English textbooks in Nepal and in Japan:
A comparative study

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Foreword

Tribhuwan University, Nepal and Saitama University, Japan concluded an academic exchange agreement in 2002. Based on this agreement, both universities have been exchanging students and faculty members as well as carrying out joint research and educational activities. This paper "English Textbooks in Nepal and in Japan" is an example of joint research. K. Uda at Saitama University made an examination of Nepalese English textbooks; B.K. Sharma from Tribhuwan University examined Japanese English textbooks. The textbooks examined are those which are used for the first three years from the beginning of public English education in the two countries. In order to see the research materials with fresh eyes, the examinations were first done independently; after finishing the independent work, discussions were held and the joint conclusion was drawn.

Part I. Textbooks in Nepal (Kazuko UDA)

I-1-1 Topographical Features of Nepal

The Kingdom of Nepal is a landlocked country, bordering India and China. Land area is 147,000 km², of which 75% are mountains. Population is about 25 million, most of which live in the flat urban areas. There is a big gap in the land altitude: from less than 200 m in the regions near India to more than 8,000 m in the Great Himalaya Range. The big gap in the altitude causes big differences in the climate: from semi-tropical monsoon in the Tarai Plain, mild climate in the foothills and valleys, cool climate in the mid-mountain regions and the frozen in the Himalayas. Though a small country, Nepal is diverse in its topography.

I-1-2 Social Features of Nepal

Nepal's governmental form is designated as constitutional monarchy. Under the principles of constitution, king rules the country supported by council members. However, there is no
parliament; political party movement is suppressed and there is no election at present in 2005; family kinship is strong in politics.

Surrounded by big countries, Nepali society is multi-racial and multi-cultural; Nepal now counts near 40 ethnic groups in its territory. Religion is strong; about 90% are Hindus and 10% are Buddhists. As a buffer-zone country, Nepal has been under the influence of world powers: different nations came in; sometimes they controlled Nepal and sometimes gave aid to Nepal. Nepalese have to think of their own country in the relationship of other countries. Sense of difference/diversity is important about Nepali society as about its topography.

I-1-(3) History of English Education in Nepal

The earliest record about the English language in Nepal is about the 17th century; an inscription at Hanuman Dhoka states that King Pratap Malla (1641-74) knew English as one of the 14 languages he knew. Christian missionaries taught English to the Nepalese population and there was always some contact with India, where British East India Company controlled its trade and economy.

English education began in the second half of the 19th century; the Rana family and other rich families taught English to their children by employing private teachers. Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana, in 1844, opened the first English school in Nepal at his palace. The purpose of this school, the Durbar School, was to educate only his own children. The ruling class knew how important English was in order to deal with the British power; it was common they sent their children to boarding schools in India. The popular mass had to use English when they were recruited in the British army; the Nepalese occupied one fourth of the famous Gurkha Soldiers.

The revolution of 1950 brought about a radical change in education as well: monopolization of education by the Rana family ended and educational institutes, both public and private, were established throughout the country. English, of course, had been a compulsory subject at the Durbar School; the compulsory status for English was retained till 1971. In this year, a drastic change was carried out: the National Education System Plan was introduced, where English was defined as one of the UN languages. The intention was to shift emphasis from English to the education of the national language, i.e. Nepalese. English class hours in public schools were reduced and the weight of English in the School Leaving Certificate became half. But today, English is returned to a compulsory subject due to the increasing necessity of English in the globalization.

I-2-(1) Overview of the Nepali Governmental English Textbooks

With the basic outline of Nepal and its education in mind, we will examine the first three Nepali governmental English textbooks which are intended for the students of Grade 4, 5 and 6. These students are 9, 10 and 11 years old. Though the students' ages are different, these three Nepali textbooks are used for the first three years in the public English education; in this sense they are comparable with the three Japanese junior high textbooks.
The Nepali governmental textbooks are: *My Primary English, Book One, Grade 4* ; *My Primary English, Book Two, Grade 5* ; and *Our English, Grade-6*. All these were developed by the Curriculum Development Centre, one section in the Ministry of Education. Publisher is denoted as His Majesty’s Government.

I-2-(2) *My Primary English, Book One, Grade 4*

The first edition of *My Primary English, Book One, Grade 4* was published in 1995; it has been reprinted every year without revision till this issue at hand of 2003. At its first glance, all the Japanese will be surprised at its coarse quality of appearance: paper is rough; there are some pinholes on the paper; printing is not clear; it is mono-color without photographs; and the binding is loose.

Though the physical quality is low, the ambition entrusted with the textbook is high. “Preface” points out the following three: there was not a big development in English textbooks in Nepal; in order to make a change, this textbook was written by incorporating the opinions of teachers, experts and students; and the main purpose of this textbook is to give functional English education, taking local interest and needs into consideration. In “Introduction”, the following five are important: this textbook was developed upon the Primary Education Curriculum 1992; the aim of this textbook is to lay foundations in four English skills; all new languages should be introduced orally; learning to write is important at the early age; and language learning should be enjoyable. Through “Preface” and “Introduction”, we understand that the biggest aim in compiling this textbook was to be useful in society.

This textbook of 144 pages holds 6 sections: “Family and Friends”, “School”, “People and Places”, “Time”, “Doing Things” and “Meeting New People”. These section titles may indicate that the book is topic-oriented. However, when we actually go through the textbook, we find that the topics crisscross and grammar exercises are inserted deviating from the topics.

The textbook is not completely grammar-oriented either. Different levels and different categories of grammatical instructions are mixed unsystematically: simple statements come together with order sentences; simple questions and wh-questions come together. There is no alphabet table or table of numbers in the textbook. The first letter students have to write is small “i” and the next is small “i”; as a result the first word students have to write is “ill”. What is the reason “ill” is the first word? How can students learn reading and writing a new language without an alphabet table?

All these problems mean categorization and arrangement are not managed well. “Preface” and “Introduction” write about the lack of curriculum development in Nepal; we will be able to agree with their own opinion about the lack of educational structure in Nepal.

I-2-(3) *My Primary English, Book Two, Grade 5*

*My Primary English, Book Two, Grade 5* was written in 1996, one year later than *Book One*. The publisher, the editor, and the authors, except one author, are the same. “Preface” and “Introduction” again, except for the dates, are the same. Its physical appearance is the same.
too.

The content structure, however, is a little different: instead of 6 sections as was in *Book One*, there are 4 units; one unit holds 4 to 5 lessons with each title; and one unit composes one story by going through the several lessons in it. *Book Two* again seems to be topic-oriented.

Here again we see the same problems. Grammar and language functions are mixed with topics and stories. The unit/lesson arrangement is not neat. Sequence from *Book One* is not good either; sometimes students have to repeat what they studied in *Book One*. Teaching order is not systematic: past tense is used from the very beginning of *Book Two*, but Unit 4 “Time” teaches how to use future and past tenses. As to *Book Two* again we agree with its “Introduction” and “Preface”: lack of curriculum development in Nepal.

I-2 (4)  *Our English Book, Grade-6*

*Our English Book, Grade-6* shows a big difference from the previous two textbooks. This textbook, the first edition in 1994 and the revised edition 2001, is for Grade 6, which belongs to the lower-secondary level, not the elementary level. This book is B4 size, bigger than the previous A5, and more bulky with 213 pages in total, though the paper/printing/binding quality is the same. There is no “Introduction”; there is only “Preface”, which puts much emphasis on the enhancement of moral values through education. Section division is small in this book: there are 23 sections plus a verb list and a glossary. There is no section title; sections are divided according to grammatical functions and language usages. *Our English Book* seems to be more language-oriented.

Despite these changes, *Our English Book* repeats the same problems: categorization and arrangement are not well done. Cursive writing begins in this book, but again, there is no alphabetical script table. There are many cases of repetition of the same language function, but on the other side, there are many cases of lack of proper foundation to learn a new function. Studying through this textbook, students will be sometimes bored and sometimes they will find their tasks not easy to accomplish from the lack of the basis.

I-3  Assessment of the Textbooks

After the examination of the three Nepali governmental English textbooks, Japanese eyes will be able to point out the following.

*Weaknesses of the textbooks*

1. There is only one choice of the textbook; there is only one series of governmental English textbooks and all public schools use the same books. The whole nation will take the same approach to English, while there can be varieties of attitudes to English. There is only one authorized series and in case of mistakes, mistakes would become nationwide.

2. Curriculum is not developed; to categorize and systematize is wanted.

3. There are not enough subsidiary teaching materials; an audio cassette tape is provided but its recording is only of the listening exercise parts.
4. Physical quality is not good; learning is easier when things are shown in colors with photos on smoother sheets of paper.

Strengths of the textbooks

1. There is kind consideration for children to make language learning enjoyable. There are exciting stories, quizzes and games. The textbooks are true to a motto “to be enjoyable” in the introduction of the textbooks on the elementary level.

2. Only the target language is used: students are immersed in the English environment.

3. There are more of animals, plants and different kinds of people than in the Japanese textbooks. This keen sense toward life and its multiplicity is reflecting the nature and the society of Nepal. We also feel the intension of the authors to nurture among children a gentle heart to all beings in the universe. Religions in Nepal have some influence too.

Jeremy Harmer in his *How to Teach English* (Chap. 11, p. 169), points out 9 areas to be considered when teachers choose their textbooks: 1) price, 2) availability, 3) layout and design, 4) methodology, 5) skills, 6) syllabus, 7) topic, 8) stereotyping and 9) teacher’s guide. When we apply these 9 areas to Nepali textbooks, there is no problem about 1), 2), 4), 5), 7) and 8). Books are provided to children free; communicative approach, which is the most common over the world now, is adopted; there is a good balance in 4) skills; there is enough variety in the topics; and fair equal attitude is taken to all people and countries in the world.

Problems with Nepali textbooks lie in 3) physical quality, 6) syllabus and 9) subsidiary materials.

There are problems, but in fact, there has been advancement in Nepal’s education. Statistical data about the whole education in Nepal are available in *Analytical Description of Educational Indicators of Nepal 1997–2001*, published by the Statistics Section in the Ministry of Education and Sports. In this book we read, for example, the numbers of schools/students/teachers are increasing, female students/teachers are increasing, and student–teacher ratio is improving. The data tell us a steady advancement in the education of Nepal.

An overall assessment of the Nepali governmental English textbooks will be the confirmation of the “Conclusion” of the *Analytical Description of Educational Indicators of Nepal 1997–2001*: despite continuing problems, Nepali education system is showing visible signs of progress and is trying its best to fully attain the educational goals and objectives. (p. 56.) Though there are problems, we see in the governmental English textbooks strong intention and efforts to improve the education of the country and the country itself. “Preface” of *Our English Book* emphasized “the enhancement of moral values through education.” Sincere attitude for the improvement of the country should be most evaluated.

References for Part I


Part II. Textbooks in Japan (Bal Krishna SHARMA)

II–1–(1) Background

Japan is located to the east of the Asiatic continent and between the Pacific Ocean and the Japan Sea. Its culture has long been influenced by the continent, but advances in the means of communication have brought the cultures of the west to Japan as well. Japan consists of four principal islands Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu and nearly 7,000 smaller islands. The islands of Japan are mainly of seismic and volcanic origin. Geographic location and characteristics of Japan leave it open to such natural calamities as earthquakes, typhoons, floods and heavy snowfalls. Despite these disadvantages, Japan is a land of beauty and its people are energetic and ambitious.

Apart from its unique geographical features, Japan has its identification as a country of advanced science and technology. Education has played a vital role to reach Japan in this height from the past to the present.

II–1–(2) School Education System

We can trace the spread of education since the beginning of the modernization of Japan which took place in the Meiji Era (1868–1912). By the beginning of the twentieth century, enrollment in compulsory education exceeded 90 percent. As the result of this spread of elementary education, secondary education was promoted together with the development of vocational education as well as the expansion of educational opportunities for women. After World War I, the educational system was further expanded and higher education was developed. Following the end of World War II, education in Japan realized the concept of equal opportunity and elevated national educational standards became a driving force for the development of the economic society.

After the fundamental law of education and school education law were enacted, the new system of school education was introduced, realizing the principle of equal opportunity for education. The modern school educational structure of Japan is as follows:

Kindergarten education

Kindergartens admit children aged 3, 4 or 5 and provide them one to three year courses. The objective of kindergarten is to nurture young children from the age of 3 until they join elementary school, provide them with a suitable environment for learning and support their
physical and mental development.

**Compulsory education**

Children must attend 9 years of compulsory education from the age of 6 to 15. Compulsory education can be looked upon from two stages: elementary school and lower secondary school. Elementary school aims to provide children aged between 6 and 12 with 6 years of general elementary education and lower secondary education aims to provide children aged between 13 to 15 with three years of general secondary education based on the education they have received in elementary school.

**Upper secondary education**

Upper secondary school provides children who have completed compulsory education with both general and specialized upper secondary education of three years. General courses provide general education suited to the needs of both those who wish to advance to higher education and those who intend to gain employment but have chosen no specific vocational area. Specialized courses are mainly intended to provide vocational areas as their future career.

II-1-3  **English Education in Japan: Then and Now**

English was first taught in Japan following the brief stop at Nagasaki of a British ship in 1808. Since the Japanese found that they could not communicate at all with the sailors from that ship, the Tokugawa government ordered the interpreters to add the study of English to their study of Dutch, French and Russian. In 1853, Japan was forced to be open to the Americans, and the study of English began in earnest. Two major methods emerged early in the history of English teaching in Japan. One emphasized correct pronunciation as well as meaning, and the other emphasized meaning but not pronunciation or syntax. In the 1890’s, a system of language teaching was established. English was compulsory in the middle and higher secondary schools. English was mostly taught by native speakers, including many Christian missionaries. English medium classes were held at institutions of higher learning; most textbooks came from the US. In the early 1900’s foreign texts and teachers were gradually replaced by Japanese texts and teachers. Japanese scholars who had studied abroad became influential in the field of English education. English became primarily a subject of study, mainly learned for the purpose of reading written texts, instead of as a means of communication.

In 1921, Herald E. Palmer, an English linguist and specialist in language teaching, was invited to Japan and became an adviser to the Minister of Education. He advocated the Oral and Direct Methods. His methods were used in various parts of Japan and obtained good results. Unfortunately, they required a command of English far beyond that of most Japanese teachers of English so never came into general use. Shortly before and during World War II, the study of English was discouraged because it was considered the enemy language. However, this policy was reversed after the war.

Now, most Japanese students start studying English when they enter the first year of junior high school at age 13. English is offered in more than 99% of all junior high schools and almost all students take it even though it is an elective. In general primary schools do not offer English
classes and secondary schools do not offer foreign languages other than English. Most universities have an English section as part of their entrance examinations, so it is very difficult to go to a university without having taken English classes in secondary schools. The future of English education in school education apparently seems to be more optimistic. Many Japanese go to English speaking countries and many English people come to Japan merely to promote English teaching in Japan.

II-2- (1) Analysis of English Textbooks

Apart from giving introductory information on school education system in Japan with a particular focus on English education, this paper also makes an attempt to analyse the *New Horizon* English textbook series meant to be for the junior high school students in Japan. Also an attempt has been made to provide some feedback in light of the findings so that some steps can be taken to improve textbook writing. *New Horizon English* course for the Junior High School comprises 3 textbooks. Each text is supposed to be prepared along the guidelines of the New Courses of Study introduced by the MEXT (2002). The New Courses of Study has its principal aim to make students communicatively competent to carry out practical communicative activities. Accordingly, these texts are also supposed to follow the same path and present the language material according to the communicative needs of learners. The authors of the textbooks are a team of English Language Teaching (ELT) experts, most of whom are university professors.

The findings of the research went simultaneously with the analysis of the texts. To make it easy to give a cursory look, the summary of the findings is outlined as the strong and weak aspects of the textbooks.

*Strengths of the textbooks*  
1. The textbooks provide table of contents and glossary of words.  
2. The textbooks are accompanied with supplementary materials like audio CDs and teacher/student guides.  
3. They have attractive layout, with a high quality paper.  
4. They make use of sufficient number of color pictures and photographs which work as a source of motivation for the beginners.  
5. The textbooks have undergone a thorough proofreading and editing, and contain no instances of errors.  
6. Writing is legible and reading materials ensure readability, with enough spacing at the top, bottom, left and right margins.  
7. Listening material makes male and female voices in a balanced way.  
8. The content of the material is drawn from diverse areas such as sports, science, technology, environment, etc.  
9. Writing activities are authentic.  
10. There is an adequate treatment of grammar.  
11. There is an intercultural element in the texts, drawing materials from various cultures
and developing intercultural awareness in the students.
12. These texts integrate four language skills in a well balanced manner.
13. The textbooks thoroughly follow the guidelines specified by the Monbukagakusho.

Weaknesses of the textbooks
1. The textbooks are more grammatical than communicative.
2. Heavy use of students' mother tongue encourages mental translation by the students, and discourages to ask and respond in the target language.
3. The texts lack variety in reading activities and tasks.
4. There is an under representation of para-orthographic texts like charts, graphs, tables, maps, etc. as reading materials.
5. The content in the beginning of each text clearly specifies what structures the students will learn in each unit, but does not make an attempt of what communicative skills they will acquire using what language functions.
6. Poor incorporation of communicative activities that include proper information gap.
7. These texts discourage the ability to use dictionary by the students themselves.
8. There are no exercises particularly meant for vocabulary.
9. There is a poor inclusion of language games, word puzzles, etc.

II-2-(2) Recommendations and Suggestions
The courses of study (2002) claims to attach importance not only to grammar but also to communicative skills. It makes an attempt to specify what language functions the learners are required to learn and what grammatical structures they are supposed to use. But the courses of study treats grammar in more detail specifying all the structures the textbooks should include. It deliberately excludes the thorough treatment of communicative functions with their exponents. Consequently it was found that these textbooks also put too much emphasis, following the guidelines of the Ministry of Education, on grammatical aspects and not enough on interesting content and fun activities. Therefore, the courses of study can be revised and communicative functions can be given with their respective exponents. Following the guidelines, each textbook should specify what communicative functions the learners will master using what exponents.

Heavy use of students' mother language should be avoided, at least giving instructions and word meaning bilingually or in the target language only. Of course, use of Katakana as a pronunciation guide seems superficially an effective way to help students make noises easily in the target language. Unfortunately, it also does an effective job of teaching children how to pronounce English non-Englishly. 'Cook', for example, becomes Kukku (Textbook 1, page 10); 'chap', chappu (Textbook 2, page 56); and 'cool' kooru. Resultantly, this leads all these kids memorizing Japanese English, a brand of English that is incomprehensible to native English speakers. Although there are views on Japanese English as a variety of English (for example, Morrow: JALT 2004) from the world Englishes perspective, Japanese English is still immature to introduce itself as a variety of English with its own distinct vocabulary and pronunciation.
pattern.

Another equally important issue to address is the government policy to introduce English education from the junior high school. One important but controversial issue about foreign language learning is the theoretical claim made by critical period hypothesis. This hypothesis states that young children have the natural ability to learn a language in a faster and better way. But around puberty, they lose the natural ability for acquiring a language and accordingly it becomes slow and difficult later. It should be noted, however, that introducing English when the students are around 13 is rather a more considerable issue to be addressed. Moreover, the new curriculum proposed in 2002 has reduced class hours and subject content by about 30 percent. It is clear that this additional reduction in the number of words and content included in Ministry-approved textbooks will only further disadvantage to public lower-secondary school EFL learners in pursuit of the EFL objectives set for them and their future EFL learning needs. An attempt should be made to make a provision of English education from earlier grades with more class hours.

The texts should incorporate more fun activities like language games, quizzes, puzzles, songs and rhymes, jokes and riddles, etc. Appropriate attention should be made toward the inclusion of reading materials like maps, graphs, charts, etc. There is a poor inclusion of tasks. Students, for example, can prepare a particular food after reading a set of instructions or find the way reading a map.

II-3 Conclusion

It has long been realized that English education is very important in Japan due to increased internationalization. English in Japan has multiple purposes. The original reason that the Japanese have for learning English is to learn about the outside world. In order to learn about technology, systems of government and economy, culture, etc. it is inevitable to learn English because Japanese is little used outside of Japan. It is equally important to learn English to explain Japan and its unique culture to the outside world as well. It has been frequently observed that students who have learned English in Japan have shown poor performance in English proficiency tests like TOEFL, TOEIC or IELTS and are deprived of better study opportunities in English medium universities only because they have poor English background. Since junior high school is the foundation level where English education starts formally in Japan, it is very important that students make a good beginning.

References for Part II


Joint Conclusion

Different eyes can see different cultures more distinctively. English textbooks of two countries were examined in a cross-cultural context and the characteristics of the two were pointed out from the opposite side. Findings will serve as good mirrors to recognize one's own country and its education. To refer to the opinions of both sides will be a good means to develop our countries and our education.

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