

Interpreting the Meaning of Visually Contextualised Lexis in ELT Coursebooks

*Cultural Considerations for Japanese
Learners*

Pilot Study



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AssocDegSocSc, PG Cert TESOL

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Applied
Linguistics (TESOL) in the Division of Linguistics and Psychology, Department of Linguistics,
Macquarie University, Sydney

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Declaration of Originality of Research

I, Johannes Cornelis Razenberg, author of this work, do hereby declare that:

- The research submitted in this dissertation has not been previously submitted for any other degree.
- All possible attempts have been made to assure accuracy in the recording and giving of information.
- To the best of my knowledge all sources used and any help received in the preparation of this dissertation have been acknowledged.

Signed: 

Dated: *21 May 2007*

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Abstract

This dissertation—a pilot study to see whether or no there are grounds for a large scale empirical study—focuses on cultural considerations relating to adult Japanese EFL learners interpreting the meaning of new visually contextualised lexis in generic EFL coursebooks. Making the meaning of target lexis, referring to vocabulary and grammatical structures, in other words, lexicogrammar, comprehensible is a recognised pedagogical function of visuals. The meaning of foreign lexis may well be incomprehensible in cases where visuals found in coursebooks are as foreign as the language for which their purpose is to contextualise. Therefore, the aim of this pilot study was to discover whether having visuals familiar to the cultural background making up the adult Japanese EFL learner's knowledge better contextualises English lexis. The objectives were to: (1) test whether the interpretation of the meaning of visually contextualised lexis is better when visuals are familiar to the cultural background of the learner compared to when foreign visuals are used to contextualise lexis; and (2) trial a pilot study to become more informed as to what would be required to conduct a large scale empirical study and to determine if there would appear to be grounds for such a study. Two intermediate Japanese EFL learners volunteered for the pilot study. A qualitative approach in the form of a highly structured interview was chosen to check a participant's interpretation of the meaning of new vocabulary from visual tests. 20 words and 10 visuals were selected from commercially available coursebooks in Japan. The remainder 10 visuals were replaced with culturally familiar visuals. Results were collected from both tests and compared to see how each participant scored in the foreign visuals and culturally familiar visuals on the two tests and overall to see if a pattern of higher scores emerged. The results of the emergent pattern showed that participants correctly identified the target lexical item in 55% of cases when using *foreign visuals* and that there was no error when using *culturally familiar visuals*. The findings indicate grounds for conducting a large scale empirical study.