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# An Examination on the Visuals in the Reading Texts of the Turkish Teaching Textbooks for Foreigners

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## Abstract

There are various textbook sets commonly used in teaching Turkish to foreigners. In the literature, the literary content of these books has been examined by many researchers. However, there have not been enough studies on the visuals, which are as important as the texts in the books. The visuals belonging to the texts in the Gazi University Turkish Textbook for Foreigners Level C1 were examined in this research. In this study, document review method, which is one of the qualitative research designs, was used and 39 visuals used with 20 texts in the book were examined by the researcher and 3 experts in terms of their compatibility with the content of the texts. The visuals in the book were first grouped according to Levin's (1981) typology and it was determined that 97.42% of the visuals are representative and appropriately decorative. Then, the compatibility of the images with the texts was examined according to a five-item category list. It has been determined that helpful visuals are used in the book to predict the subject of the text, which is compatible with the content of the text. However, it has been concluded that the visuals are found insufficient to contribute to the comprehensibility of the text, to emphasize the important points in the text, and to support the main idea/emotion of the text. Suggestions were made regarding the use of organizational, explanatory and transformational visuals that contribute more to the understanding of the text in Turkish as a foreign language books.

**Keywords:** Function of Images, Textbooks, Turkish as a Foreign Language, Visual-Text Compatibility

## 1. Introduction

Textbooks are one of the most important materials for educational activities. In-class practices and assessment-evaluation activities are shaped in compliance with selected textbook. Textbooks used in foreign language teaching are designed to develop four main language skills. For this reason, the books usually include a text, vocabulary and comprehension exercises for the text, speaking, writing and listening sections relevant to the subject and sometimes grammar exercises. Visuals are used both as a design element and as a teaching material, starting right from the cover of the book. Colors, fonts and font sizes, placement of photographs and illustrations form the design and these elements provide an overall impression of the book. Visuals are also included in activities related to all language skills as a teaching element.

Texts form the backbone of textbooks in language teaching. The teaching and learning cycle commonly begins with the teacher's understanding of the text in the book, culminates with students' understanding of the same text, and continues with the teacher repeating the same cycle in another text. Therefore, texts have a vital role in the teaching and learning process (Peacock, 1995). In foreign language teaching, texts provide linguistic input in the classroom environment, enabling students to see the use of words in various contexts and the application of grammatical rules in a meaningful whole.

Various topics in the texts contribute to the self-improvement and general knowledge of students by increasing their level of knowledge. Additionally, it provides students with cultural awareness through clues about the worldview and lifestyle of the target language that it contains implicitly. Thus, the texts in the textbooks used for foreign language teaching should be selected carefully.

As well as serving as the main element to improve reading comprehension skills in language teaching, texts play an important role in the development of speaking and writing skills as well. Texts not only create a context in which students can express themselves in writing or verbally within the content, but also reflect the original use of the target language's stereotypes in this context. Besides, a complete comprehension and understanding of a text in the book for students creates a sense of achievement and contributes to the continuation of language learning motivation. Thus, ensuring that the texts are understood by the students is also an issue that should be taken into account in language teaching.

Starting from the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, there has been a great increase in making use of visuals rather than texts for transferring and communicating information in textbooks (Kress, 1995 as cited in Unsworth, 2006). In today's textbooks, visuals occupy a larger place than texts and almost all of the texts are presented with visuals. Because images are message fields just like texts and they are deemed much more permanent than texts. When the visuals are used in compliance with the design principles and also if they are compatible with the content of the text, they facilitate learning, enhance and increase the effect of the text. It helps the reader concentrate on the most important piece of information. They attract students' attention, embody the words and thoughts in the text, create a stimulating richness by activating different senses simultaneously (İşler, 2003; Kayabekir & Tepecik, 2018; Tabak, 2012).

Mayer (1981) stated that the visuals that take place in the texts have five functions: decorative, representational, organizational, explanatory/interpretive, and transformational. For example, an image with trees of the same species that is used to represent a hiking trail is only decorative because it does not have much to do with the content of the text. However, an image in which the scene in a story is illustrated in accordance with what is described in the text is representative because it reflects a part of the text. Visuals like graphics, figures, maps, etc. that are used to better communicate the content of the text have an organizational function. Visuals that are generally used to understand difficult texts written on scientific or technological subjects, and which depict the cause-effect relationships or process steps mentioned in the text are explanatory/interpretive. Visuals such as mind maps and keyword illustrations are used to help readers remember the information in the text have a transformational function (Carney & Lenin, 2002).

Teaching Turkish as a foreign language is carried out by institutions both in Turkey and abroad. Book sets from the publishers like Hitit, Yedi İklim, Gazi and Istanbul are amongst the most preferred textbooks. These books have been studied by many researchers in terms of cultural transfer, grammar teaching, vocabulary, language skills etc. However, the number of studies on the visuals in the books is not sufficient (Kaplan, 2021). The visual design of the textbooks, which is as important as the textual content, is an issue that should be taken into consideration in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. The subject of this research is the function of the visuals used in the reading texts of the textbooks that focuses on teaching Turkish as a foreign language and their text-visual compatibility. In this research;

1. According to Levin's (1981) typology, in which functions are the visuals in the textbooks used in teaching Turkish as a foreign language?
2. What is the level of compatibility between reading texts and the visuals in the textbooks used in teaching Turkish as a foreign language? questions will be answered.

## 2. Method

As this research is based on interpreting the images in Turkish as foreign language textbooks, document analysis method was adopted within the scope of qualitative research. Document review is a scientific research method that can be characterized as collecting, reviewing, questioning and analyzing various documents as the primary source of research data (O'leray, 2004, cited in Özkan, 2021).

### 2.1. Sample

C1 level of Gazi University Turkish Textbook for Foreigners Level C1, which is widely used in teaching Turkish as a foreign language, was examined in this research. C1 Level refers to the professional user according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The texts and reading passages at this level are more comprehensive and relatively challenging in terms of both subject matter and vocabulary usage. Therefore, it is deemed that visuals are very important at this level to contribute to understanding of the text.

### 2.2. Data Collection Tools

The data were collected through a form prepared by the researcher, consisting of two parts. In the first part of the form, there are boxes that will be used to tick to determine which of the five categories in Levin's (1981) typology the visual belongs to. In the second part of the form, there is a visual-text compatibility category list consisting of 5 questions about visual-text harmony. The work of İşcan and Kanca (2021) was used in the creation of this list.

### 2.3. Analysis of Data

In order to ensure reliability in this study, support was received from 3 additional experts other than the researcher herself. Two of these experts are teachers working in the field of teaching Turkish as a foreign language. The other one is a visual arts teacher. 39 visuals in 20 texts analyzed within the scope of the research were evaluated by these four people.

In the first part of the form, the visuals were categorized according to their functions and the formula of Tavşancıl and Aslan (2001) "Reliability = Number of agreement/Agreement + Number of disagreement" was used to predict the consistency between researchers, and the result was found to be 0.92. A result higher than 0.70 means an acceptable level of agreement. Therefore, the result of this study shows that there is a reliable level of consistency amongst the experts.

Whilst evaluating the visual-text relationship in the second part of the form, the arithmetic averages of the opinions were used by making use of the work of İşcan and Cımbız (2018). In calculating the scores, Yes (2), Partly (1) and No (0) were assumed and the score range was calculated as 0.66 with the formula "Highest value – lowest value)/3". The range 0 – 0.66 was calculated as no, the range 0.67 – 1.33 was calculated as partially and range 1.34-2 was calculated as yes.

The data were interpreted according to the predetermined titles using descriptive analysis method. Each image was rated individually by the participants and arithmetic mean was calculated for each image. Then, the scores of all the images were compounded to reach an overall result.

### 3. Findings

In this section, firstly, the findings about the functional categories of the visuals in the Gazi University Turkish Textbook for Foreigners Level C1 book will be presented. Then, findings on visual-text compatibility will be included.

Table 1: Distribution of visuals by functional categories in the texts in the Gazi university turkish textbook for foreigners level C1

Function	<i>f</i>	%
Decorative	17	43.58
Representative	21	53.84
Organizational	1	2.58
Descriptive/ Interpretive	-	-
Transformational	-	-
Total	39	100

When Table 1 is inspected, it can be observed that the texts in the Gazi University Turkish Textbook for Foreigners Level C1 include the visuals with the most representational function with a rate of 53.84%. Next there are decorative visuals with a rate of 43.58%. While the organizational visual is used only once among 39 visuals, it was seen that visuals with explanatory/interpretive and transformative functions are never used.

It is customary to use representational images extensively in textbooks. Moreover, the subject of the text must be appropriate to be able to use explanatory/interpretive visuals. When Gazi textbook was examined, it was ascertained that although the subject was appropriate, visuals with high-level functions were not included. For instance, Figure 1 is used in the text "Air Conditioning for Shoes (Climashoe)", where a sneaker with a propeller is described in detail.

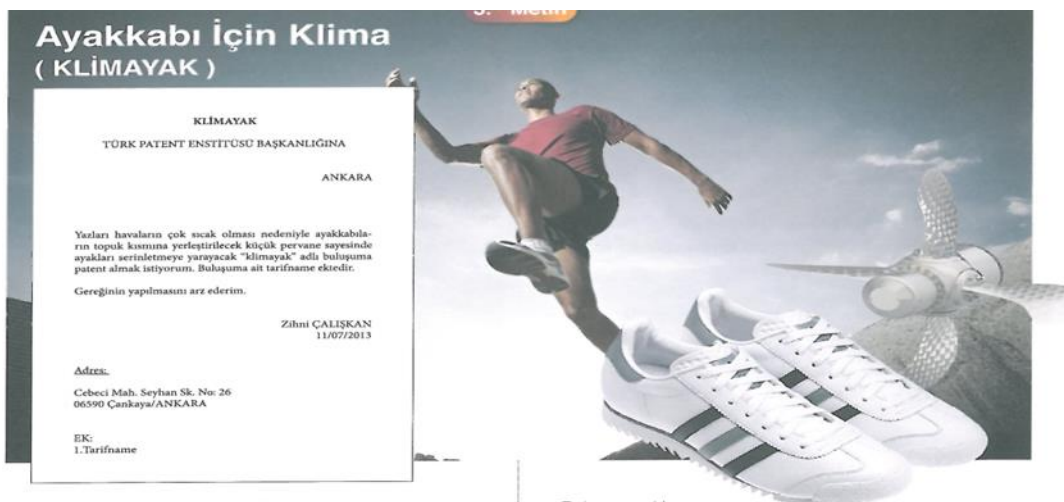


Figure 1: Image that belongs to the air conditioning for shoes text

In the text, the technical features of the shoes are “...*the propeller will use solar energy which will be placed on the heel section is intended to prevent sweating and odors by providing air inside of the shoe with the air channels on the sole.*” explained in detail. In the visual used in the text (Figure 1), the image of a sneaker and a propeller is included in order to reflect the content of the text. However, these two images are far from representing the shoes mentioned in the text.

In the following sections of the text, it is mentioned that there are four images reflecting the “...*top view of the sole of the shoe, the view of the solar powered propeller, the top view of the shoe, the right and left side views of the shoe...*”. However, neither these images nor an image appropriately representing the above mentioned invention are included in the book.

When the visuals in Gazi University Turkish Textbook for Foreigners Level C1 are examined, it seems that visuals were selected from readily available stock images or illustrations on the internet. For instance, the text which includes a short summary of the famous writer Cengiz Aytmatov's novel, *The White Ship* has no illustrations relevant to the story; instead the following images (Figure 2.) were preferred.



Figure 2: Images that belong to the White Ship text

A reason for this situation could be that an artist or visual design expert wasn't employed during the preparation of the book.

Findings regarding the compatibility of the visuals with the texts according to the "Image - Text Compatibility Category List" in Gazi University Turkish Textbook for Foreigners Level C1 are presented in the table below by providing frequency and percentage values .

Table 2: “Image-Text Relationship Category List” of Gazi University Turkish Textbook for Foreigners Level C1  
Frequency and Percentage Distribution

Visual-Text Compatibility Category List	Yes	Partially	No	Total
Visual help to predict the topic of the text	<i>f</i> 21	12	6	39
	% 53.84	30.76	15.4	100
Visual is compatible with the content of the text	<i>f</i> 21	14	4	39
	% 53.85	35.90	10.2	100

Visual highlights the important points in text	<i>f</i>	3	22	14	39
	%	7.70	56.40	35.9	100
Visual contribute to the comprehensibility of the text	<i>f</i>	8	14	17	39
	%	20.51	35.90	43.5	100
Visual supports the main idea/main emotion of the text	<i>f</i>	6	16	17	39
	%	15.40	41.01	43.5	100

Table 2 contains data on the reading comprehension texts in the Gazi University Turkish Textbook for Foreigners Level C1 and the compatibility of the visuals used with these texts. A total of 39 visuals are included in the 20 reading texts in the book. Each of these images was scored by the researcher and 3 experts according to the categories in the table. Afterwards, the average scores of all images were calculated and the frequency and percentage values were attributed.

When Table 2 is examined, it could be observed that 21 of 39 visuals related to the texts in the book help predict the text and 12 of the visuals help just partially. It is understood that 6 visuals do not contribute to presuming the subject of the text. Considering this item, it could be stated that the visuals in the book contribute to estimating the subject of the text, since the sum of the "Yes" and "Partly" values are 84.6%.

If we look at the second item in Table 2, which examines the compatibility of the visuals with the content of the text, it could be observed that 53.85% "Yes", 35.90% "Partly" and 10.25 "No" answers are provided. Considering the fact that more than half of the images are compatible with the content of the text, and 35.90% of them are partially compatible, we can suggest that the images used in the Gazi University Turkish Textbook for Foreigners Level C1 are compatible with the content of the text.

Whereas we look at the item about the visuals reflecting the critical points in the text, it could be seen that the expression "Yes" is included in only 3 visuals with a rate of 7.70%. It is clear that 22 images used together with the texts partially emphasize the prominent points, while 14 images do not. When the results are considered, it can be stated that the visuals used in the Gazi University Turkish Textbook for Foreigners Level C1 does not properly meet the expectations in terms of emphasizing the important points in the text. It can be considered that lack of organizational visuals has an effect on the emergence of this result.

In the fourth item, which examines the contribution of the visuals to the comprehension of the text, it is shown that the highest rate (43.59%) was "No", followed by the answer "Partially" with 35.90%. The fact that the rate of "yes" answer is at the level of 20.51% enables us to conclude that the visuals used in Gazi University Turkish Textbook for Foreigners Level C1 are not sufficient to contribute to the comprehension of the text. It could be considered that the lack of explanatory/interpretive visuals in the book contributed to this conclusion.

It is shown that the highest rate (43.59) was "No" and very close to it (41.01) is the answer "Partially" for the last item, in which the visual support of the main idea / main emotion of the text was examined. Only 6 of the 39 visuals used in the book emphasize the main idea of the text. Therefore, it can be concluded that the visuals used in the Gazi University Turkish Textbook for Foreigners Level C1 are not at the desired level to reflect the main idea/emotion of the text.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The adventure of teaching Turkish as a foreign language, which started with the need to teach Turkish to university students who came to Turkey with student mobility programs in the 1980s, continues rapidly both in Turkey and abroad through institutions such as Turkish Teaching Centers in many universities, Yunus Emre Institute and TİKA. As the number of foreigners who want to learn Turkish is increasing day by day, the number of materials prepared to teach them Turkish is increasing at a similar rate. Resources such as short films, audio recordings, dictionaries, books, lecture videos can be easily accessed on the internet. While in institutions, textbooks are used as the main material.

In order to teach Turkish as a foreign language in a better quality, the textbooks used should also be of high quality. In the literature, mainly the verbal/literary content of the books for teaching Turkish as a foreign language has been examined and suggestions have been made in order to improve and develop it. There have been very few studies on the visual content of the books. Whereas, the visual materials used in the books are as important as the verbal content of the books (Kaplan, 2021). Visuals provide rich content in the development of basic language skills, understanding the social and cultural dimensions of language, and increase learning motivation (Gün and Ünal, 2019). Reading texts and visuals are used together in textbooks to improve reading skills. In order to ensure better learning, the visuals should match the semantics of the text (Kayabekir & Tepecik, 2018). In other words, the concepts mentioned in the text should also be included in the visual so that it contributes to the students' understanding of the concepts in the text. Otherwise, juxtaposition of the picture and the text, which are disconnected from each other, will not contribute to the construction of meaning (Gün and Ünal).

In this study, 39 visuals used for 20 reading texts in Gazi University Turkish Textbook for Foreigners Level C1 were examined. Images were first grouped according to Levin's (1981) typology. It has been shown that 21 of the visuals have a representative function, 17 of them have a decorative function and one of them has an organizational function. It has been determined that visuals with explanatory/interpretive and transformational functions are never used in the textbook. Şimşek (2021) reached a similar conclusion in his study. In the research concerning the visuals of the book, *Journey to Turkish; Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language (Türkçeye Yolculuk; Yabancı Dil Olarak Türkçe Öğretimi)* he stated that representative visuals stood out prominently, while decorative visuals took the second place. However, in terms of contributing to the learning and comprehension of the text, decorative visuals have almost no effect, while representational visuals provide more moderate and transformative visuals very high impact (Levin, 1981, p.68). Many teachers try to draw attention to the subject based on what students see in the images. Notwithstanding there is a high rate of decorative visuals that are not related to the subject in the books and it is a great waste of effort for those who prepare the book, and a great loss of opportunity for teachers and students (Hill, 2013).

In the second part of the study, a five-article category list was created in order to investigate the compatibility level of the texts with the visuals in Gazi University Turkish Textbook for Foreigners Level C1 and the visuals were evaluated by four experts. In the first article, the contribution of the visuals to estimating the content of the text was investigated. The answer was "Yes" at a rate of 53.84%. Therefore, it was concluded that the visuals used in the Gazi textbook helped to predict the subject of the text. İşcan ve Kanca (2021) inspected the Gazi Turkish for foreigners textbook Level A1 and A2 and reached a similar conclusion. The researchers, who reached a high rate of 79.55% at the A1 level and 81.48% at the A2 level, concluded that during preparation stages of the books, the team paid attention to the fact that whether the visuals are contributing to making predictions and making inferences about the text.

Second, this article investigates the levels of representation of the visuals. The answer was "Yes" for 21 visuals used together with the texts, "Partly" for 14 visuals and "No" for 4 visuals. Therefore, it was concluded that the majority of the visuals in the Gazi textbook were compatible with the texts. Ömeroğlu (2016) analyzed four books that are widely used in teaching Turkish as a foreign language, including the level A1 of the Gazi teaching set, and stated that the books are at an "adequate" level in terms of visual-subject harmony. Conclusion of Ömeroğlu's research is similar to the result of this research. Ersoy (2019), on the other hand, examined the views of the instructors who teach Turkish as a foreign language about the visuals in the A1 level books. In his research, he



stated that instructors agree on the view that the compatibility of the visuals with the texts was not of the required level and they perceive this as a problem. Ersoy's research and the results obtained in this study are not in the same direction.

In the third, this article regarding the visuals' emphasizing the important points in the text, the highest rate (56.40%) was found to be "Partially" and the second was "No" (35.90). The answer "yes" being only 7.70% indicates that the visuals in the Gazi textbook are not adequately effective in emphasizing the prominent points in the text. Telçeker Sertoğlu (2019) examined the teachers' views on the visuals in the Istanbul Turkish for Foreigners set and concluded that the items related to the targeted topic in the texts were not prominently included in the visuals. This view expressed by the teachers for the Istanbul textbook set was found to be in parallel with the conclusion reached in the Gazi textbook examined within the scope of the research.

According to the results obtained in the fourth item, while 17 of the examined visuals did not contribute to the understanding of the text, 14 of them contributed partially. "Yes" answer for only 8 visuals shows that the visuals in the Gazi C1 book do not contribute enough to the understanding and comprehension of the text. However, the most important contribution of visuals is to facilitate the understanding of the text. Beginner level learners of Turkish can understand the content of the texts more efficiently with the help of visuals (Şeref & Yılmaz, 2013).

Finally, in the article about reflecting the main idea/emotion of the text, the answers of "No" (43.59%) and "Partly" (41.01%) show that the visuals are insufficient in reflecting the main emotion of the text. This is consistent with the data obtained in the first part of the research. In Gazi C1 level textbook, visuals with almost purely representational and decorative functions are included. Such visuals only serve to guess the subject and to have superficial information about the content. If visuals are intended to provide high-level benefits such as ensuring the understanding of difficult concepts in the text, emphasizing important points, and supporting the main idea, organizational, explanatory and transformational visuals should be included more in the textbooks.

Attention should be paid to the visual content just as much as the written content in the preparatory stages of textbooks for teaching Turkish to foreigners. Visuals should be more carefully selected in terms of both design and relationship and compatibility with texts, and if necessary, they should be created by artists. Additional research on the visuals in the existing textbooks can detect deficiencies and thus contribute to the improvement of the visual design of the books in newer editions.

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