



*This is the first of a series of reviews of contemporary foreign materials concerned with reading instruction. Each will be written by an educator familiar with the developments of his country in this area. In this first article, Ichiro K. Sakamoto of the Women Teachers' College of Tokyo reviews a conference report on language education. Readers will be interested, we think, in the effects of the American occupation upon content and methods, the introduction of phonics, and the parallelism of American and Japanese instructional problems such as: dealing with individual differences; the real purpose of reading instruction; and child development and reading.*

George D. Spache

THE ASSOCIATION OF JAPANESE COLLEGES FOR LANGUAGE EDUCATION, RECONSTRUCTION OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION—EXAMINATION OF ITS ESSENTIAL QUALITIES AND PROBLEMS TOKYO: MEIJI, 1968.

Reviewed by Ichiro K. Sakamoto

The progress of language education in Japan has now arrived at a turning point. The *Course of Study* in primary and middle schools was revised in 1968 after a lapse of ten years. At this turning point, there are a lot of problems to be solved. For instance, what is the essence of language education; how is the teaching method to be devised and finally established? On these urgent questions, the main staff of the Association (President: H. Mochizuki) give their comments in this book.

The first area covered in the historical survey of language education. Shigeru Watanabe describes the detailed history covering the twenty years after the Second World War. As some of you may be more interested in this rather than the pre-war period, I will summarize it here.

In 1945, in the despondency which followed soon after the defeat, the first task in the reading classroom was to smear the old State readers with black ink. Thus, phrases or sentences which were estimated to have had inflamed militarism or ultra-nationalism were erased. State textbooks emphasizing democratic and peaceful thought were published two years later, and two years after that we could select private readers without restraint.

Another large reform concerned teaching methods. Prohibiting the old uniform, teacher-centered method, the American officers advised us to adopt the way of unit learning. This was designed to place the language — as a tool subject — in the marginal area of the core-curriculum, which was centered on social studies. The subject matter, therefore, proceeded to make children achieve such reading ability or skill only as was needed in their social life.

One more important reform was the way in which to write the Japanese syllabary and Chinese characters. The amount of Chinese characters to be taught were limited, and “kana” spelling (the syllabary) was changed to a phonetic system. Though there are arguments for and against it even now, it is a fact that it has simplified the learning process.

After the peace treaty, the cry for originality in the language education system became louder. It was insisted that the language be an independent subject in the curriculum, taking the position that the language had three main functions: (1) communication in social life, (2) personality formation, and (3) a medium of culture. The unit learning system centering on language education was carried out at that time but the effectiveness was seriously doubted. Doubts had also arisen throughout the whole educational system after the war, because it was found that scholarship was on a lower level. As a countermeasure, those pushing for a change advocated a rigid selection and systematization of subject units.

In the revision of the *Course of Study* in 1958, language education became stable on this new basis. The curriculum was systematized in order to develop four abilities: reading, writing, hearing and speaking. In addition, teaching literature came to be emphasized more than before. During the next ten

years, the idea of what should be the ideal structure of this system was discussed and, with it, new teaching methods (i.e. programmed learning) have been developed. And now, we are at the beginning of the next turning point to promote the reconstruction of our new language teaching.

Eikichi Kurasawa says that we have two directions in which to reform language education. One is how to improve the present level of theoretical study, and the other is how to fill the vacuum and stagnation of practical teaching. Without careful consideration of the former, we at first hastened to take in foreign techniques right after the war. But later it was realized that a theory was needed which could promote and integrate those techniques into those our own, and it has been developed and brought into practice to some considerable degree. Before we consider the structure of the subject of language, there are three points which we must base on.

The first is the problem of continuity vs. discontinuity of education in life. The subject of language must serve life. On the other hand, in order to elevate one's own life, it is necessary to cut oneself off from one's life. This means that we must do certain things which do not directly relate to our daily lives, such as the study of culture and classical literature. How should such a contradiction of practicality be integrated? Furthermore, there is another contradiction of tradition vs. innovation: how to harmonize these opposing forces is now the fundamental problem.

The second problem concerns grouping or individualizing of the students for instruction. The size of our classroom is larger than those abroad, so simultaneous teaching is the traditional method. But recently, concern about individualization of teaching has arisen. In the subject of language, also, it has become necessary to make plans for teaching which are suited to certain geographical areas, grade levels, and individuals, and we have had to clarify the principles of individual learning, and carefully select teaching materials on this basis.

The third problem is about the teaching plan which is based upon the principles of development. A child's language develops through all phases of life, so his learning in the classroom should be adapted to his daily life.

From the viewpoint of problems mentioned above, Kurasawa proposed four structural strata for the subject of language.

This book contains other topics on (1) speaking, (2) explanatory sentences,

(3) literature, (4) classics, (5) book-reading, (6) composition, (7) dictation, and (8) language elements. All writers are looking for a new starting point.

Our language education which stood on a philosophical language theory before the war, and then was thrown into confusion by the defeat, is now marching to establish a scientific foundation.