

IN AND AROUND THE TEACHING OF LANGUAGE AS A SCHOOL SUBJECT

-Part I-

Hi-Won Yoon

This paper is the first part of an article of the same title that is, in principle, an introductory survey of the language education by formal schooling. From the teaching of Korean as the national language, beginning in the very first year of primary school, up to that of a second foreign language in high school, we invest a considerable amount of energy (including time and money) in language education; still, we believe the actual state of affairs to be unsatisfactory. In the cause of improvement, we ought to have a thorough grasp and control of our object and its surroundings. For this reason, the discussion in this paper is opened by giving a rough sketch of education and language. And then supporting sciences (linguistics, sociology, psychology and the study of education) are to be taken into consideration. In Part II and Part III, we will seek for a more concrete means to contribute to the betterment of language education: a useful and usable theory of language teacher training, theoretical yet practical guides for teaching and/or research, etc.

I

The history of language education¹ is as long as that of education itself, and one can hardly imagine any educational institutions without a language class where the target language is labelled 'national', 'foreign', 'first', 'second', 'official', 'standard' or anything at all. In this information-rich society, where our contemporaries provide or obtain necessary information through literal communication, language education is in its full expansion. However, language-conscious professionals have repeatedly pointed out the unsatisfactory state of language education.

These days a considerable number of theories and methods are in the library and on the market, claiming to stand for a more effective or a less troublesome language education. We are nearly at a loss for theories and methods some of which are recommended or rejected by researchers and teachers (and sometimes learners themselves) due to theoretical reasons and/or from their own experience. However, those products show their limitations in several respects, since, (for the most part) they merely provide either description and/or explanations of the target language without any practical information on class management and teaching techniques, or a set of theoretical postulates

¹ The term implies the process and activity of teaching and learning by formal schooling.

which are not applicable in reality.

Our ultimate hope would be of course to find out or to develop THE theory of language education that would be personally valid as a guide to the mastery of the target language by helping each and every teacher and learner to overcome all of the frustrations and failures, and contribute to the improvement and the greater effectiveness of language education. Still, this paper makes no attempt to proclaim a panacea but to provide a conceptual framework for the study of language education as a subject-matter education, that is not specific to any particular language or to any particular group of language learners or teachers, nor to any country, educational system, or level of education. It is intended to be applicable to language education by formal schooling in general under any circumstances.

II

Education, obviously including language education, is really a complex and complicated area. While examining the fields of study, one cannot but be surprised by the diversity of patterns of relationships between language education and each of the disciplines or sub-disciplines. Will all the educational problems be solved some day? What should we do to improve education, in our case language education, in the near future?

[Figure 1]² shows us the dynamics of educational changes, for the better or for the worse, to which the key is at first harmonious development of pre-service education, in-service education, and research of education.

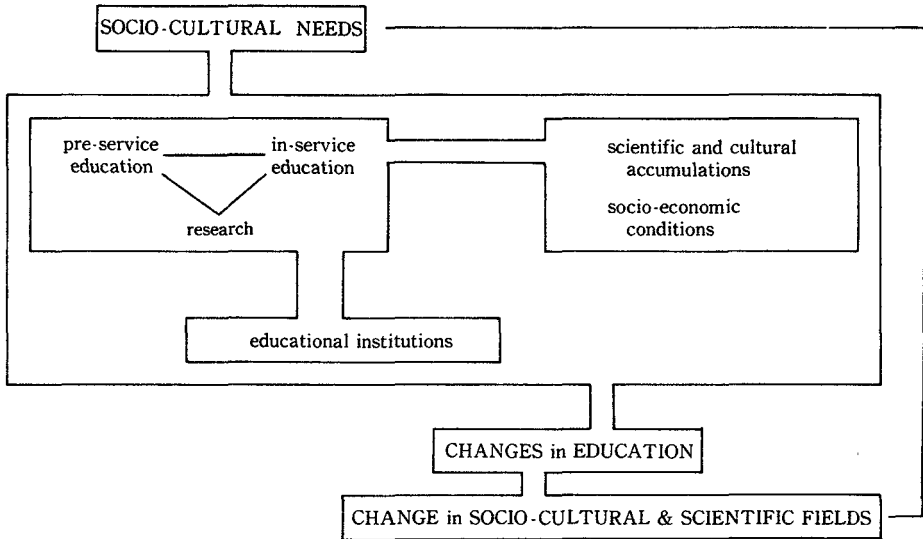
Education nowadays, as in the past, is based on the teaching of separate subjects, and this system will probably continue into the future. A school subject deals with a body of knowledge that a teacher is in charge of transmitting to the learners. For this reason, the instructional process reflecting the specific characteristics of each subject-matter deserves as much emphasis as the teaching subject field itself in the educational system. On that account, teacher education programs should put more emphasis upon method courses, and more study should be devoted to the development of method courses and their course syllabi.

To achieve those given goals, a framework³ as Figure 2 has been proposed for subject education.

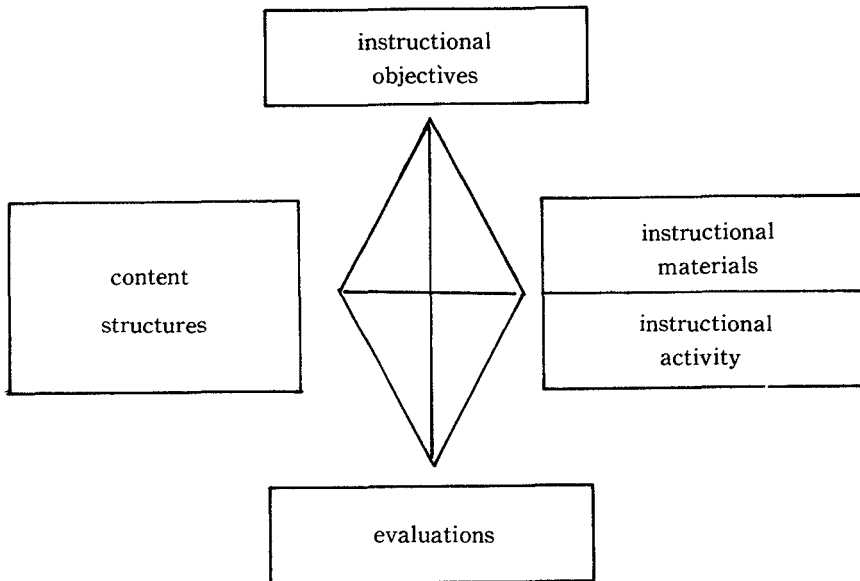
² H-W. Yoon (1986) 'A Syllabus for the Course of Introduction to Korean Education,' *The Journal of Teacher Education* I, Korea National University of Education, p.52.

³ This production is the result of collective work done by the subject education research team (T-B. Chung, J-W. Kim, J-S. Kwon, B-S. Choi, M. Hur, and H-W Yoon) of the Korea National University of Education in the year of 1985.

[Figure 1] =Dynamics of Educational Changes



[Figure 2]
=A conceptual framework for study of subject education



II

Language teaching is a highly skilled activity as it implies a sophisticated blending of knowledge of the target language, what is known about language education and education in general with the characteristics of teacher(s) and learner(s) such as their own perspectives, experience, intellectual capacity, cultural background, aptitude and attitude, needs and wants, etc. The activity of language teaching involves many different variables the value of which cannot yet readily be assessed. Unfortunately, not all of the variables are known, quantifiable or controllable, and for this reason the activity of language teaching cannot be reduced to a systemically modelled set of procedures. But, it does not mean that non of them exists but, on the contrary, some of them are now describable, measureable and controllable. And now a considerable body of knowledge about the nature of language and its teaching and learning is available.

By the way, professionals of language teaching very often find themselves involved in non-teaching assignments such as the planning of courses and the writing of material. Both require specialized background and experience of a kind which is commonly lightly glossed over or benignly ignored in too many university programs in teacher training and in research in subject-matter education. Traditionally, the devising of course planning and the preparation of materials and textbooks for language teaching had been carried out not by specialists of subject-matter education, but by those of knowledgeable in the subject-matter.⁴ And very often, experienced teachers have had practically no say in the matter, but increasingly nowadays, cooperative efforts are made throughout the total language teaching operation, where specialists of subject-matter education and experienced teachers have begun to play an active part.

In language education circles, as in those of other fields of science, the discord of theory with practice has given rise to controversies. Language teachers can be said to regard themselves as practical people and not theorists. They used to say that a theory is something trapped in the ivory tower and it won't work in practice. Theory in this sense is an unattainable ideal or a discouraging criticism given by fastidious outsiders. But, what we call a theory of language education refers to the systematic study of the thought related to a topic or activity: theory is simply the thought underlying language education.

There are certain situations in which theory becomes particularly evident: in language teacher training, in advising or supervising language teachers, in curriculum planning, in the writing of textbooks, in the choice of a program,

⁴ In this case, mostly theoretical linguistics.

or in justifying expenditure on equipment. In such situations we have to express our views on language teaching, to make choices, to take up a position, and very often to defend it against opposing points of view. In short, theory manifests itself particularly clearly in debate and in policy decisions.

To begin with, let us consider a few of the attempts that have already been made elsewhere with a similar aim in mind. There has been a growing awareness of the enormous complexity of language teaching, leading to the conviction that if language teaching is to be a truly professional enterprise, it must deal with the various aspects involved in a scholarly and scientific manner and establish a sound theoretical framework.

Firstly, here we have [Table 1], showing the hierarchy of planning function in the total language-teaching operation, proposed by S. P. Corder (1973 : 13) :

[Table 1]

= Hierarchy of planning function in the total language-teaching operation

Level 1	Political	Government	Whether, what language, whom to teach
Level 2	Linguistic, Sociolinguistic	Applied linguist	What to teach, when to teach, how much to teach
Level 3	Psycholinguistic, Pedagogic	Classroom teacher	How to teach

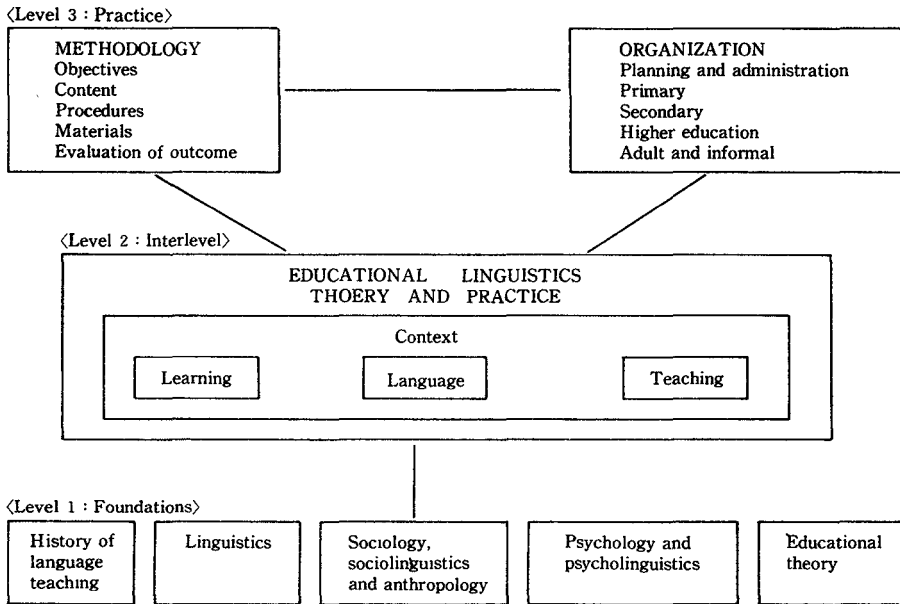
Ten years later, H. H. Stern (1983 : 44) proposed a general model⁵ asserting that a model "should serve as a research model".

According to the author, the object of the model is "(1) to serve as a conceptual framework for theory development, (2) to provide categories and criteria for the interpretation and evaluation of existing theories, (3) to provide essential conceptualization for planning and practice, and (4) to give direction to research (Stern, 1983 : 45)."

With all 'bonne fois' throughout the language education, the question is whether the decisions made individually or collectively are well thought out and based on a sound theoretical foundation. The interaction between teaching languages as a practical activity and the theoretical developments in support-

⁵ Although this model refers to second language teaching, it may very well apply to any language education. In many instances, we need not draw a sharp line of demarcation between the teaching of the mother tongue and a second language, as the line would be so thin that it is practically indistinguishable.

[Figure 3]
= A general model for second language teaching



ing sciences was recognized as less simple and straightforward than it had appeared in the earlier period. A number of scholars came to the conclusion that applied linguistics as a mediating discipline between theoretical developments in language sciences and the practice of language teaching could perhaps smooth the way for a more effective participation of the language sciences in language teaching. Other factors besides the language sciences had to be taken into consideration in understanding language teaching, such as social, political, and economic realities. Taking account of all these, we might include some more supporting sciences such as psychology and sociology. And to finish the list, we have to consider the study of education because language education occurs in educational settings.

Linguistics is often called the 'scientific study of language.' The establishment of the validity of linguistic's claim to be scientific has been century-old topic in academic discussions. But, the difficulty lies in the fact that the term scientific itself has been subject to various interpretations. This is obviously not the place to go into the discussion of the philosophy of science, but it would be necessary to draw attention to the ways 'we' language teachers interpret

or misinterpret the term 'scientific', since it is relevant to notions about language teaching and learning. Above all, linguistics provides a systematic description and explanation of target language, with which teachers and learners are content, as if they possessed exact and permanent knowledge. The most practical use of descriptive and explanatory knowledge in education is the kind of knowledge that is more or less measurable and quantifiable, i.e. it causes fewer problems in evaluation.

But, what-so-called scientific approach to language necessarily involves objectivizing. Inevitably, objectivizing means abstraction, and by abstracting in this way, the linguistic study of language has tended to lose its connection with man and society. The object of language education is to enable the learner to behave in such a way that he or she is communicatively competent: the goal of teaching a language is not make the learner merely manipulate meaningless fractions of sound sequence, but to send and receive messages in the language. In a word, language education is not linguistics education at all, and our concern with language education is that we ought to know much more about what and how it is that should be taught and learnt. With our awareness of the inter-disciplinary character of language education, linguistics cannot be regarded as the discipline to sustain practice by itself. Then, which of the language sciences can be said to have bearing on language teaching? Also, what is the most effective relationship to be established between them and language teaching practice? What other factors besides the language sciences play a significant part in language teaching theory? In search of the answers to these questions, we must keep in mind that the disciplines have to be looked at from a language teacher's perspectives. Besides the direct contribution that linguistics has made to language education through various descriptive and contrastive analyses, there is perhaps another even more important aspect to its influence: the effect, directly or indirectly, of linguistics upon the design and content of language course and upon teaching methods was considerable, even if we set aside the psychological theories of language learning.

The role of language in society and the relationship between language, society and culture are to be taken into consideration in the total process of language education. We cannot teach a language without coming face to face with the factors of social context. The fact that language and society are in many ways closely linked came to draw attention from reseachers and teachers. Scholars are seeking more and more to integrate their views of language and society. That is to say, they are not just seeking to find parallels between language and society or cause-and-effect relations between language and society.

Language teachers have not waited for sociolinguistics to come along in order to become aware of a relationship between language, culture and society. If a language teacher concentrates too hard on the linguistic elements and

forgets the people who use the language in ordinary communication in society, he distorts the reality of language use. On the other hand, if he overemphasizes people and society and disregards linguistic knowledge, his teaching tends to be superficial and not very useful.

It is interesting to note that men have lived together in societies for thousands of years, yet sociology is a modern science, and the social surveys and sociological studies of communities which have been referred to usually made little or no mention of linguistic aspects, although the methods of inquiry must have involved verbal communication. The reason is partly that social sciences and language education have only recently come into contact with each other, while language teaching has interacted for a long time with linguistics and with psychology. Another reason for this belated recognition lies in the development of proper theories of language education. Sociolinguistics provides concepts, mechanisms and systematic information for the study of language in a social, cultural and interpersonal matrix. Its contribution can be said to have bearing on curriculum objectives and content.

Besides linguistics and sociology, we may count psychology as one of the sciences most influential to language education. The relevance of this discipline to the developing of a language teaching theory is that it forms a bridge between individual language learner and the processes of language learning. Psychology is a field of study in its own right with a history of over a hundred years. It studies the behavior, activities, conduct, and mental processes of human beings. It can be defined as the science of the mental life and behavior of the individual. In the history of psychology, language has always played an important role, but at no time have linguistic processes been the center of attention and vice versa. The net effect for a psychological approach to language behaviour was the perception of the complexity of that behaviour. Psychology has also integrated learning problems from the applied side in practical learning situations, such as in the learning of school subjects especially reading and mathematics. In addition, psychology has brought not only theories and concepts, but also the results of many significant experiments on specific problems of learning to the study of learning. The opinion that psychological processes are implicated in the individual acquisition of a body of knowledge has been widely accepted, and it is important for teachers and curriculum-builders to understand the nature of these processes. The task requires us "to formulate and to test theories of learning that are relevant for the kinds of meaningful ideational learning that take place in school and in similar learning environment. (Ausubel 1967 : 5)"

In language education, psychology operates in three ways: the psychology of language, the psychology of learning, and the psychology of their interaction. Besides the psychology of language and the psychology of learning, other areas of psychology have direct bearing of language education, in particular

child psychology, social psychology, physiological psychology, clinical psychology, etc. The psychological contribution goes so far that there is hardly a single aspect of language teaching which could not be related to psychology. The descriptive study of languages, the making of pedagogical programs, curriculum development, the expression of objectives, teaching procedures, and the organization of language teaching in educational systems—all have psychological aspects. We may allocate to psychological studies on language learning the same categories as those of the psychology of learning, commonly applied to formal educational activities, which are “(a) characteristics of the learner and individual differences among learners (abilities, personality, attitudes, and motivation), (b) different kinds of learning, (c) the learning process, and (d) outcomes of learning (Stern, 1983 : 309).” Yet, the interaction between psychology and the theory of language education, like the relationship between linguistics or social science and theory of education, is not without its problems. In general psychology, educational psychology and psycholinguistics, the learning of other languages has not been discussed as much as the acquisition of the mother language.

Psychology, the theory of language education, and psycholinguistics have been in contact for a sufficiently long period for certain conclusions to be drawn, but not long enough for the definite theory that we strive for to be discovered. Moreover, psychology and psycholinguistics, like the theory of language education, are still growing fields of study. While linguistics and sociolinguistics are concerned with language, and language in society in general, as well as scientific approaches to particular languages and speech communities, psychology directs our attention to the individual person as a language user and a language learner. Since language teaching is concerned with the acquisition and learning of individuals, its theory is bound to operate with psychological concepts of language use and language learning, and psychological thinking on these topics forms an essential part of any theory concerning language education.

Among the disciplines we have considered, educational science (the study of education) is perhaps the closest field to language education. Language education occurs in educational settings and for this reason educational science is meant to make a great contribution to the theory and practice of language education. Yet, the study of education has often been neglected in discussions on language education. However, since the study of education has the totality of the practice of education as its object, it has much importance to language pedagogy as linguistics, social science, psychology, or any of the other disciplines we have taken into consideration. Concepts of education are applied as a matter of course in language education as much as in other subjects in the curriculum. For the most part, the language teacher operates with some notion of what teaching involves and how language teaching fits into the educational

enterprise of which it customarily forms a part. For the theory of language teaching, education itself can be regarded as a multidisciplinary source discipline: as a professional field of study, education draws on a number of other studies. By treating it as such, educational assumptions in language teaching can be brought to light, and language education can be viewed more clearly in relation to other educational activities.

As for education as a discipline, we divide it into several sub-disciplines. The most general and comprehensive view of education is offered by educational philosophy which has a bearing on each and every aspect of the study and practice of education, and language education is no exception. Because of the particular importance for language education of the analysis of concepts and the discussion of values, we have much to gain by viewing it from a philosophical perspective. A historical approach to education provides a wider context to the study of the history of language education that has been subjected to influences which in some ways set it apart from the general historical development of education. The history of language education is a part of, and yet apart from educational history. And, educational psychology could be recognized as the most developed, of all the disciplines which make up the study of education. Educational psychology covers practically every aspect of education from a psychological angle, and is central to educational theory. If language education has anything to do with psychology at all, it is educational psychology as we have briefly seen above. As a branch of sociology, educational sociology places education as an activity and instruction in a social context. It recognizes educational institutions as agencies within a society. Educational sociology also recognizes that schools have been created as agencies of social change through which the society may deliberately strive to modify its internal social structure. In some societies, education has been used as a means of social mobility. The work of Bernstein⁶ and that of Labov⁷ have indicated that there appears to be a close link between social class and dominant language use in the family, impeding social mobility through schooling. The fifth area of the study of education is the economics of education. This is a relatively new branch. Its major concerns are to establish the economic benefits of education and the cost accountancy of educational choices and decisions by making an assessment of costs and benefits of specific educational measures. Such assessments cannot be based on general economics. For language education, the factors to be taken into account range from the cost of teacher training to the time and space needed. Language education occurs within the framework of educational systems, that needs an effective administration and organization to ensure the proper functioning of

⁶ B.B. Bernstein (1971) 'Class, Code and Control,' Vol.1: *Theoretical Studies toward a Sociology of Language*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

⁷ W. Labov (1972) *Sociolinguistic Patterns*, Oxford: Blackwell.

the entire system, of each institution, and even of each subject and class. Moreover, language teachers are working within a particular system of education. So, if a language teacher wants to adapt him(or her)self to an existing system or to modify it, he (or she) should be familiar with the structure and operation of that educational system. An educational system is a large and complex organization which involves the coordination of many components: personnel, students, parents, curriculum, material, equipment, finance, etc., directed to a common purpose. It operates on several levels⁸ and to make matters more complicated none of the factors involved in the system is static. An obvious case of the planning is that of educational provision, school places, and teacher supply in accordance with forecasts of many the changes to which the educational system is exposed. Planning does not mean a strict and inflexible central control but includes a constant renewal and revision. Language education by formal schooling depends on long-term organization. Consequently, a skillful combination of educational planning and language can very hopefully be applied to language education. For language teachers, the study of education from a comparative and international point of view, as it is a task assigned to comparative education, is of particular importance because of the international nature of language education. Knowing how to approach a different educational system is indispensable for the work of language teachers. Then, there is the curriculum study. The term curriculum refers, in a broad sense, to the substance of a program of studies of an educational institution, and in a more stricted sense to the course of study or content in a particular subject. Previously, the language curriculum went very much its own way. But certain parallels between the development of general curriculum theory and the development of curriculum theory in language education have been noted. Tenthly, and lastly for now, we can think of educational technology. Educational technology deals with both technological devices in education and a technology of instruction. With a superfluity of gadgets like audiovisual aids or a language laboratory, language teachers cannot stand aloof from modern technology. The aims of educational technology are the establishment of a teaching-learning system, the development of educational media and devices, and their application to the process of education.

In this section, we have seen that the different fields of science constitute useful resources. They propose a broad framework and essential concepts for language education. A closer look at the scene of education, and at the same time at the supporting sciences, would be helpful in view of the anticipated improvements in language education. Throughout the total operation of language education, what we researchers should bear in mind is that we are above

⁸ national level, regional level, local level, and the institutional level.

all language teachers and that everything should be looked from a language teacher's perspective.

REFERENCES

- Ausubel, D. P. (1967) 'Learning Theory and Classroom Practice,' Bulletin No. 1, Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
- Brumfit, C. J. & K. Johnson (1979) *The Communicative Approach to Language Teaching*, Oxford University Press.
- Corder, S. P. (1973) *Introducing Applied Linguistics*, Penguin Books.
- Leather, J. (1985) 'Second-language Pronunciation Learning and Teaching,' *Cambridge Language Teaching Surveys* 3.
- Littlewood (1983) *Communicative Language Teaching*, Cambridge University Press.
- Miller, G. A. et al. (1979) *Language and Perception*, Harvard University Press.
- Romian, H. (1979) *Pour une pédagogie scientifique du français*, Paris, P.U.F.
- Shaw, A. M. (1982) 'Foreign-language Syllabus Development,' *Cambridge Language Teaching Surveys* 2.
- Stern, H. H. (1983) *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching*, Oxford University Press.
- Sternberg, R. J. (1986) *Beyond I.Q.*, Cambridge University Press.
- Stevick, E. W. (1986) *Teaching and Learning Languages*, Cambridge University Press.
- Ur, P. (1986) *Teaching Listening Comprehension*, Cambridge University Press.
- Widdowson, H. G. (1983) *Learning Purposes and Language Use*, Oxford University Press.
- Yalden, J. (1987) *Principles of Course Design for Language Teaching*, Cambridge University Press.
- Yoon, H-W. (1986) 'A Syllabus for the Course of Introduction to Korean Education,' *The Journal of Teacher Education* I-1, Korea National University of Education.

Department of Korean Education
 Korea National University of Education
 Cheongwon, Chungbuk 320-23
 Korea