any actual language learning relevant to the issues of conservation. From an interpersonal perspective, the images are all long-distance views and there are no humans in any of the images, so the interpersonal effect is to create remoteness from the reader. Compositionally, it is the solutions which are more saliently represented because of the white background of the print, the star-flash in which the language appears and the location of this in the centre of the composition. There is a problem with the choice of pink for the text superimposed on the images, since in the case of the elephant image

the yellow background makes the pink text almost unreadable.

As well as noting the limitations of the images as resources for learning in these textbooks and the potential for more strategic selection and use of images, it should also be noted that these are the only images in this unit of the textbook. In the case of the advanced textbook, there are no images to accompany the feature reading text on the Nam Cat Tien National Park (p.127). The inclusion of one or two images with this article would approximate the normal presentation of such a piece in another form of publication and would also create opportunities for enhanced language learning. For example, the article mentions that the national park has seven different habitat types but does not indicate what they are. This could be done by including a conceptual classificational image illustrating the seven habitats and a map locating where these occurred. Such images would then facilitate discussion relating text information, for example, about peacocks dancing, to habitat type and location.

The supplementary textbook for advanced students also contains a unit very similar to the conservation unit in the standard and advanced textbooks. In the supplementary textbook the topic of this unit is 'Our Planet' and it also deals with issues of pollution and conservation. But the images in this book are very different from those in the standard and advanced textbooks and the images are used very differently as a teaching resource. Here we will briefly discuss two examples.



Figure 3: Images in the unit on 'Our planet' in the supplementary textbook (Falla & Davies, 2013, p.81)

Figure 3 is taken from the first page of the unit and it shows the giant chimneys from a coal fired electricity generation plant alongside an image of a series of wind turbines for electricity generation. Representationally, the chimney is a narrative image, which is actional as the emissions are flowing out into the atmosphere. The image of the wind turbines is conceptual since there is no action and the image illustrates the parts of the turbine and tower and also indicates that a very large number of these make up the power generation plant. Just that image distinction is significant since it suggests that the chimney is depicting a polluting process while the wind turbine is not. However, what needs to be discussed is that representing the wind turbines visually in this way means that the sound of the rotating blades cannot be shown and also the cropped image cannot show the vast area of land required for the very large number of towers. In this book the images are not being used to simply match elements of the language. The images with the language of the task description shown in Figure 3 provoke learning of language relations beyond those actually listed in the textbook and do so in the context of learning about pollution and conservation issues. For example, the wind turbine is never named in the book. The superordinate term 'renewable energy' is used in the task description and the naming of the image provides just one subordinate of this superordinate term. Class discussion can then add other subordinates such as 'hydro power' and 'solar power' and hence the images are provoking the building of taxonomic relations in language extending the students' language about this topic. Similar potential exists with the coal-fired chimney as being one subordinate of 'fossil fuel energy'. It is the contrastive nature of the images that provokes also the building of the language of comparison of the advantages and disadvantages of the various forms of energy production. There is no

comprehensive visual provocation of this comparison but sufficient is depicted visually to give impetus to the discussion.

The second image to be discussed from the supplementary textbook is on the second page of the unit about 'Our Planet' and is shown in Figure 4.

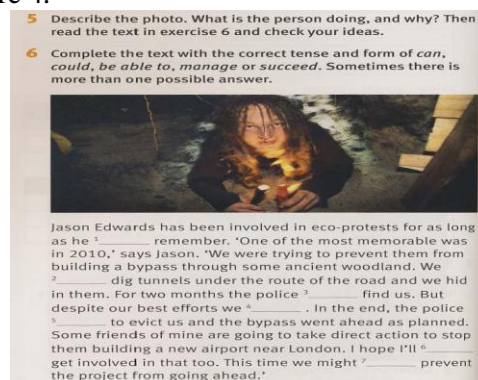


Figure 4: Another image in the unit on 'Our planet' in the supplementary textbook (Falla & Davies, 2013, p.82)

Representationally this is an image of an adolescent holding what appears to be candles or torches and is located in a street or lane. From an interpersonal or interactive perspective, the image is shown from a high angle, with the frontal plane of the person aligned in parallel with the frontal plane of the viewer and with the person making contact with the reader by looking directly at the reader. The representation of a human is important in visually linking the discussion of the destruction of the natural environment and the need for conservation to people, which does not happen in the standard and advanced textbooks. The interpersonal aspects of the image are significant in that they construct a pseudo interpersonal interaction between the represented adolescent and the reader – the gaze of the eyes of the person in the image directly towards the reader makes contact and engages the student interpersonally. The high angle of the image is important in positioning the represented adolescent as not having power and suggesting his vulnerability. In the written text accompanying the image the boy is identified as a protester against the destruction

represented and the interpersonal aspects of the animal images mean that there is no interaction between the reader and represented participants in the book – the reader is kept detached and remote through observe images from long distance views. This is also largely the case for the mass media unit in the advanced book.

In the supplementary text there are more than twice the number of images than in the standard or advanced text and they are distributed functionally throughout the unit as part of the various text resources across the unit. Several of the images involve humans and some of these make direct eye contact with the reader so that the student reader is positioned as an interactant and is not positioned remotely from the images through distance, observe, oblique angle views. The images in the supplementary text are not simply to provide some background context or opportunities for matching vocabulary with pictures and they are not peripheral to the topic addressed in the learning tasks provided for students. The images in the supplementary text go beyond providing a visual background or even a visual analogue to what is represented in the verbal text. These images are active in provoking language activity and language development through the meanings that they communicate, which are complementary to the meanings constructed in the language.

Conclusion

The importance of understanding the contribution to meaning of images and image-language interaction in a wide range of texts has been emphasized as a crucial aspect of literacy in countries where English is the official language of education (Andrews, 2004; Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Hull & Nelson, 2005; Kamil, Intrator, & Kim, 2000; Kress, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; Leu, Kinzer, Corio, Castek, & Henry, 2013; Luke, 2003; Mayer, 2008; Richards, 2001; Rowsell, Kress, Pahl, & Street, 2013; Russell, 2000). This is now strongly influencing the teaching of English in these countries and is impacting on the official curriculum for English in schools. In Australia

the new national curriculum for English (ACARA, 2012b) requires teachers to teach, and students to learn, about the meaning-making role of images and image-language interaction. The expectation is that students will be able to draw on knowledge about the meaning-making resources of images and language to discuss how meanings are constructed intermodally as indicated, for example, in the following content description for year nine students:

Explore and explain the combinations of language and visual choices that authors make to present information, opinions and perspectives in different texts (ACELY1745) (ACARA, 2012a).

Notwithstanding the expectations of multimodal literacy development in the Australian curriculum recent research has demonstrated that many primary school students find great difficulty in comprehending particular kinds of image language relations. The 2005 and 2007 Basic Skills Test (BST) of reading comprehension administered to all students in government (and most non-government) schools in New South Wales (NSW) in Australia were the key source of data in a collaborative research project investigating the comprehension of different kinds of image-language relations by students in year three and year five of the primary school (Chan & Unsworth, 2011; Unsworth & Chan, 2008, 2009). The proportion of test items that involved images in the 2005 BST was 33% and in the 2007 BST 30% (Unsworth & Chan, 2009). These items included two basic categories of image language relations. In the first category, which we called *elaboration*, there was a great deal of commonality between a particular meaning communicated by language and a similar meaning included in accompanying images. In the second main category, which we called *extension*, particular meanings provided in language were not provided at all in the images or particular meanings in the image were not provided in the language.

A total of 64 'visual' test items were identified from the 2005 and 2007 BSTs and the 2007 English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA) for secondary school students. The analysis of the image-text relations associated with these items showed that questions requiring understanding of particular kinds of image-language relations in the extension category were among the most difficult items in the test as a whole and some questions drawing on image language relations in the elaboration category were among the easiest. This shows that for many children in Australian schools comprehending text segments that constructed meaning through image-language relations of extension was a very challenging reading task.

The teaching of English as a foreign language needs to take account of the nature of English language education and the expectation of learners of English where this is the official language. This means that TEFL pedagogic practice and TEFL textbooks need to incorporate learning experiences that prepare those learning English as a foreign language to be able to negotiate the meanings made by images and image-language interaction in English texts. In this paper we have shown that existing TEFL textbooks such as *Solutions* are productively oriented to supporting such learning experiences. While the other textbooks we have examined are clearly not currently designed to support the inclusion of images as an integral aspect of textual meaning, we have suggested some ways in which more strategic choices and use of images could be adopted as part of an improved textbook design process in order for textbooks to support bringing TEFL practices into alignment with the multimodal nature of English language learning in countries where English is the official language. On basis of what it has been possible to illustrate from the modest initial study outlined in this paper, it is clear that the improvement of textbook design would benefit from more extensive studies of this kind.

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