

The Contents of a Grade 3 National Language Textbook of Myanmar: Contents Analysis of 2018 Textbook

Yuki OSADA

1. Preface

In this paper, the contents of a Myanmarese textbook for Grade 3 (herein after referred to as “G3”) students in Myanmar are analyzed.

Educational reforms are underway in Myanmar, with support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). In June 2017, G1 curriculum and textbooks were completely renewed, followed by the same kind of reform for G2 in June 2018 (Tanaka, 2015; Osada, 2016a)⁽¹⁾. Curriculum reform is proceeding one grade at a time in step with the progress to the next grade. A new G3 curriculum is to be introduced in June 2019. To examine the reform of national language education in Myanmar, a content analysis of the textbooks used before the introduction of the new curriculum was conducted (Osada, 2016b, 2017). However, G3 textbooks have not been analyzed yet. Therefore, in this paper, we analyze the G3 Myanmarese textbooks used in 2018.

After the new curriculum was introduced, the standard for primary national language as a whole and that for each grade were established. Textbooks are to be prepared based on these standards. However, there is no standard that defines education content in the old curriculum: it is the textbooks themselves that define education contents. Analyzing G3 textbooks means analyzing not only the materials, but also the contents of the old curriculum.

2. Analysis of as G3 textbook

Table 1 shows the results of the content analysis of a G3 textbook used in 2018. The framework of analysis is basically the same as that of G1/G2 textbooks (Osada, 2016b, 2017). From the left to right, “No.” is shown in the table, then “Title of Unit.” Materials are categorized into the following: “Speaking/Listening,” “Writing,” “Reading,” and “Basic of language.”⁽²⁾ Reading is divided into three subcategories: “Poems,” “Stories,” and “Descriptive texts⁽³⁾.” “Basics of language” includes the subcategories of “Characteristics and rules of language (grammar)” and “Characters.”

Most of the materials are for teaching reading (poems, stories, and descriptive texts) and there are 24 items. The remainder, one item, is for teaching writing. In G3 textbooks, there is no material pertaining to speaking/listening, characters, or the characteristics and rules of language.

As for reading materials, there are 10 poems and 10 descriptive texts. There are four stories. We will

take a closer look at them below.

The poems are all short with a length of less than one page, and are intended to be recited. The contents varies from items familiar to children such as “Poem: Mother” (Unit 3), “Poem: Father” (Unit 5) and “Poem: Rice Planting Festival” (Unit 10) to moral materials such as “Poem: Parents’ Jobs” (Unit 17) and “Poem: Teachers’ Jobs” (Unit 18). Unit 17 and Unit 18 among others are about the things parents and teachers value when raising children, so that children will respect their parents and teachers.

Regarding the descriptive texts, what comes first is material relevant to the national integration of Myanmar, “National Flag” (Unit 1), and for the citizens of a country of agriculture, they are: “Season” (Unit 8), “Former Teachers: Old Farming Men” (Unit 9), “Paddy Pest” (Unit 12), and “About Cows” (Unit 21). The type of material that appears most next, is material that is attractive to children, such as “Toys of Myanmarese Children” (Unit 13), “Children in Distant Countries” (Unit 19), which describes children in different countries, and “Zoo” (Unit 20). What is interesting is “Toys of Myanmarese Children” (Unit 13), which shows pictures of children from eight countries including Mexico and Japan with captions under the pictures saying “People from ...” These materials describe things with pictures, not with sentences. “Zoo” (Unit 20) is also characteristic. This is a material consisting of descriptive sentences using a child as a main character to describe a zoo from the viewpoint of children. This is a rare material as a descriptive text because it is written in the first person. “Water Festival” (Unit 16) describes about a big Buddhist event in the Buddhist country of Myanmar that celebrates the birthday of Buddha. This material may have been used to attract children because they love festivals. There is also a material to teach morals titled “Take Good Care of Everything” (Unit 11).

Regarding stories, there are some from Aesop’s Fables such as “The Hare and the Tortoise” (Unit 2), “Crow to Imitate the Peacock” (Unit 7), a short moral story of “Parrot Brothers” (Unit 15)⁽⁴⁾, and “Opening a Store in a Backyard” (Unit 23)⁽⁵⁾, which explains Myanmarese dictums in narrative form.

As for a writing material, there is “Letter to Friends” (Unit 4), which teaches how to write a letter.

3. Differences from G1/G2

Table 2 shows the difference in the number of materials between G3 and G1/G2.

The number of materials for “Reading/Writing” is zero, as it is for G1 and G2. This indicates that they pay no attention to it.

“Writing” appears in G3 materials for the first time. “Letter,” a specific form of writing, is the only material in this category in G3. Even in G3, there is quiet a deficit in the curriculum with respect to instructions on writing.

Under the category of “Reading,” “Stories” and “Descriptive texts” appear from G2 and their number of materials increases greatly in G3. The number of “Stories” doubles to four and that of “Descriptive texts” becomes 10. There are 10 “Poems,” which is half that of G1, but the number is still more than that in

Table 1: The results of the analysis of an existing G3 Myanmar language textbook.

No.	Unit title	Speaking/ Listening	Writing	Reading			Basics of language	
				Poems	Stories	Descriptive texts	Characteristics and rules of language	Characters
1	National Flag					⊙		
2	The Hare and the Tortoise				⊙			
3	Poem: Mother		⊙	⊙				
4	Letter to Friends							
5	Poem: Father		⊙	⊙				
6	Poem: Golden Temple with Tree of Enlightenment				⊙			
7	Crow to Imitate the Peacock					⊙		
8	Season (3 seasons)					⊙		
9	Former Teachers: Old Farming Men					⊙		
10	Poem: Rice Planting Festival			⊙				
11	Take Good Care of Everything					⊙		
12	Paddy Pest					⊙		
13	Toys of Myanmar Children					⊙		
14	Poem: Bamboo Grove			⊙				
15	Parrot Brothers				⊙			
16	Water Festival					⊙		
17	Poem: Parents' Jobs			⊙				
18	Poem: Teachers' Jobs			⊙				
19	Children in Distant Countries (pictures)					⊙		
20	Zoo				○	⊙		
21	About Cows					⊙		
22	Poem: Village of a Country Girl			⊙				
23	Opening a Store in a Backyard				⊙			
24	Poem: Mea Samyang (name of a place)			⊙				
25	Let's Voice: Riddles			⊙				
Total		0	1	10	4	10	0	0

* ⊙ indicates a main goal and ○ indicates a subgoal. Only ⊙ are counted.

Table 2: The differences in the number of materials between G1, G2 and G3 textbooks.

	Speaking/ Listening	Writing	Reading			Basics of language	
			Poems	Stories	Descriptive texts	Characteristics and rules of language	Characters
G1	0	0	20	0	0	0	21
G2	0	0	6	2	7	1	15
G3	0	1	10	4	10	0	0

G2. Both “Descriptive texts” and “Stories” occupy 40% of the materials individually and can be considered as core materials in G3. “Stories” occupies 16% of the material as a whole of G3, which is an increase from the 6.5% in G2, showing a gradual growth.

The number of materials for teaching “Basics of language” is zero in G3. This is because the instruction on characters has been completed in G2. In G3, there appears no grammatical material that was seen in G2.

Based on the findings above, G3 textbook of Myanmar can be considered as a “Reader” to teach students how to read sentences using the knowledge of characters acquired in and before G2. However, the

emphasis is on descriptive sentences and poems rather than on stories, and 80% of the contents are characteristically occupied by descriptive sentences and poems. There is no material specifically designed for teaching expression such as “Speaking/Listening” or “Writing.”

4. Summary and future subjects

In this paper, we analyzed the contents of a G3 Myanmarese textbook used in 2018. We found that the textbook is totally geared toward reading in G3. It contains a lot of descriptive texts and poems to teach contents to be shared in Myanmar, a country of Buddhism and agriculture, while some of the materials are chosen to attract children’s interest. They also use a few more stories, but many of them are still from Aesop’s Fables as before. As the textbook is for reading, there is no material specifically designed for enhancing powers of expression except for the one teaching how to write letters.

Our future tasks are to investigate the contents of G4 and higher textbooks and how the new textbooks have changed from the one used in the old curriculum. Many of the materials of G3 textbook come with exercises. Analyzing these exercises is also a subject for future work.

*In preparing this paper, I received considerable cooperation from members of JICA’s “Project for Curriculum Reform at Primary Level of Basic Education” (CREATE) and interpreter Soe Soe Myint. Here, I would like to express my gratitude to all of them.

References

- Osada, Y. (2016a) Efforts towards Conversion to Export Type Language Education: Based on the Case in Myanmar. The Japan Reading Association, *Science of Reading*, 58(3), pp. 122–131. [Published in Japanese]
- Osada, Y. (2016b) The State of National Language Education at Introductory Stage in Myanmar: Analysis of G1 Textbooks. Language Teaching Association, *Journal of Language Teaching*, 43, pp. 127–132. doi/10.15068/00148615
- Osada, Y. (2017) Analysis of the Contents of Grade 2 National Language Textbook of Myanmar, *Journal of Language Teaching*, 44, pp. 131–136. doi/10.15068/00150856
- Tanaka, Y. (2015) Challenge of Myanmar: Cultivation of Human Resources to Live in the 21 Century. Tanaka, Y. (Ed.) *21st Century Skills and Educational Practices in Foreign Countries: Cultivation of Newly Desired Abilities*. pp. 242–263. Akashi Shoten. [Published in Japanese]

- (1) School starts in June in Myanmar.
- (2) This table assumes the framework used in Osada (2016b, 2017). The materials that can be considered to fit into “Traditional language culture,” the subcategory of “Traditional language culture and the

characteristics of national language,” do not appear until G3. Therefore, this “Traditional language culture and the characteristics of national language” was changed to “Basics of language” and the subcategory “Traditional language culture” was dispensed with.

- (3) Information text.
- (4) This is a story about two parrot siblings. One of them came to be kept in a temple and the other came to be kept by a thief. The one raised in a temple grew up to speak and behave politely.
- (5) This is a dictum about the importance of living frugally and economically. The summary of the text is as follows:

A father left as his last words: “Build a granary in every village. Open a shop behind it. Eat 100 heads and change clothes three times every day. Learn from a man with three heads.”

After the death of father, the younger son built a granary in every village and opened a shop each one. He bought and ate 100 heads of birds and sheep. As a result, he used up all his money and became poor.

After the death of father, the older son asked the meaning of the strange last word to an old man who looked like he had three heads. He old man explained as follows: “Build a granary in every village” means having friends here and there. “Open a shop” means planting your own vegetables to save money. “100 heads” means nutritious and cheap small fish and shrimps. “Change clothes three times every day” means reversing the same clothes to prevent ripping so that they will last longer. “Man with three heads” means an elder wise man. Having listening to this, the older son acted in the way he had been instructed and became rich and successful.