

## English Textbooks in Japan and Korea

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English education in Japan and Korea are similar in some respects. Although both countries are not completely but mostly monolingual society, where citizens do not need English in their daily life, they have begun to realize the importance of English as a tool for international communication, and as a result their English education is becoming more and more communication-oriented. It seems that Korea is the forerunner in communicative teaching and Japan is following. This report compares English textbooks used at schools in Japan and Korea, which shows a great deal on how English is taught in both countries. Since English is taught as a regular subject for 3rd to 6th grade at elementary schools in Korea but not in Japan (tentatively taught for 5th and 6th grade), the English taught at Korean middle schools (junior high schools) is much more advanced than that of Japan, however, it is not necessarily true of the senior high school level. The goal of English textbooks in each country is slightly different: Koreans aim to express themselves and exchange ideas in English, while Japanese textbooks are designed to arouse learners' interests in foreign culture and to foster their communicative attitude.

**Key Words:** Korea, Japan, English textbooks at school, Readability, Theme of Material

### 1 Introduction

The situation surrounding English education is similar in both countries: Japan and Korea. First of all, both of their native languages are quite different from English in grammar and structure: the English word order is S+V+O, while Korean and Japanese are agglutinative with *joshi* in Japanese and *chosa* in Korean as postpositional word functioning as an auxiliary to a main word, and their word order is S+O+V. Second, people can live without English in their daily lives: almost all residents in both countries speak only their native language of Korean or Japanese throughout the country, in contrast to many other Asian countries where English is used as a lingua franca. Third, thanks to globalization in the last few decades, English is becoming more and more

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necessary as a tool for communication in business, not as a tool for absorbing knowledge from advanced countries as in the past. Therefore, English education in both countries has been changing from the once-dominant grammar-translation method to the communicative method. Fourth, since many people in both countries feel unsatisfied with their English competence, English education is often criticized since they feel that their English competence is inferior to other countries.

The aim of this report is not the comparison between Korean and Japanese English education itself, but to find out some of the advantages of each country through the comparison.

### **2 Structure and Readability of English Textbooks**

#### **2.1 Elementary school**

Children start learning English in the third year in Korea and the fifth in Japan. At Korean elementary schools, English has been taught for 2 hours a week since 1997. On the other hand, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), which assumes that English education in Japan is behind that of other Asian countries including Korea, announced that they would officially introduce English classes to elementary schools, though most of them have already introduced them tentatively. Nevertheless, they will be held only once a week not to burden children.

Textbooks in both countries focus on fostering children's interest in foreign culture and communication in English rather than on acquiring linguistic knowledge. All of them are edited by each country's supervising ministry but Koreans have national official textbooks titled *Yono* (English) while Japanese ones are not compulsory, called *Eigo Noto* (English Note). Textbooks for Korean 3rd year and Japanese 5th year classes are similar both in structure and appearance, being students' first English textbooks. They are full of pictures and few English letters and instructions are given in their mother tongues. They include dozens of picture cards as supplements used for activities in each lesson.

Characters in these textbooks are of various races. In Korean text, they include Koreans, a girl who seems to be Japanese named Mika and some English speaking children of different races whose nationalities are not obvious. On the other hand, it is more conspicuous that Japanese *Eigo Noto* is designed to arouse children's interest in international communication with not only native speakers of English but also others. Its characters are Japanese, Americans, Koreans, Chinese, French and Spanish. Moreover, greetings in these languages are introduced in lesson 1 and ways to count numbers in them are included in lesson 3. There are few English letters except the title of each lesson and short instructions such as *Listen and Repeat, Let's Play*. Their aim

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is acquiring aural and oral communication skills in their early stage.

The Korean textbook for the 3rd year has 92 pages and dozens of picture cards, and consists of 8 lessons:

1. *Hello, I'm Minsu*
2. *What's this?*
3. *Happy Birthday!*
4. *Wash Your Hands*
5. *I Like Apples*
6. *How Many Cows?*
7. *I Can Swim*
8. *It's Snowing.*

Each lesson presents several instructions: *Look and Listen*, *Listen and Repeat*, *Let's Play*, *Let's Chant*, *Let's Play*, *Look and Speak*, *Let's Sing*. Each lesson takes up familiar topics related with children's daily life.

The Japanese textbook for the 5th year is thinner than Korean 3rd year textbook but similar in content. It has only 64 pages but 9 lessons. These are lesson titles:

1. *Hello, Annyon Haseyo* (originally in Hangul). *Bonjour.*
2. *I'm Happy.*
3. *How Many?*
4. *I Like Apples.*
5. *I don't like blue.*
6. *What do you want?*
7. *What's this?*
8. *I study Japanese.*
9. *What would you like?*

Instructions found in each lesson is *Let's Listen*, *Let's Chant*, *Let's Play* and a few activities.

Comparing the 6th year's textbooks used in these two countries, as it is the 4th English textbook for Koreans and the 2nd for Japanese, it is obvious to say that the English level is quite different. *Eigo Noto* for Japanese 6th years does not widely differ from its 5th year's text either in textbook structure or in English level though alphabet is introduced and some English words appear. On the other hand, Korean text is 136 pages thick plus picture cards and reading and writing tasks are introduced as *Let's Read* and *Let's Write*, in addition to *Look and Listen*, *Listen and Repeat*, *Let's Play*, *Let's Chant*, *Let's Play*, *Look and Speak*, *Let's Sing* (written lyrics are presented) and so on. Considering these, there is already a great difference in English abilities between children in Korea and Japan before they even enter middle schools or junior high school.

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### **2.2 Junior high school (Middle school)**

Four kinds of English textbooks are published for each grade of middle school in Korea and seven in Japan. Out of these texts, this report monitors Kumson Churpansha's *Middle English* for Koreans and Tokyo Shoseki's *New Horizon* for Japanese. The 7th grade is the 5th year of learning English for Korean students and the first for Japanese equivalents as a regular subject in the school curriculum.

#### **2.2.1 Tokyo shoseki *New Horizon 1-3***

In each of the textbooks, *New Horizon 1-3* balances four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Each of them presents various kinds of activities to improve all of the four skills. Since *New Horizon 1* is the first English textbook taught as a regular subject for Japanese students, naturally it starts with an introduction before the regular lessons begin. This includes classroom English, easy nouns used in daily life and the alphabet. Except this part, all of the three textbooks used for three years in junior high schools have almost the same textbook structures: there are 6 to 11 units (these three textbooks use the term unit instead of lesson). Most of the units in the 7th grade textbook have simple conversations as the main material. As the grade proceeds, the units take up short stories, diaries, letters and so on. Each unit presents a few key grammatical sentences, substitution drills, tasks for self-expression and some have listening practice which includes the key point in the unit. Between each unit, practices for speaking, listening or writing are included. Reviews and grammar practices are also sometimes inserted, in which grammatical points are shown using a few simple grammatical terms and diagrams.

#### **2.2.2 Kumson's *Middle School English 1-3***

Each textbook consists of 12 lessons. As for the first graders, the textbook starts with greetings, classroom English and the alphabet just as in the textbook, Japanese *New Horizons*. Each lesson starts with the introduction called *Get Ready*, in which multiple-choice questions on vocabulary and expressions related with the topic of the lesson are presented. The second part is the listening section named *Figure It Out*, which carries several multiple-choice questions. The third part for speaking is named *Speak Out*, which presents a 60-80 word dialogue and its related speaking tasks. The fourth is reading material called *Read & Think*. This part is a two-page essay or short story, which is followed by the fifth part, *After You Read*. This part is for reading comprehension and consists of two multiple-choice questions and two short written answer questions. The sixth is *Write It Out*, in which tasks related to the topic of the

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lesson are prepared but some of them require students to write about themselves. The seventh is *Work It Out Together*, which has tasks for group activities and the eighth and final part is *English in Use*, which presents several activities to learn the grammar points in the section. Instead of using grammatical terms as the Japanese texts do, *Middle School English* textbooks are designed to help students acquire grammatical knowledge by repeated use of same grammatical points through various activities.

Both of the textbooks for the second and the third year have the same textbook structure. The second year text has 12 lessons, all of which consist of 8 parts. The first part is *Let's Listen*, with some multiple questions and one requiring a short written answer. The second part is *Let's Talk*, which carries two dialogues (70-80 words for 8th grade and 90-110 words for 9th) and some related speaking tasks. The third part is the reading material called *Let's Read*. Before each reading material, one-page pre-reading activity is presented, which plays the part of introduction to motivate students to advance to the main reading material (200-250 words for 8th grade and 270-370 words for 9th). After the reading section, students check their understanding in the fourth part, *Reading Comprehension*, which gives students some multiple choice questions, to fill in the blanks questions and so on. Then the fifth part is *Let's Write*. After comprehending the reading material, students are required to write short sentences related with the lesson's topic. The sixth part is *Summing Up*. This part is for students to acquire linguistic knowledge such as pronunciation, intonation, useful expressions and vocabulary presented in the lesson. Sample sentences and pattern practices are included but no grammatical terms are used, unlike Japanese textbooks. The seventh part is *Test Yourself*, designed for self-study, which consists of small listening quizzes, short dialogues fill-in-the-blanks, vocabulary and grammatical practices. These practices are contrived to help students acquire vocabulary and grammar without translation or grammatical terms. The last part is *Build up Your English*, which is divided into two stages: supplementary and intensive. Each student belongs to a supplementary or intensive class according to their achievement and they study the stage corresponding to their course.

### 2.3 Senior high school

National curriculum standards in both countries regulate that English is compulsory until 10th grade and selective for later grades; *High School English* for Koreans and *English 1* or *Oral Communication 1* are compulsory while *English 1, 2, Reading, Writing English Conversation* are advanced selective for Koreans and *English 2, Oral Communication 2, Reading and Writing* are selective in Japan. In reality, however, most high school students except vocational high schools continue to learn English though high school as a de facto compulsory subject.

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### 2.3.1 High school English in Korean and its equivalent English 1 in Japan

In general, English level in Korea may be much higher than in Japan, however, it is not necessarily true of senior high textbooks. This report monitors Kyohaksa's *Middle English 3* as a Korean textbook for 10th graders and its Japanese equivalents, Bun-eido's *Unicorn 1*, one of the most widely used textbooks in Japan, as well as Kirihara's *World Trek 1*. There are only a few kinds of English textbooks for Korean 10th graders and all of them are similar in English level, while Japan has 36 from which in Japan so that teachers can select the proper textbook according to their students' achievement level. The English level in the Korean textbooks gradually rises from junior high to senior high and so does the Japanese text *World Trek 1*. The length of sentences can be one criterion to measure the English level or readability of the text though it is not an absolute measure as we must consider vocabulary and sentence structure.

Table 1: Comparison of Reading Materials for 9<sup>th</sup> year

| Textbook                | Number of Lessons | Average Number of Sentences Per Lesson | Average Number of Words Per Sentence | Total Pages (B5 Size) |
|-------------------------|-------------------|--|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Middle English 3</i> | 12                | 26.7                                   | 11.4                                 | 295                   |
| <i>New Horizon 3</i>    | 9                 | 22.7                                   | 8.5                                  | 125                   |

Table 2: Comparison of Reading Materials for 10<sup>th</sup> year

| Textbook                   | Number of Lessons | Average Number of Sentences Per Lesson | Average Number of Words Per Sentence | Total Pages   |
|----------------------------|-------------------|--|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| <i>High School English</i> | 12                | 45.1                                   | 13.7                                 | 236(B5)       |
| <i>Unicorn English 1</i>   | 12 *1             | 55.5                                   | 11.9                                 | 177(A5)       |
| <i>World Trek 1</i>        | 11 *2             | 44.1                                   | 9.3                                  | 144(LargerA5) |

\*1: Number of lessons for *Unicorn English 1* includes two supplemental reading lessons

\*2: Number of lessons for *Word Trek 1* includes one supplemental reading lesson

The Table 1 and 2 show that the average length of a sentence in the Korean 10th grade textbook increases from 9th grade 11.4 words in the 9th year to 13.7 words. As for Japanese texts, *World Trek's* sentence length increases from 9th grade text, *New Horizon 3's* 8.5 to 9.3. On the other hand, *Unicorn 1* averages 11.9. Considering *Unicorn 1* is one of the most widely used textbooks, the gap in English level between Japanese junior high and senior high is larger than that of the Korean equivalents, which have a gradual development.

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### 2.3.2 Reading

Table 3: Comparison of Reading Textbook for 12<sup>th</sup> year

| Textbook                  | Number of Lessons | Average Number of Sentences Per Lesson | Average Number of Words Per Sentence | Total Pages (B5 Size) |
|---------------------------|-------------------|--|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Reading</i> (Kyohaksa) | 15*1              | 78.3                                   | 13.1                                 | 267(B5)               |
| <i>Unicorn Reading</i>    | 11*2              | 82.9                                   | 15.7                                 | 175(LargerA5)         |
| <i>Orbit Reading</i>      | 26                | 26.9                                   | 12.0                                 | 160(LargerA5)         |

\*1 Number of lessons for *Reading* includes three rapid reading lessons

\*2 Number of lessons for *Unicorn Reading* include one supplementary reading lessons

Through middle school and in the 10th grade, the English level in Korea is higher than in Japan, however, the level of reading material sometimes reverses in three years at high schools. The table 3 shows that the average lengths of lessons and sentences in the Japanese *Unicorn Reading* often adopted at prestigious schools is longer than those of Korean Kyohaksa's *Reading*, though the latter is larger in size, thicker and has more lessons. The quantities of reading materials in both textbooks is not so different as they look since the truth is that the font of Kyohakusha's text is a little larger and it contains more pictures and its layout is more spacious. Considering the subject *Reading* is usually adopted for 12th year both in Korea and Japan, the readability in the Japanese textbook adopted at prestigious high school declines sharply.

On the other hand, another type of textbooks exists in Japan. *Orbit Reading* in the table one is the example. The average length of sentences in the textbook is 12.0 words, which is just slightly longer than *Unicorn English 1*'s 11.9 and even shorter than Korean's *English 1*'s 13.7. Easy textbooks such as *Orbit* tend to be adopted at lower level schools. It shows that there are considerable disparities in English achievement among high schools in Japan.

The reason why the level of reading material does not risen sharply in Korea is that the textbook is used not only as reading material, but also to deepen the understanding of the material through additional activities. Pre-reading and post-reading activities are more abundant in Korean texts than in Japanese ones. Koreans' *Reading* presents two pages with three tasks before each lesson:

- (1) *Guessing the Words* (guessing words related with the lesson referring to illustrations or photos),
- (2) *Filling in the Blanks* (multiple choice)
- (3) *Warming Up* (cartoon dialogue).

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Post-reading tasks for Korean *Reading* is much more varied. The first one is a two-page comprehension check: *True or False, Multiple Choice, Scanning,* and *Reading Map* (itemization for the summary of the content) and discussion on the content of the lesson. The second one is *Language Points & Idioms* (including structures and essential idioms). The third is *Essential Reading Skills* (instructions for passage structures and effective ways of reading). The fourth is *Checking Yourself* (checking vocabulary, junctures, reading comprehension, etc). The fifth is *Supplement* (this varies depending on lessons: speaking practice or interview in groups, puzzles, listening comprehension, etc). The sixth is *Extension* (supplementary reading and questions for its summarization). The last one is *Performance Assessment* (additional task for research on the topic of the reading material). The title of the textbook is '*Reading*' but it also contains tasks for self-expression and communication.

Compared with the Korean *Reading*, which presents various activities besides the reading materials, the Japanese *Unicorn Reading* presents only a short one-page introduction before each lesson: a background briefing in Japanese and listening quizzes (multiple choice). After the reading, two-pages of post-reading tasks are presented: *Comprehension Check* (filling in the blanks of the summary), *Understanding the Study* (true or false or multiple choice quizzes), *Useful Patterns & Expressions* (filling in the blank using the idioms or expressions used in the text), *Vocabulary Building* (filling the blanks using words used in the text or their derivatives) and *Challenges* (a few questions in English).

As for the other reading textbook *Orbit*, even fewer tasks are presented before and after the reading. There are only a few questions for scanning before each lesson as well as less than a page of tasks to summarize the reading material. This textbook does not adopt activities other than reading. Another characteristic of the textbook is that it is divided into two parts. Part 1 consists of 15 lessons, each of which is a one-to-two page story or essay. Part 2 consists of 11 rather long lessons of five to six pages.

### 3. Theme of Materials

It is needless to say that the prime purpose of English textbooks is to help students acquire linguistic knowledge and skills. However, through using the materials, students can also acquire knowledge on the theme and the contents can contribute to the development of students' values and characters. In addition, choosing an adequate theme for the teaching material is important since students' interest in the content can help to raise their motivation to learn. Examining the theme of each lesson or unit shows us what the editors of the textbooks want students to learn in addition to English itself.

This report examines the middle school textbooks from 7th to 9th grade in countries, *High School English* and *Reading* for Korean high schools and the Japanese equivalents *English 1* and *Reading*. Themes are classified into 12 groups



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as follows:

1. English
2. Daily Life (including school, family, shopping)
3. Own Culture and Society
4. Foreign Culture and Society
5. Integration or Comparison of 3&4
6. Philosophy and Ethics (including way of living and ambition)
7. Peace and Human Rights
8. Women's Status
9. Technology (including the Internet and Email)
10. Science
11. Environment
12. Others

Lessons or units overlapping several themes are classified depending on which theme is more emphasized.

Table 4: Percentage of Each Classification in Textbooks

| Middle School (Junior High)  |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Theme Classification   | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    | 6    |
| Korean (%)   | 2.8  | 39.5 | 8.3  | 13.9 | 5.6  | 0.0  |
| Japanese (%)   | 0.0  | 25.0 | 6.7  | 40.0 | 6.7  | 6.7  |
| Theme Classification   | 7    | 8    | 9    | 10   | 11   | 12   |
| Korean (%)   | 0.0  | 5.6  | 13.9 | 8.3  | 2.8  | 0.0  |
| Japanese (%)   | 6.7  | 0.0  | 3.3  | 0.3  | 10.0 | 0.0  |
| Korean: <i>Middle School English 1-3</i> (Kumson Churpan)<br>Japanese: <i>New Horizon English Course 1-3</i> (Tokyo Shoseki)   |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| High School (Senior High)  |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Theme Classification   | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    | 6    |
| Korean (%)   | 3.7  | 18.5 | 3.7  | 0.0  | 0.0  | 14.8 |
| Japanese (%)   | 8.7  | 4.3  | 8.7  | 13.0 | 8.7  |      |
| Theme Classification   | 7    | 8    | 9    | 10   | 11   | 12   |
| Korean (%)   | 7.4  | 7.4  | 7.4  | 11.1 | 3.7  | 3.7  |
| Japanese (%)   | 13.0 | 4.3  | 4.3  | 8.7  | 13.0 | 8.7  |
| Korean: <i>High School English</i> (Kumson Churpan), <i>Reading</i> (Kyohakusha)<br>Japanese: <i>Unicorn English 1</i> (Bun-eido), <i>Unicorn English Reading</i> (Bun-eido) |      |      |      |      |      |      |

It is natural that a lot of lessons or units in both countries middle schools' textbooks should take up concrete themes concerned with daily life and school life (Classification No. 2) and they become more abstract such as 6

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and 7. Furthermore, topics about technology, science and environment increase as grades gets higher.

The most prominent and interesting difference between the middle school textbooks is Number 4, Foreign Culture and Society. It accounts for as much as 40 % of the lessons in Japanese textbooks, while it is only 13.9 % in Korean texts. If we include No.5, approximately half of the Japanese junior high school textbooks are concerned with foreign culture and society. They take up not only English speaking countries including the U.S., Canada and Australia, but also others such as Korea, Nepal and Peru. This shows that the editors (or MEXT) hope Japanese students will learn about foreign countries to develop a global view through English, which is a tool for international communication. Though the differences decrease in high school textbooks, Japanese textbooks tend to have more lessons on the themes of peace, human rights and the environment than in Korean ones.

One of the characteristics of Korean textbooks is that many lessons take up scientific and technological themes which are No. 9 and 10 in the classification. These account for over 22 % of middle school lessons while Japanese texts have only 3.3 %. This shows that Koreans regard science and technology as important issues and hope that future engineers will be actively involved in the global society using English. Some lessons in classification No. 9 both in Korean and Japanese textbooks take up the topics of the Internet and email, which reflects today's society.

Another characteristic of Korean textbooks is that they often take up a philosophical or ethical theme. Two lessons (Lesson 7 titled *Dream On* in *High School English* and Lesson 7 *How to Fulfill Your Dream* in *Reading*) emphasize the importance of keeping dreams and making efforts to fulfill them and others preach social morality or proper behavior such as kindness to others, friendship and fraternity. This characteristic may be a reflection of Confucianism in Korean society. Some other lessons in both countries' textbooks take up stories of successful women, but this tendency is stronger in Korean ones.

Summing up these differences between these textbooks, Japanese English education places more emphasis on international understanding as well as absorbing knowledge through learning English while Koreans require students to think about their way of living and cultivate their character. This shows that English education in Japan and Korea has different historical and cultural backgrounds.

### 4. Conclusion

One thing that is common to both Korean and Japanese English education is that they have evolved from simple absorption of knowledge and now emphasize communicative competence. However, it can be easily estimated that English level is generally higher in Korea than in Japan, partly because Koreans start to learn English at the age of 9, so they have a longer exposure

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to English than Japanese do. Korean English education is ahead of the Japanese in terms of the communicative teaching method. Since 1997, the 7th national curriculum reform emphasizing a more communicative teaching method has encouraged teaching English through English, which has become popular in Korea as the demand for more exposure to English in classrooms is increasing. Korean English textbooks show that they aim for the practical usage of English by emphasizing function over grammatical knowledge: they do not use grammatical terms but help students acquire key sentence structures by repetition through dialogues, reading materials and various activities. They are designed to require students to use English as actively as possible rather than focusing on grammatical correctness. They have a lot of advantages that Japanese English textbooks can use although not all of them can be imitated, considering students' motives and their burden.

All of the textbooks in both countries are well contrived to make learners interested in English by taking up interesting topics and using attractive illustrations and photographs. Examining the contents of these textbooks shows the cultural difference between Korea and Japan. The aim of learning English for Koreans is to express themselves and to exchange ideas in English, while that of the Japanese is rather to arouse their interest in foreign culture and society to foster their motivations to communicate in English. It is worthwhile for the English education in both countries to refer to each other's textbooks to apply its advantages to their own texts.

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