

# Toward a Greater Variety of Reading Practices: Attempts with Pearl S. Buck's *Story Bible*\*

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## Introduction

This is a practical report. It summarizes the three instructors' shared experiences and experimentations in the teaching of reading English as a foreign language in the first-year reading course at Doshisha University since 1986 to the present. In what follows, we discuss the aims of the first-year university reading course as we view them, the text materials chosen, the types of exercises devised, and the possible extensions of the text material.

The principal goals of the entire project were (1) to explore possibilities of teaching reading without resorting to the translation method, (2) to introduce the widest possible range of practice activities in class, and (3) to relate reading to other aspects of language learning, notably listening-comprehension and writing skills. Along with the language skills, the cultural stimuli have been kept in equal consideration throughout this teaching project.

During the past six years, 29 classes of approximately 40 students each studied with the reading material in question, of which 2 classes are still in progress at the time of this report. Student response to the text ma-

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terial as well as to the teaching devices have been monitored by frequent questionnaires and comments solicited from the students. The principal results of the four major questionnaires are summarized in the tables in the appendices, while discussion on student response is included in the relevant parts of this report, notably in the section on student response.

### **Problems to be Dealt With in the First-Year Reading Course**

Average students arrive at our university after six previous years of training in English as a foreign language with the intensive grammar-translation method. Their knowledge of English grammar proves inadequate when it comes to applying it to the actual reading processes of an English text. For one thing, more often than not, they have learned grammar as a stock of knowledge rather than as a functional skill. Secondly, the grammar they have learned is strictly limited to sentence grammar, which does not facilitate the understanding of groups of sentences as meaningful units<sup>1</sup>.

The second set of problems with average students trained in the traditional grammar-translation method has to do with vocabulary. Many of the students have internalized<sup>2</sup> an extremely small English vocabulary, due to the fact that the English words were always and solely presented along with their Japanese equivalents, and there was virtually no vocabulary practice. They only have learned to match certain English words with their Japanese equivalents. This type of "knowledge" of vocabulary does not help the students to go through an English text with a reasonable amount of rapid understanding.

Since their past training in reading an English text has been almost solely for the purpose of learning grammar, the average students have not had any experience in "functional reading," i. e., reading an English text for what it says and responding to it as readers. This, coupled with the fact that they do, or have done, very little reading in their own native language, makes reading English passages for functional purposes a

daunting task. They have not yet acquired the standard reading techniques that develop naturally with experience<sup>3</sup>. Also, there is an unnatural expectation on the part of the students that they have to understand every single word in every sentence, which hinders the genuine reading process from taking its natural course.

In the aural-oral aspects of language study, the average students have had very little, if any, practice in making or listening to an oral presentation of the text. Listening to a recording is also a rare experience, but if the students have had any amount of listening, it was done with no clearly stated objective, and as a consequence, listening has largely been a pointless task. It hardly ever even mattered whether the students really listened or not.

The students have to think what the text says when an occasional question is asked about some arbitrary detail on the content. And that is almost inevitably countered by a "telegraphic" one-word or one-phrase reply, usually by quoting words from the text. The students have rarely experienced meaningful content exercises, hardly ever written a summary, a plot, or comments, nor have they had any consistent practice with simple Question-and-Answer exercises in English, which might have entailed some amount of such reading activities as paragraph searching or skimming.

Given this set of facts, the university reading course must undertake the task of remedial instruction by meeting squarely what needs to be done. However, the factors that prevent this are numerous.

First, a single meeting per week of ninety minutes in a classroom with approximately forty students to one instructor results in little meaningful learning taking place. If language instruction intends to involve any behavioral adaptation as genuine foreign-language acquisition requires, this physical or material circumstance must be drastically altered. Second, the teaching materials must meet the students' interest and level of achievement<sup>4</sup>.

Third, the teaching method is, too much of the time, still based on the

same traditional word-for-word translation<sup>5</sup>. Given a vocabulary level far above the students' current ability, sometimes even above that in their own native tongue, the torturous task of coaxing some meaning out of what appears to them like "word salad" does not quite serve as foreign language learning.

Remedial practices in the language skills on the one hand and the appeal of "university-like" patterns of instruction on the other are the minimal requirements for a first-year reading course. The "university-like" patterns viewed from the students' point of view presumably involve more behaviorally-oriented (as opposed to verbally-oriented) instruction, more of the so-called "active" practices of speaking and writing, more meaning-oriented exercises, more practical vocabulary, among others. The "university-like" quality from the instructors' point of view involves cultural and intellectual background knowledge, and understanding the content of passages rather than single isolated sentences.

### **Why the Bible, Why the Old Testament, and Why Pearl S. Buck's Version?**

In coping with the set of problems just described, *The Story Bible* by Pearl S. Buck seemed to be a good candidate for a first-year reader for a number of reasons. Her book, however, was too large to cover properly within one academic year with 22 to 25 classroom sessions. Therefore, with the help of expert advice, thirty-three out of forty-nine stories in the book were selected, and most of them were then excerpted down to, on the average, approximately 40 to 50 percent of the original length. Pearl S. Buck's original sentences were preserved *in toto* except in an extremely small number of cases where the editing required that pronouns, for instance, be replaced by a noun, a semicolon by a comma, etc. Special care was taken both in selecting the stories and in excerpting the text to preserve the scope and intent of the original book. The excerpts were then divided into two volumes, the first containing the stories of "the Creation of the World" through the time of Moses' death, and the second start-

ing with "the Battle of Jericho" and ending with "the Homecoming of the Jews" from Babylon<sup>6</sup>. Either of the two volumes is now of manageable size for an average academic year.

Our Bible text is an attempt, tentative as it is, to address to some extent the expectations of both the students and the teachers in fulfilling the minimum requirements of a first-year reading course.

The choice of the Bible is based on two different but equally important considerations, namely language and content. The two aspects are different but not separate, so that there are overlapping areas. Many other similar texts may also fulfill these qualifications as listed below. In that sense, the following may serve as the beginning of a checklist for other potential texts for first-year reading courses:

A. Characteristics pertaining to the language features:

1. The book is written in relatively basic, everyday vocabulary.
2. The book uses relatively simple, straightforward sentence structures of sufficient variety.
3. The book has a refined style of writing.
4. The total effect of the language used serves to present simple, everyday language as well as more adult, standard, written levels.

B. Characteristics pertaining to cultural content:

1. The book is a source of a wide range of cultural information.
2. The book is a source of constant references and quotations in the English language today, and as such it is basic cultural material.
3. The book is associated with a wide range of fields such as history, literature, art, music, etc.
4. The book has ancient as well as contemporary relevance on the world scene.
5. The book has a natural association with Doshisha and, in that sense, is appropriate as teaching material in the first-year classroom.

C. Characteristics pertaining to student interest:

1. Although many students want to read the Bible mainly because they know it represents a major historical and cultural heritage, they seldom find themselves capable of reading it on their own. For that reason they welcome an opportunity to read the Bible in class. (See the section on Student Response below.)
2. Although it is impossible to present all the aspects of the Book, the little the students get to know can serve as a starting point for their future learning and experience. Many students realize that it is a good "investment" in that sense.
3. The Bible is a collection of a variety of tales, from realistic to fantastic and from mythical to down-to-earth. They are varied enough to sustain interest for an entire year.
4. The Bible is a book worthy of being associated with college days. Most of the "disposable" texts are just that: disposable. Being one of the Great Books of human heritage, the Book of Books has an irrefutable prestige and a memorable status.

D. Characteristics pertaining to classroom use:

1. The stories are sufficiently straightforward for practice in reading without translation.
2. Sentence structures are relatively simple and suited for practicing direct comprehension.
3. In both vocabulary and grammar, the text is suited to reinforcing the basic, everyday elements of the target language.
4. The level and style of the language used is appropriate for varied language activities, such as: 1) listening comprehension practices; 2) oral activities such as pronunciation practices and oral presentation of passages; 3) writing practices such as answering questions in English and reproducing parts of the stories; 4) simple or modified repetition practices and answering questions in English.

In short, the book is suited for repeated exposure to promote different language skills.

Aside from these considerations, there was also a more basic question of permanence versus ephemerality of the material. If a team of staff is committed to working on a text over a period of years rather than months, the text must stay good for a good number of years to come and also sustain the student interest over a span of years.

Even those students who already have some knowledge of the Bible often know only several isolated fragments. By going through the Old Testament stories from the mythological stage to the historical stage, supplemented by optional reading of literary works (from Shakespeare to Arishima to Steinbeck) with Biblical backgrounds, watching documentary videos and dramas, looking at reproductions of famous art works, learning about the contemporary debates on the Palestinian issues, the students are brought to a more comprehensive, adult view of the Bible.

In our judgment, the Old Testament is a better basis for understanding the New Testament than vice versa. It also deals with three of the four major religions of the world, namely, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, while the New Testament is primarily associated with Christianity.

The Old Testament, however, might not have been our choice if Pearl S. Buck's version were not available. That version begins with the Creation of the world and ends with the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ. It is written for English-speaking youngsters in such a way that the earlier stories are shorter and written in simpler sentences and with a smaller vocabulary. The book becomes progressively complex and more detailed both in narrative and language toward the end<sup>7</sup>.

For developing reading fluency and proficiency, which after all is a major goal of the English language course, the Old Testament, therefore, was a logical choice.

### **Cultural Background As Well As Language Skills**

For the purpose of demonstrating cultural and intellectual goals, the

*Shorter Story Bible* is interspersed with short articles dealing with various aspects of the Bible. These are by no means intended to cover all aspects or offer sufficient cultural information, but rather to point the way toward what is intended by this text and to entice the students toward the realization that reading in English serves the same purpose as reading in any language: to satisfy cultural and intellectual curiosity.

However, the text also has a not lesser goal of helping the students with improving their English-language skills, primarily the reading skills. Translating an English text word for word into Japanese, for instance, is NOT reading in our view. It is word-for-word match-up.

Reading, as reading should be, requires a certain amount of fluency in going through written symbols. This is the first obstacle for a majority of university students today, and repeated training is necessary to overcome it. A variety of practice can be devised in the classroom not only to train the students on the spot but also to show them how they might train themselves on their own outside the classroom. Silent reading at a certain speed, silent reading while listening to a recording of the text, reading aloud phrase by phrase or sentence by sentence are all good training techniques, and improvements begin to show in from several weeks to a few months<sup>8</sup>.

### **Use of Recorded Tape for Developing Reading Fluency**

Listening to foreign-language material is no doubt good practice for developing proficiency in the target language. Care must be taken, however, regarding the materials to be used for listening practice. Quite often in Japan, "listening" practices are conducted with tape recordings of written texts read aloud by a "native-speaker." Such material usually presents an oral interpretation of written language with reading (or quoting) intonation patterns. Quite often the oral interpretation involves little or no expertise, and unless the written text is intended for oral presentation—such as in the case of poetic or dramatic texts—there is no good reason to listen to an oral version of the written language, except

for the sake of studying a foreign language in a form as artificial as it can be.

In large part, our Bible text is no exception, although there are a few parts such as the beginning of "the Creation of the World," that are fit, and actually used, for oral presentation. The tape recording of the text, therefore, is used only as a means of promoting "reading" (and not listening) proficiency. The students are warned repeatedly in the course of the year that the recording is NOT a sample of spoken language, but a sample of "reading aloud," and as such, it is to be used as an aid for "reading" better, either aloud or silently.

Listening to the recording (or each other, for that matter) is effective only if the students understand clearly what they are expected to listen for. Merely running the tape in class is often a waste of time. There are a number of listening tasks to be devised according to the students' ability: listening for particular English sounds, especially those that are difficult for the Japanese-speaker, listening for pauses in the middle of sentences (i. e., meaning units within sentences), listening for emphasized parts of the passage, or listening and then interpreting or summarizing the passage in Japanese. Other listening tasks such as filling in the blanks or dictating the English sentences involve spelling and copying skills, which are clearly associated with full language competence.

Another valid listening practice is answering questions on the passage, in much the same way as the question-and-answer exercises given for a reading passage. If questions are given orally and the students are required to answer them in writing, it is advantageous in that (1) it is less intimidating than one student responding orally in the presence of the entire class; (2) it can be easily conducted by a Japanese teacher; and (3) the entire class can participate at the same time.

The recorded tape is most useful to help the students in increasing their reading speed and fluency as it can encourage them to go through a written passage at a particular and steady pace.

### **“Speaking Practice” as a Means of Promoting Comprehension**

Our Bible text has a device called “Speaking Practice.” Despite its name, it actually is a modified sentence-repetition drill at its initial stage: it requires the student to answer a short simple yes-no question with a full, affirmative sentence, which is largely a repetition of the question.

This practice, along with those with recorded tape, aims at orienting the student’s attention toward the aural-oral aspects of reading an English text, and at attempting to fuse the sound and meaning of basic words, phrases, and sentences in the student’s mind. The aims of this practice, in brief, are as follows:

- (1) Confirming the acquisition of the pronunciation and meaning of essential vocabulary;
- (2) Learning to use, with some degree of fluency, the present-and past-tense forms of essential verbs;
- (3) Oral command of basic sentence patterns;
- (4) Reinforcement of the broad outline of the narrative.

This relatively simple repetition practice is a step beyond chorus reading or repeating after an oral model in the sense that the practice sentence must be understood before responding to it. For those who have reached a certain level of reading proficiency without ever having any oral-response drills, some simple device such as this one is a necessary step in mentally adjusting to oral exercise.

The speaking-practice questions are written in such a way that every question requires an affirmative answer. This is primarily to eliminate factors extraneous to the immediate aims as described above<sup>9</sup>. Also, the question sentences are shorter and simpler for the first part of the book, and become longer and more complex toward the end of the book<sup>10</sup>.

If the students prove to be more competent, the Speaking Practice questions can be used for more complex practices, as suggested below, as the second stage of “Speaking Practice”:

Stage 2 (Wh-question practice): Oral or written practice of creating content- or wh-questions that require the given affirmative sentence as an answer.

Aims of the second stage of speaking practice are:

- (1) Reinforcement of the same four aims as described for Stage 1;
- (2) Developing a command of simple wh-question sentences; and
- (3) Developing a command of sentence-stress patterns and the appropriate use and non-use of nouns, verbs, and their substitutes.

Again, the aim is a general readiness for learning to speak a foreign language, as well as reinforcement of the sound/meaning combination of the grammar and vocabulary involved. The use of pronouns and elimination of redundant parts in answer-sentences must be relearned in relation to sentence stress and meaning, and as a functioning, creative, and communicative process.

Stage 3 (Question-answer practice): A variety of wh-questions more or less spontaneously and randomly given and answered with appropriate affirmative sentences.

Based on the wh-questions of the second stage, a more spontaneous dialogue can be developed involving a more varied and/or randomized series of wh-questions and answers.

A question-answer practice is still far from being a normal conversational situation, but one small step ahead in spontaneity of the two earlier stages. By the time this stage is reached, attempts can also be made more or less easily to create slightly more spontaneous exchanges<sup>41</sup>.

### **Comprehension Questions and Writing Exercises**

The Comprehension Questions can either be used for further "speaking" practice, or for writing exercise, or both. If used as oral-practice stimuli, the exchanges centering on the comprehension questions might become a continuation of Stage 3 of the Speaking Practice, with more or less (or more and more) spontaneity introduced into both cues and responses. Groups of four or five students can hold a ten-minute speaking session

using these questions as stimuli, which then can be followed by writing exercise as homework.

The comprehension questions are all wh- or content-questions, and, in answering them, the student must recall or refer to the relevant part(s) of the text since the answers are not always obvious from the wording of the questions. Modifications of the relevant passages in the text are often necessary to produce appropriate responses.

If any or all of the comprehension questions are to be used as stimuli for writing practice, which is highly recommended and which these questions are primarily designed for, emphasis must be placed on the fact that written answers should be more complete than the spoken answers, a point that practically no student ever realizes unless it is clearly pointed out. The students have no idea that the standard written answers must be made in the form of complete statements with nouns and verbs wherever necessary, such as sentence-initially, and parts of the question must be repeated whenever it is necessary for clarity, so that the result is a complete statement comprehensible without the reader having to refer back to the question.

Once pointed out, the situational differences between oral and written exchanges can be easily understood by the student, who then finds the writing exercise a more credible task.

Classroom experience proves that, through the writing practice, the students develop not only various writing skills but such reading skills as skimming and paragraph searching, and as such, this is a much more meaningful pedagogical device than explaining at length in Japanese how paragraphs are organized, etc. If given in class, the writing exercise keeps the student alert and active. If given as homework, a writing exercise has a far greater chance of faithful delivery on the part of the student than non-writing assignments.

After weekly exercises in writing, more or less complex content questions may be asked as part of the exam, and the longer, more detailed answers can be rewarded with better marks than shorter, simpler replies.

No scrupulous examining is necessary for grading the student writing, which improves, often dramatically, only by having opportunities to write such answers.

### **Toward General Proficiency in English**

Grammar, Vocabulary, and Pronunciation are all practiced through reading, listening, pronouncing, and writing. Within a few weeks, the students understand what is expected of them: practice and learning through activities.

In any case, the students by far prefer all these active exercises to the common sentence-by-sentence translation tasks. In translation, the students too often understand the content of the text in terms of clumsy, word-for-word Japanese sentences and not the English text itself. By increasing direct contact with the English text itself (several times in class and at least once out of class in various ways), the students end up reading the English text many times and, as a result, come to a certain degree of understanding of the English text, which is what any teaching method hopes to achieve. Perhaps not every single word or phrase is understood with minute accuracy, but then, that is not the purpose of adopting the present text as reading material in the first place.

The general aim of reading a story is to get an overall understanding of what is being narrated and responding to it as a reader. In order to help the students to achieve this in a foreign language, it is necessary to do away with the dependence on word-for-word translation at the earliest possible stage of learning<sup>12</sup>.

### **Use of Slides, Compact Discs, CAI, and Further Prospect**

The Bible text, like many other reading materials, can be developed into a multi-media teaching material. Aside from such visual aids as art books, maps, and slides, the sound medium of cassette tapes and video tapes related to the Bible can be regularly utilized in the classroom.

Besides, sets of slides were made to synchronize with the tape recording of several of the stories. Some sets of slides present art works on relevant Biblical themes, while others show on the screen short passages of up to eight lines of the text at a time. The students can watch either the art works or the text in the alphabet while listening to the relevant portion of the text. On some of the stories for which there are not a sufficient number of art works to go with the entire text, a combination of art slides and alphabetical text is shown on the screen.

Student response to the synchronized slide material, as indicated by a preliminary survey of 36 students by a questionnaire, is quite favorable both for the text slides and art slides<sup>19</sup>. The feasibility of synthesizing these audio and visual materials into a video tape, which would greatly facilitate the classroom use, is also being explored.

The question of whether passages with comprehension questions can be effectively computerized to attract certain types of students, if not all, is also being tested. CAI (Computer-Assisted Instruction) devices similar to those we envisage are already available in English-language classrooms in Doshisha University and elsewhere. We are hopeful that something effective for reading proficiency might be developed in the near future for our own Bible text.

As a new addition to the teaching aids already familiar in classrooms, experiments have also been made with the compact disc format. In using conventional cassette tapes in the classroom we often experience frustration in finding the proper starting point. Repeating certain passages on cassette tapes is not an easy operation, either. We have therefore transcribed the analog tape recording of the last two stories from the first volume ("The Ten Commandments" and "The Land of Milk and Honey") onto a compact disc. Track and index numbers were programmed for each paragraph and each sentence respectively.

The compact disc not only made listening to the stories and paragraphs easier, but it also made the interaction and communication between the teacher and the students smoother. If the students requested to listen to

a certain paragraph repeatedly the teacher can provide it almost instantly by using the track and/or the index number. Speaking practice attached to each story can thus be utilized to its maximum effect with the compact disc. One question from the speaking practice is played, and, if the students do not understand the question at the first play, they can ask for a repetition and the teacher can provide it instantly. The correct answer can be played any number of times, too. The smooth operation made possible by the compact disc helps maintain the students' incentives to respond whereas operational difficulties in manipulating a cassette tape can wither the rising interest or eagerness of the students. The actual use of the compact disc in the classroom proved that the majority of the students appreciated the smooth classroom operation. A considerable number of students expressed interest in using the compact disc at home and at school for such purposes as reviewing the lesson<sup>14</sup>. In addition to the conveniences provided by the compact disc, some students noted the good quality of the sound itself.

Applications of other recent digital devices to teaching should also be considered. CD-ROM can provide a visual and sound version of the text, and possibly some visual material through personal computers. This may eliminate conventional textbooks. Laser discs can integrate audiovisual materials; they, too, allow random and instant access to any particular spot in the recording. In addition to these valuable features, all unavailable from video tapes, these materials offer finer sound and visual quality than tapes afford.

Both digital software and hardware cost much more than analog equipment at the present time. It may take some time before CD and laser disc players become as popular as cassette tape players are now. However, introduction of digital equipment may well begin to be considered for the audio-visual system in schools<sup>15</sup>.

### **Student Response**

In general, students respond quite favorably to the ways the reading

course is conducted by the three instructors involved with the project of *the Story Bible* text. In the data collected so far, the most striking is the fact that an overwhelming majority of the students surveyed (105 students out of 138, or 76.1%) find the language level suitable for proficiency-oriented exercises. (See results in the Appendices, Questionnaire (2), Question 3.). In view of the fact that fostering confidence appears to be an important key in foreign-language instruction<sup>16</sup>, discovering the appropriate level of language in which to couch meaningful content seems to be the first challenge in teaching reading at the college level today. Secondly, the students seem to like the fact that they are provided with both Speaking Practice Questions and Comprehension Questions<sup>17</sup>, which suggests that, for any reading course, not just translating English into Japanese, but some additional exercises would enhance the effectiveness of instruction.

Perhaps one indication of increased interest on the part of the students in the present reading material is the set of figures regarding their desire to read the Bible stories: 44.1% were interested at the beginning of the year as opposed to 49.5% who were not (See results in the Appendices, Questionnaire (1), Question 2.), whereas at the end of the year 68.8% answered that the reading material was interesting, and 50.7% wanted to go on to read the second half of the stories (See results in the Appendices, Questionnaire (2), Questions 1 and 2.).

Presentation of art works, especially on slides, have also been quite warmly received. The students do not seem to be familiar with most of the well-known works of art presented on the slides, which apparently arouse a good deal of interest among them. The "blue slides" with several lines of written text also seem to do well with the students<sup>18</sup>.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The primary goal of the project was to move away from the traditional reading exercise of word-for-word translation of English text into Japanese and to seek a variety of alternative reading exercises that might

give the learner as much first-hand experience of genuine reading as a classroom could provide. The various forms of practices and exercises were designed to complement each other and eventually to fulfill this goal.

The students have generally responded favorably both to the particular reading material and to the variety of practices. They welcome the variety as opposed to the uniformity of the traditional translation method, manifesting their willingness to listen to, pronounce, write, and even speak some English. At the end of the year, most students opt to write comments in English on the year's reading when the choice of language is open to them.

As greater amounts of experience and experimentation are accumulated, a further variety of reading exercises might well be developed. The attempts reported here are just a beginning in that direction.

#### Notes

- 1 Experimental evidence (Matsui, 1976) indicates that the same set of ideas is more readily understood by a larger number of students when it is expressed in a single complex sentence than by a set of simple sentences, proving the fact that more students read texts on a sentence-by-sentence basis and not with any larger scope. Although this evidence was collected in 1976, our impression is that the situation has not changed in the least.
- 2 The intended meaning here of the word *internalized* is close to what Caplan and Huet (1991) refer to as "appropriation," which "is a way of taking . . . new forms and sounds [of a target language] and making them *one's own*." (p. 108)

On the topic of vocabulary, questions must also be raised as to the validity of the "Educational" vocabulary lists used for the Middle-School and High-School textbooks in Japan, i. e., whether or not they lead to valid preparation for university-level reading or for reading contemporary pieces of writing aimed at the general reading public.

- 3 Relatively recent experimental evidence seems to point toward the fact (1) that the good readers "rely more on semantic than on syntactic cues," (Clarke, pp. 117-118 in Carrell et al. (1988) and also (2) that good first-language readers are significantly better second- or foreign-language readers, given the same level of the second-language proficiency. See Carrell et al. (1988), pp. 119 ff. as well as Alderson and Urguhart (1984), esp. pp. 16 ff.
- 4 A limited choice given to the students for the first time in April 1992 from

among several texts is a step forward in the sense that, in a very limited way, the student interest can be monitored by observing which of the alternative texts are chosen by more of them. A more rigorous and hopefully a more systematic monitoring might be instituted.

5 A large number of students seem to think that college English is a repetition of high-school English; others comment that the only difference they see is that in cram courses tougher texts and more earnest instruction were provided. Whatever the reason, after only the first few weeks following their arrival, a good number of students lose their good intentions to work on "real" English. There is little doubt that both the students and the teachers are up against overwhelming odds when it comes to seeking meaningful English acquisition possibilities at the university level. Yet the possibilities are there, and good intentions are there as well.

6 Both volumes have been published by Eichosha as *A Shorter Story Bible* with the subtitles: *the Promised Land* (1991) and *God's Promise to Israel* (1992), respectively.

7 Besides the fact that the stories tend to be longer and the narration more detailed toward the end of the book, indices regarding text complexity clearly express the gradual increase in linguistic difficulty from (1) the first story of the two-volume book ("The Creation of the World") to (2) the one almost exactly in the middle (or the last story in the first volume): "The Land of Milk and Honey," and to (3) the very last piece of narrative in the second volume ("The Homecoming of the Jews") as follows:

	(1)	(2)	(3)
1. Average length of sentence (Number of words per sentence):	16.0	20.8	22.5
2. Variety of vocabulary items (Percent of new words):	30.73%	35.53%	36.75%
3. Average length of words (Number of letters per word):	3.92	4.04	4.24
4. Speed of recording (Number of words per minute):	136.6	161.8	.....

8 A common problem with reading aloud or silently is that the students go through a text without trying to think of what it means, and the teacher must monitor and caution the students repeatedly on this.

Alphabetical training and reading aloud with simultaneous comprehension become truly meaningful for the students only if these skills count in the exams. The easiest way to include these skills in the written test with 40-50 students in one class is as follows: (1) assign certain pages of text for the test of reading aloud, (2) make a copy of these pages and divide the text into a number of short passages of several lines each: fewer lines at the beginning of the year and fewer lines if the class is large. Some attention must be paid to the content so that each short passage would make good enough integral

sense: sentence-initial pronouns, for instance, may have to be replaced by a noun. (3) Anywhere between about a dozen and two dozen short passages would do for a class of 40-50 students. Paste each of the short passages on a note card to make it easier for the student to hold it. (4) Put numerals or letters on the cards for later identification of the passages. (5) On the exam sheet, provide a large enough space for the student to write the summary of the short passage. The summary can be required to be written either in English or in Japanese as the teacher thinks appropriate, or perhaps the student can be allowed to choose the language. (6) During the exam period, go down the aisle giving each student one of the cards, different ones to neighboring students, and ask each of them to read the short passage loudly enough for the teacher to hear her/him. (7) As soon as the student comes to the end of the passage, the card must be given back to the teacher, who goes on to the next student. (8) While reading aloud the short passage, the student must understand what it says in order to write a summary of the passage in the assigned space. Some students do quite well in this task, and others do not. But the weekly reading and listening becomes meaningful to them because of this section of the mid-term and the final.

- 9 Classroom experience proves that the students find this practice sufficiently challenging and exciting (partly because it is different enough from what the majority of them have experienced before), and at the same time simple enough to cope with because it is only a small step ahead of reading aloud or repeating after a model. The best thing about this practice is that no student remains silent or helpless.
- 10 For the first quarter of the chapters, the majority of the answer sentences are 8 words long or shorter and have a single-clause structure. For the middle half of the chapters, the sentences are mostly 8 to 12 words long and often involve some type of sentence-like sub-structure attached to the main clause. In the last quarter of the book, the answers frequently require sentences that are 12 to 15 words long, often involving more than one grammatical clause.
- 11 Not all the three stages of speaking practice have to be included from the outset. For the first few chapters, for instance, only the first stage may be feasible. As the students become used to the simple repetition exercise, the first two stages may be achieved within a reasonable amount of time. For the first half of Stage 3, the student may have to come prepared with written questions first, and as proficiency develops, the wh-question may be formed more quickly and spontaneously.
- 12 Once the students get used to reading English stories, they can be sent to Doshisha University Library to select one of some eight hundred ESL (English as a Second Language) readers, small books written in easy English with the vocabulary of 500 to 5,000 words, some original and others rewrites of classics. The students are asked to record the amount of time spent in reading the entire book of their choice. After reading, they fill out a questionnaire

and write a summary and comment in English. The questionnaire asks about the relative ease or difficulty of the language and interest or gratification offered by the content. Casual statistics indicate that the students who read more challenging books tend to get higher levels of gratification from the reading. When this statistical result of their own class is shown to them, the students then seem to go for more challenging books the second time round. In the course of the year, a good majority of the students learn to read at their approximate level.

The ESL readers consolidate the initial purpose of the first-year reading course.

- 13 See results in the Appendices, Questionnaire (4).
- 14 See results in the Appendices, Questionnaire (3).
- 15 Forty-three out of 85 students surveyed were of the view that CD's should replace the tape cassettes for foreign language materials, as shown in the results of Questionnaire (3), Question 3 in the appendices.
- 16 See Luzares (1992), pp.137-156.
- 17 See results in the Appendices, Questionnaire (2), Questions 4 and 5.
- 18 Twenty-two out of 36 students had practically no knowledge of the art works presented on slides, and 8 said that they knew nothing about them; 24 said that interest in these works was stimulated by the slides, and 8 said the art works made it easier for them to understand the recorded text. See results in the Appendices, Questionnaire (4).

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### Appendices

The following is a summary of the results of the four major questionnaires run at four different times on four different groups of first-year students. The first two questionnaires asked general questions about the teaching material: the first was given in April of 1992 to see how much general interest exists among the first-year students in reading Biblical stories in English, and the second was conducted at the end of the previous year in December, 1991 to investigate how the students viewed the particular reading material from *the Story Bible* after using it for one academic year. Of the first group, nearly 40% were enrolled in the reading course with *A Shorter Story Bible* and the other 60% were enrolled in classes with other reading materials.

The third and the fourth questionnaires were designed to collect some data on the student response to particular media of instruction, i. e., recording on the CD and the recording-with-slide presentation of the text material.

Questionnaire (1): On the student interest in reading the Bible stories in English (April, 1992)

1. Have you ever read any part of the Bible before?
2. Would you be interested in reading stories from the Bible in English?

Result of Questionnaire (1) Number of respondents: 202 students.

1. Experience with the Bible
 

Have read parts:	109 (54.0%)
Have never read:	93 (46.0%)
2. The Bible as reader
 

Interested:	89 (44.1%)
Not interested:	100 (49.5%)
No response:	13 (6.4%)

Of those with previous knowledge of the Bible: 109 students

- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| Interested in reading Bible stories in English:     | 56 (51.4%) |
| Not interested in reading Bible stories in English: | 52 (47.7%) |
| No response:  | 1 (0.9%)   |

Of those with no previous knowledge of the Bible: 39 students

- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| Interested in reading Bible stories in English:     | 33 (35.5%) |
| Not interested in reading Bible stories in English: | 48 (51.6%) |

Of those who have chosen the reading course with *A Shorter Story Bible*:  
 79 students

Interested in reading Bible stories in English:	39 (49.4%)
Not interested in reading Bible stories in English:	40 (50.6%)

Of those who have chosen the reading course with texts other than *A Shorter Story Bible*: 122 students

Interested in reading Bible stories in English:	56 (45.9%)
Not interested in reading Bible stories in English:	66 (54.1%)

Questionnaire (2): On the experience of reading *A Shorter Story Bible*, Vol. 1 (December, 1991)

1. Was reading the stories from the Bible in English interesting?
2. Would you be interested in reading the rest of the Bible stories in English?
3. Was the level of English suitable?
4. Was the "Speaking Practice" useful?
5. Were the "Comprehension Questions" useful?
6. Were the short articles on cultural backgrounds useful?

Result of Questionnaire (2) Number of respondents: 138 students.

1. Interest in the material
 

Interesting:	95 (68.8%)
Not interesting:	42 (30.4%)
No response:	1 (0.7%)
2. Interest in the rest of the stories
 

Interested:	70 (50.7%)
Not interested:	65 (47.1%)
No response:	3 (2.2%)
3. Level of English
 

Easy:	4 (2.9%)
Suitable:	105 (76.1%)
Difficult:	13 (9.4%)
No response:	16 (1.2%)
4. Speaking Practice
 

Very useful:	32 (23.2%)
Useful:	74 (53.6%)
Not useful:	28 (20.3%)
No response:	4 (2.9%)
5. Comprehension Questions
 

Very useful:	37 (26.8%)
Useful:	71 (51.4%)
Not useful:	27 (19.6%)
No response:	3 (2.8%)

6. Short articles on backgrounds	
Very useful:	35 (25.4%)
Useful:	67 (48.6%)
Not useful:	29 (21.0%)
No response:	7 (5.1%)

Questionnaire (3): On the recording on CD (December, 1991)

1. Were you interested in the use of the CD in class?
2. Would you like to use the CD for study out of class?
3. Is the CD more interesting than the cassette tape?

Result of Questionnaire (3) Number of respondents: 85 students

1. Use of CD in class	
Strongly interested:	12 (14.1%)
Mildly interested:	59 (69.4%)
Hardly interested:	14 (16.5%)
2. Use of CD out of class	
Strongly interested:	47 (55.3%)
Mildly interested:	0 (0%)
Hardly interested:	34 (40.0%)
Noresponse:	4 (4.7%)
3. CD to replace cassette tape	
Strongly interested:	42 (49.4%)
Mildly interested:	1 (1.2%)
Hardly interested:	18 (21.2%)
No response:	24 (28.2%)

Questionnaire (4): On the recorded tape synchronized with slides (May, 1992)

- A. On the text presented through slides
  1. Were the letters on the slides easier or more difficult to read compared with the printed page?
  2. Was each of the slides shown long enough?
  3. Were you able to follow the text on slides while listening to the recording?
  4. Is listening to the recording easier or more difficult with the text on slides or on the printed page?
- B. On the art works presented through slides:
  1. Did you recognize any of the art works on the slides?
  2. Were the slides shown long enough?
  3. Did the slides stimulate your interest in art?

Result of Questionnaire (4) Number of respondents: 36 students

- A.1. Reading the text on slides compared with reading printed pages
- |                                    |            |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| Easier than printed pages:         | 9 (25.0%)  |
| As easy as printed pages:          | 22 (61.1%) |
| More difficult than printed pages: | 5 (13.9%)  |
2. Duration of the presentation of each text slide
- |            |            |
|------------|------------|
| Adequate:  | 27 (75.0%) |
| Too short: | 8 (22.2%)  |
| Too long:  | 1 ( 2.8%)  |
3. Following the text on slides while listening to the recording:
- |  |            |
|--|------------|
| Able to follow:                                      | 7 (19.4%)  |
| Probably able to follow with a little more practice: | 29 (80.6%) |
| Unable to follow:                                    | 0 ( 0%)    |
4. Listening to the recording easier with slides than with the printed page
- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| Easier with slides than with the printed page:    | 8 (22.2%)  |
| As easy with the slides as with the printed page: | 23 (63.9%) |
| Easier with the printed page than with slides:    | 5 (13.9%)  |
- B.1. Recognition of the art works presented through slides
- |                         |            |
|-------------------------|------------|
| None recognized:        | 8 (22.2%)  |
| Almost none recognized: | 22 (61.1%) |
| Some recognized:        | 6 (16.7%)  |
2. Duration of the presentation of each art slide
- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| Adequate:                                     | 19 (52.8%) |
| Sometimes too long and other times too short: | 10 (27.8%) |
| Too long:                                     | 4 (11.1%)  |
| Too short:                                    | 3 ( 8.3%)  |
3. Presentation of art works through slides:
- |                      |            |
|----------------------|------------|
| Stimulated interest: | 24 (66.7%) |
| Not so interesting:  | 11 (30.6%) |
| Not interesting:     | 1 ( 2.8%)  |

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