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## A REPORT ON THE ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS OF THE SOVIET UNION

Ichiroh Yoshioka

Russians Bitten By English Bug. It was in April 1964 that UPI, under such a headline, reported the Soviet Union was determined to teach its people English.

Continually growing ties between Russia and the other parts of the world made it necessary for Russians to master English, for Russian is a difficult language with its tongue-twisting sounds and its Cyrillic alphabet.

As a result the English language was compulsory with the fifth-grade pupils in secondary schools in the Soviet Union (Children are admitted to them at the age of seven).

The percentage of people who can understand English has increased remarkably of late. Moscow Radio beams an English Class to children and adults. Moscow television also carries lessons. Moscow's English-language newspaper *Moscow News* makes its contribution, too.

A lot of Russian books translated into English are published every year. Especially American literature — its classics as well as its contemporary authors — enjoys great popularity in the Soviet Union, and pupils are instructed in the history of American literature even in its secondary schools.

Now in these circumstances English is often taught beginning with earlier than fifth grade of secondary schools, and the number of schools is on the increase where English is taught at the second grade, that is, at the age of eight.

It is said today that English-language teaching is greatly advanced in Russia, while Russian-language teaching in America.

Well, then, we are so much interested in the English textbooks for Russian pupils. If those textbooks are examined, the outline of English-language teaching there will be given to some extent.

Book Three and Book Four are taken up here in this report, because they are just on the second and the third years of Japanese junior high school level and we usually rack our brains over the teaching materials in English for the pupils of such a school year.

### Materials

*English 3* (Ed. by O. C. XAHOBA) Moscow, 1965.

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The examination of the English textbooks above is made from the two standpoints

of view. One is the aspect of the “subject matter” as teaching materials, and the other the aspect of “function” as a foreign language.

### (I) Subject matter

Jobs of the characters are a collective farmer, railwayman, engine-driver, teacher, shopman, soldier, doctor, policeman, sailor, airman, etc.

They are full of variety and at the same time it can be easily found that the central figures are “working people”. An obscure expression as “Father goes to office . . .” is not offered.

You must not be surprised if you are finding many children in the textbook, but you will see that they are often working or helping each other. For instance, they are the children gathering firewood for their family in the woods, or the children lending a hand with the collective farmers’ work in the fields, or the child explaining the use of the definite article to his friend who has been absent from school.

Playing children of course are picked up in the textbooks, but their playing, for example, football, volleyball, tennis, skiing, skating, swimming, fishing, camping, etc., are not against the customs of Russian people. The textbooks contain not the faintest allusion to baseball.

Most of the children in the textbooks are described as lively Russian ones. Russian pupils will no doubt feel much more sense of intimacy with Sasha Petrov or Victor Ivanov.

Careful selection of a place name is noticed like in the case of a child’s name. The Volga, the Black Sea or Moscow is carefully arranged with the Yukon, California or the Indian Ocean. So far as the name of a country is concerned, “the U.S.S.R”, “Great Britain”, “America” and “India” are in the textbooks.

And many of persons in the illustrations of the textbooks are dressed in Russian style.

Now, the lessons distinguished by special subjects are as follows :

### Book Three

#### Lesson 11 The Autumn Months

September, October and November are autumn months.

⋮

On the seventh of November we have a great holiday — the holiday of the Great October Socialist Revolution.

On that day children go to Red Square with their fathers and mothers.

The national memorial day is thus woven into the lesson of autumn season.

### Lesson 15 The Red Tie of the Pioneers

Mike's father is a communist. Mike's mother is a communist too.

Mike goes to school. He is a pioneer.

⋮

He has a red tie. His tie is always clean. He puts on his red tie every day.

The red tie has three ends. They are tied in a knot. Do you know what they stand for?

One end stands for the Pioneers.

One end stands for the Komsomols.

One end stands for the Communist Party.

This subject is symbolic of the meaning and significance of a "pioneer" who comes out over and over again in the textbooks.

A boy named Victor in another lesson (Lesson 17 Pioneers) is only an instance among many. The brave boy stops the running train and saves the lives of the passengers. When he is thanked by everybody, his answer is:

"Don't thank me. I'm a Soviet boy and a pioneer. It's my duty to help the people. I'm happy when I can do it."

### Lesson 33 The Hill

Mike and his little sister Kate are trying to go up the hill on the sledge, which is characteristic of the cold Soviet land.

### Lesson 37 A Pioneer's Letter

I go to school, and daily

Put on my pioneer tie.

I want to be a soldier,

Or a flier in the sky,

Or learn to be a captain

And sail across the sea,

But I shall serve my country,

Whatever I may be.

This is just what the Soviet Union expects of its young people.

### Lesson 41 The Past and the Present

When Mike asks Mother to tell about Grandfather, she says that workers are now the ruler of their country. And this is her story. It stands out in sharp contrast to

Grandfather's days.

All right. Your grandfather, my father, was a worker. He had a very hard life. He worked hard from six o'clock in the morning till six in the evening. He had no time to rest. He had no time to play with us, his children. And yet we were often hungry.

The workers lived in small houses. There were very few hospitals for them when they were ill.

There were very few schools for their children.

Now in the U. S. S. R. the workers live very well. They live in fine houses, and they have time to rest. Their children can go to school. Their life is joyful and happy.

#### Lesson 50 Artek

This is a lesson about Artek which is one of the best pioneer camps in the Soviet Union.

Artek is in the mountains of the Crimea. It is near the Black Sea. The Crimea is one of the prettiest places in the world.

In many countries, like England and America, the children of poor workers must play in hot streets in summer. There are no summer camps for them. Some of them can go to the country for one or two days. Only the children of rich parents can go to the country for the summer.

#### Book Four

##### Lesson 8 I Shall Never Forget That Day

This is the story of some children's happiest day when they are permitted to join the pioneers for the first time. They are deeply impressed with the ceremony.

Under the red banner they repeat after the pioneer leader :

"I, a young pioneer of the Soviet Union . . ."

⋮

Everyone present congratulated us. The grandfather of one of our pupils said :  
"I am an old Bolshevik. I worked with Lenin."

And he told us about the struggle of the Bolsheviks before the Great October Socialist Revolution and how they fought to give us a bright and happy life.

I shall never forget that great day in my life !

### Lesson 13 Moscow

Moscow is one of the largest cities in the world.

Thus begins the story of Moscow in this lesson, where the Moscow metro, Lenin Mausoleum, Children's Library, the Moscow University, etc. are introduced.

And the concluding words of the lesson are :

The working people of the whole world love and know Moscow.

Some lessons in Book Three and Book Four only have been taken above as examples of Russian character. The Russian textbooks have other characteristics above and beyond them.

It probably will surprise you that only a fairy tale is to be found among the seventy lessons. From the very nature of materialism a fairy—with supernatural powers—should not come out in the books for young people.

A. S. Makarenko, Russian pedagogist, says in his book that fairy tales about ghosts, hags, or nymphs first should be given up and stories about animals are always so instructive to young children.

Those English textbooks may be taken as an illustration of his opinion and there are eleven animal stories in them. They are all fables. For example, "The Fox and the Grapes", "The Fox and the Bear", "The Tiger and the Monkey" and "The Hare and the Turtle".

Now in Book Three the subjects are almost as to things Russian or Russian boys and girls, though in Book Four for higher grade appear some other foreign stories: "The Trojan Horse", "A Few Days in Great Britain" and "Robin Hood Meets the Bishop", etc.

The key subject for lower grades is supposed "Russian people", not foreigners. The words of "the Soviet Union" or "the U. S. S. R." are repeatedly used in eight lessons. Even when a foreign language is learned, their own country and its people can not be left untouched.

Who are liked of English or American authors in the Soviet Union? This is the next question and its answer can be to some extent gathered from those textbooks. There are some stories in Book Four adapted from the works of English or American authors, which you will see in the "Contents" of the textbooks given in the last page of this report. The choice is fallen upon Jack London and Mark Twain. And then R. L. Stevenson's poem "My Shadow" and the poem of L. M. Child, Massachusetts Abolitionist, "If Ever I See" are also found in the "Appendix".

In conclusion it is the friendship and cooperation of the working people that most weight is attached to. This is a song "Friendship" in Book Three.

The one who friendship holds most dear,  
Who feels a helping shoulder near,  
Will never fall throughout the fight,  
Is never lost in any plight.  
But if he stumbles on the way,  
A friend will help him anyway,  
A trusty friend upon the way  
will lend the helping shoulder.

## ( II ) Function

The correct pronunciation and intonation seem first consideration in these textbooks. "The first requisite in the study of a foreign language is constant practice" is well into practice.

Phonetic signs are not used in the text of those books and children have to learn how to pronounce spelt letters.

At the beginning of each lesson is found pronunciation exercises, for example, a diphthong or semi-vowel. Phonetic signs are only given in an appendix at the end of each textbook, in which grammatical rules in every lesson are carefully and skilfully arranged.

As for intonation it is successfully shown by a diagram both in the texts and appendixes of the books.

Then the grammatical items given in the textbooks are shown in regular order here.

## Book Three

The Present Continuous Tense

The Present Indefinite Tense

Must

In, into, out, out of

Can

Let us. . .

Their, there

Have got

Many, much

These, those

How many. . . ?    How much. . . ?

The Possessive Case

May

Here is... Here are...  
Where (as a Relative Adverb), that, who (as a Relative Pronoun)  
Cardinals and Ordinals (13-19)  
Any, some, no  
Every, everybody, everthing  
There is... There are...  
Cardinals and Ordinals (20-90)  
It is...  
The Comparison  
An Interrogative  
Will, shall  
Have  
Be  
-ed  
Did...?

#### Book Four

The Possessive Case  
The Article  
    The Indefinite Article  
    The Definite Article  
Pronouns  
    Personal Pronouns  
    Possessive Pronouns  
    Demonstrative Pronouns  
    Interrogative Pronouns  
    Indefinite Pronouns  
    (A) little, (a) few  
Numerals  
The Adjective  
The Adverb  
The Verb  
    The Present Indefinite Tense  
    The Past Indefinite Tense  
    The Future Indefinite Tense  
    The Present Continuous Tense  
    The Past Continuous Tense  
    Can, may, must

The number of words used in Book Three is 709 and in Book Four 882, which amount to a considerable number though there are many words repeated in both of the textbooks.

A little difficult words, such as "physical", "riddle" and "portrait" are used even in Book Three. "Communist", "slogan" and "revolution" are naturally given.

The content of the textbooks is nicely arranged. That is one of their fine features. At the beginning of each lesson you have exercises which put stress on pronunciation or intonation or grammatical rules.

After such repeated practice pupils will begin to study the text of the book. And then they also have exercises at the end of each lesson.

The quantity of the text is so small in general, while that of the exercises so large.

A great care is taken about colloquial speech, and most of the texts are written in conversational style especially in Book Three. "Today is Sunday." "Spring is coming." "I have got enough berries." We often come across those everyday English there.

Subtracting and adding up figures in English are even required, which is one of absorbing interest.

In Book Four the important words and phrases are Gothic-typed.

Exercises to the Text are chiefly made up of "Answer in English", and some has fifty-six questions of the kind. Then the Appendix over scores of pages.

In short those textbooks get received careful consideration from the functional point of view of the English language.

"Contents" of the two textbooks are added here for reference.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Book Three

#### Lessons

1. AT THE RIVER
3. IN SUMMER
5. CLEVER VICTOR
7. THE SUMMER MONTHS
  
9. PLANTING TREES
11. THE AUTUMN MONTHS
13. WE COUNT IN ENGLISH
15. THE RED TIE OF THE PIONEERS
17. PIONEERS (Part II)

#### Lessons

2. IN THE FIELDS
4. IN THE WOODS
6. A SUNNY DAY
8. BACK TO SCHOOL  
WE ARE HAPPY CHILDREN
10. AUTUMN
12. SUMMER AND AUTUMN
14. LESSONS
16. PIONEERS (Part I)
18. THE PIONEER ROOM

- |                              |                                 |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 19. IN THE CLASS-ROOM        | 20. COUNTING BY TENS            |
| 21. OUR ROOM                 | 22. IN THE EVENING              |
| 23. THE SEVENTH OF NOVEMBER  | 24. LATE AUTUMN                 |
| 25. ON SUNDAY                | 26. WHAT DOSE LITTLE BIRDS SAY? |
| 27. AT THE LENIN MUSEUM      | 28. FATHER AND KATE             |
| 29. WINTER                   | 30. IN THE PARK                 |
| 31. ON THE POND              | 32. WE CAN SKATE                |
| 33. THE HILL                 | 34. THE FOX AND THE GRAPES      |
| 35. TOMORROW                 | 36. A LETTER                    |
| 37. A PIONEER'S LETTER       | 38. MIKE'S FRIEND               |
| 39. DINNER-TIME              | 40. A TELEPHONE CALL            |
| 41. THE PAST AND THE PRESENT | 42. ON NEW YEAR'S DAY           |
| 43. THE BEAR AND THE FOX     | 44. FRIENDS                     |
| 45. A PRESENT<br>BE POLITE   | 46. V. I. LENIN                 |
| 47. WINTER AND SPRING        | 48. SPRING                      |
| 49. TWO LITTLE BIRDS         | 50. ARTEK                       |

#### Book Four

##### Lessons

1. THE FIRST OF SEPTEMBER
3. ANDY HELPS HIS FRIEND
5. THE TROJAN HORSE
7. WHAT TIME IS IT NOW?
  
9. SPOT (Part I)  
after Jack London
11. KEESH (Part I)  
after Jack London
13. MOSCOW  
THE FOX AND THE GOAT
15. THE SELFISH GIANT (Part II)
17. WHITE FANG (Continued)
19. ROBIN HOOD MEETS THE  
BISHOP (Part I)

##### Lessons

2. A FABLE
4. THE TIGER AND THE MONKEY
6. DAYS, MONTHS AND YEARS
8. I SHALL NEVER FORGET THAT  
DAY  
THE HARE AND THE TURTLE
10. SPOT (Part II)
12. KEESH (Part II)
14. THE SELFISH GIANT (Part I)  
after Oscar Wilde
16. WHITE FANG after Jack London
18. OUR SCHOOL  
A FEW DAYS IN GREAT BRITAIN
20. ROBIN HOOD MEETS THE BISHOP  
(Parts II)  
TOM WHITEWASHES HIS AUNT'S  
FENCE after Mark Twain