Investigation of Text Readability of the College Scholastic Ability Test and High School English Textbooks Based on Lexical Familiarity and Syntactic Complexity

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The aim of this research is to suggest perspectives of development of the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) and English textbooks by analyzing text readability of the CSAT and English textbooks based on measuring of lexical familiarity and syntactic complexity beyond the traditional readability measures. Overall, the CSAT was shown to be more lexically difficult and syntactically more complex than the English textbooks reviewed. In addition, the English textbooks fluctuated much more in their vocabulary frequency level and contained a smaller amount of academic words. In order for text readability to be well-balanced when developing the CSAT and English textbooks, the CSAT first needs to be developed not resorting to EBS-CSAT prep books mainly focusing on solving test items but based upon English textbooks which were laboriously developed through the rigorous procedures authorized under the national curriculum. Secondly, more academic words need to be included in the future development of textbooks to help Korean students with their future higher education. Lastly, it is necessary to employ procedures investigating lexical familiarity and syntactic complexity when developing the CSAT and textbooks.

Key words: readability, lexical familiarity, syntactic complexity, CSAT, textbook
I. Introduction

This year will be the first to witness a criterion-referenced English assessment in the history of the CSAT. The main purpose of adopting the criterion-referenced assessment for the CSAT is twofold: in order to firstly reduce private English education spending and secondly lessen learning burden by excluding difficult test items far beyond the level of the national curriculum which has caused excessive competitions over test scores under the current norm-referenced assessment of the CSAT. However, as Choi (2014) pointed out, the difficulty of the CSAT way beyond the level of textbooks is so big a problem which threatens to impede the normalization of the public English education, because the students struggle with getting test scores by mostly dealing with CSAT prep books on and off campus. As such, the students are forced to be skillful of getting items correct even without appropriately understanding the sentences, paragraphs and thus the texts of the CSAT. The current CSAT seems to have failed to be built aligned with the national curriculum and the English textbooks because 70% of the CSAT have resorted to EBS-CSAT prep books which do not reflect the national curriculum. Thus in order for the criterion-referenced assessment to function the way it purports to, the CSAT would have to assess much of what the students learn in school under the national curriculum. One of the best ways to realize it is that the CSAT best reflects textbooks because textbooks are well developed based upon the national curriculum. Therefore, it needs to be taken into account that text readability as one of the significant considerations be well-balanced between the CSAT and the English textbooks when developing them.

In this juncture, it might be well worth the effort to analyze the gap of text readability between the CSAT and the textbooks through a variety of methods beyond traditional readability formulas and ultimately seek for perspectives of building well-balanced text readability between the CSAT