

BOOK REVIEW

Normahdiah Sheik Said. *Appropriate Illustrations for Appropriate Functions: The Taxonomy of Illustration*. Serdang: Universiti Putra Malaysia Press, 2011.

"A picture is worth a thousand words" is an eloquent statement of the critical role visual representation performs in communicating information. Whether it be in print or non-printed form such as the computer screen, a visual representation can communicate an idea or a concept or a body of information in a way which is more effective, economical and elegant than a wordy account of it. The effective use of a visual representation is dependent on both the type of representation that is used and how it is used in relation to the text that accompanies it, as well as the intended target audience. This subject is precisely the focal concern of *Appropriate Illustrations for Appropriate Functions: The Taxonomy of Illustration* written by Normahdiah Sheik Said, an academic at the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication at Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Malaysia.

Based on a Master's thesis undertaken at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, United Kingdom, in 1990s, *Appropriate Illustrations for Appropriate Functions* discusses "types and functionality of illustrations" by classifying them under "four taxonomies built on a 5-pointer scale." The four taxonomies are based on four categories. The categories are: (1) level of detail used in an illustration; (2) degree of abstraction in technique; (3) degree of conceptual abstraction; and (4) degree of dependence on text.

Inclusive of the Introduction, *Appropriate Illustrations for Appropriate Functions* comprises six main chapters: Introductory (Chapter 1); "What is Illustration?" (Chapter 2); Taxonomy of Illustration According to Physical Form (Chapter 3); Taxonomy of Illustration According to Its Relationship with Text (Chapter 4); A Case Study on the Use of Illustrations in Dorling Kindersley's Eyewitness Series of Children's Information Books (Chapter 5); and Illustrations and Intended Audiences (Chapter 6). Although the book discusses the subject of types and functions of illustrations in general, it does have a special focus or emphasis on illustrations for books and materials intended for children as demonstrated by Chapter 5.

"Knowing appropriate illustrations for appropriate functions will help us get the right message across to the right audiences in the right place

at the right time," asserts the author in the Introductory chapter. Filled with illustrations on almost every page, *Appropriate Illustrations for Appropriate Functions* can be used as an example of whether illustrations are used effectively to communicate its own message to the reader. While some illustrations in the book succeed in communicating effectively to the reader, some however, fall short. For example illustration 2.1 on page 7 and 2.6 on page 9 respectively, has a part of it cut off which does not allow the title in the illustration to be read in full. To illustrate the message of "Degree of dependence on text," the author placed a table containing two figures, i.e., Figure 4.7a illustrating "an inter-dependent or integral illustration" and Figure 4.7b for "an independent or optional illustration" at the bottom of the page. Both figures are repeated on the top of page 42. Unfortunately, the size of Figure 4.7a and 4.7b on page 41 fail to illustrate clearly integral illustration and independent illustration respectively. Instead of repeating the figures on page 42, the right message would have been more effectively communicated if the two figures were made bigger in size to fill up page 41.

Apart from some ineffective use of illustrations, the book also contains numerous grammar mistakes. For example, "Books for instant will be there..." (page xii), "...illustrations plays a vital role..." (page 3), "Such placing of types and functionally according to scale..." (page 6), and "What is meant of physical form illustration?" (page 7). A thorough language editing of the book is needed to ensure it is free of such errors.

Despite the two weaknesses identified above, *Appropriate Illustrations for Appropriate Functions* is a useful reference book for a college student and the general reader on the subject of illustrations, specifically with regards to types and functions. The book does not assume any previous knowledge of the subject and provides the reader with a basic knowledge of it in a simple and straight forward manner and style. The font size of the text with colourful subject headings and important statements taken from the text which the author considers as critical points to get across to the reader captured as quotations and placed in colourful boxes make the book an easy read. Chapter 5 which documents the research findings of a case study on the use of illustrations in information books for children published by the award winning publisher Dorling Kindersley in its Eyewitness Guide Series provides useful information for writers, editors and designers of children's books.

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