

English Education in Japan—Belling the Cat? Viewed from the point of view of aspiration, achievement and prospect.

Forewords: Japanese Ministry of Education has issued a guideline for the English education for the primary schools, junior high schools and high schools. This article mainly aims at exploring the extent of the possibility for striking a balance between the aspiration and the achievement in this matter (an underlying theme constitutes the objective of education in general, with English as no exception, and how much the present English educational system is capable of conforming it). I have taken into account the objectives and the instructions proposed by the Ministry of Education to achieve them, analysed them and tried to address the issues from logical and practical point of view which I have developed by my experience of teaching English in Japan for over 10 years, interviewing various kinds of people including teachers and students, and by my own study, especially, of English literature and language. At the same time, I have tried to point out the common mistakes made by the Japanese English speakers and writers, irrespective of their overall English proficiency and shown the causes of the mistakes, which can largely be attributed to the educational system, and offered some suggestions to overcome them, sometimes with practical examples. My argument is sometimes invested with powerful notions and expressions from the products of recognized artistic and intellectual endeavour as well as personal experiences. The purpose behind this practice is to render the article the power to arrest readers' attention by

touching their emotional as well as intellectual faculties. In other words, in an attempt to make the points leave a permanent imprint on the readers, I have sometimes illustrated them a little with the words of literary artists or thinkers.

In fact, theoretically speaking, from the point of view of causes, it is not that difficult to overcome the problem of poor English ability of most Japanese —with the educational institutions making some simple changes in policy, salvation is perfectly possible. But practically speaking, regrettably, it is immensely difficult to achieve it from the point of view of implementation. Why? Let me borrow Wordsworth's words: 'a simple truth in this tutored days no more be seen with undiscordrd sight'. The truth of this observation applies many times more to our time than his, and regrettably to educational matter, too: thousands dispute an obvious truth, thousands offer new theories for the sake of making something new, thousands make a mountain out of a molehill when slight problem comes in view, which paradoxically, aggravates greater problems.

Regarding the content of this article, roughly speaking, the first 11 pages, with a brief description of the conventional teaching and evaluation system, is an attempt to demonstrate the big gap that appears to exist between the aspiration and the achievement of the Ministry of education. Next part (page 12 to 26) focuses on the typical mistakes most Japanese, sometimes regardless of their overall English proficiency, make. The rest of the article (page 27 to 58) constitutes my proposals to overcome the problems of English

education in Japan, with a focus on how they can help students achieve linguistic proficiency, along with conforming to the rational objectives of the study of liberal arts in general, and English language in particular.