

A RECENT CONCEPT OF ENGLISH EDUCATION AND RESULTANT CHANGES IN ERROR ANALYSIS

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I. Introduction

Whatever English may be called such as a foreign language like in Japan, a second language as in the Philippines and Thailand, or an associate official language as in India, the language planning and its teaching have been crucial problems and have been at a turning point in every country where English is being taught, including the nations where it is spoken as a native language. When we discuss or attempt to answer some of the questions involved in English teaching, the first thing that we must do is to define the concept of the English language itself. That is, the English which we are engaged in teaching should be regarded as a foreign language or a second language or a native language or an international auxiliary language. The definition that English is a foreign language has prevailed among teachers throughout Japan and at the same time the function of English as an international auxiliary language has also been emphasized seemingly without any logical conflicts between the two sets of criteria. English is a language of the world. We may use it for different purposes and for different lengths of time on different occasions, but nevertheless it belongs to all of us. So English may be one of the languages of Japan, Korea, Micro-

nesia, and the Philippines. And also it may be one of the languages of the Republic of China, Thailand, and the United States. As a matter of fact, English is an international auxiliary language. This is a real fact that we must recognize and not a matter of decision. It is no longer one language belonging to only English speaking people like Americans, British, Australians, or Canadians.

II. An International Auxiliary Language

According to Larry Smith, an international language is a language which is used by people of different nationalities to communicate with one another. An auxiliary language is also a language, other than the first language, which is used by nationals of a country for internal communications. English frequently serves these purposes. In the past, the most frequently used international auxiliary languages were Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, Arabic, Spanish and French. In the last fifty years, the use of English has greatly increased and today French and English are perhaps the ones most frequently used as international languages. What qualification is necessary for a language to be used as an international language? As the motivation for an IAL (International Auxiliary Language) Larry Smith presented the following questions and answers to them.

1. Do the total number of native speakers have something to do with the choice of an an IAL?

In this regard, he provided us with the information given by Language and Development, Retrospective Survey of Ford Foundation Language Projects, 1952—1974. The 17 languages which have 50 million or more native speakers, in order of decreasing magnitude, are; 1. Mandarin, 2. English, 3. Spanish, 4. Russian,

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5. Bengali, 6. Hindi, 7. Arabic, 8. Portuguese, 9. Japanese, 10. German, 11. Wu(Shanghai), 12. Italian, 13. Javanese, 14. French, 15. Telegu, 16. Cantonesse, and 17. Korean.

Although French is frequently used as an IAL, it ranks 14. Consequently, we may conclude that total number of native speakers does not correlate directly with the frequency a language is used as an IAL.

2. What about the power and political influence of the countries in which a language is used natively?

His answer is that these factors may appear to have influence on language usage, but we realize that French is more often used as an IAL than Russian, yet every one admits that the Soviet Union has much more power and influence than France.

3. Does a language from an extensive culture have something to do with an IAL?

This definition certainly fits countries where Latin, Arabic, Sanskrit, Spanish, and French is or was spoken.

4. Wealth in natural resources of the countries which use the language natively?

If that were the case, then Indonesian and Arabic should be frequently used.

5. Technological advancement of the countries which use the language natively?

If this were true, Japanese would be one of the most frequently used.

6. Number of countries which use the language as the principal language?

Larry Smith concludes from these questions and answers that the most tenable answer seems to be number six, as far as English is concerned but not in the case of French. As a result of this observation, it appears to be very difficult to state the criterial attributes of a language which cause it to be used frequently as an IAL, and it appears that we do not know exactly how or why English has become an IAL of frequent use, but we do know that it has become an IAL. I would like to turn aside from Smith's view of English as an IAL here and try to focus on what Mark Lester states as to the pedagogical implications of considering English as an IAL. All living languages by definition are a means of communication of the group of people who speak that language as a native tongue. One of the purposes of learning a second language or a foreign language is to communicate with people who use that language, either in a passive way or in an active way. He suggests two obvious corollaries which from the above mentioned assumption.

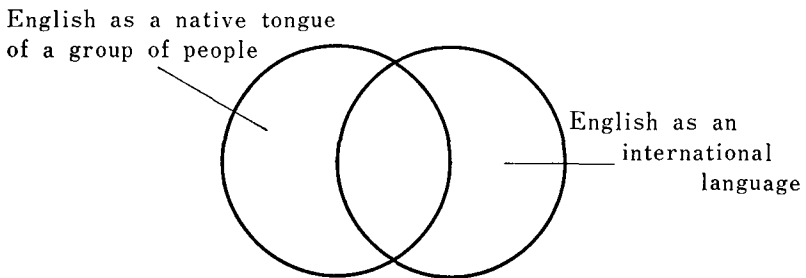
1. The subject matter of the language program should be drawn from the culture and life style of the people whose language is being taught.

2. The native speakers of that language are the final arbiters of acceptable levels of performance in their language.

As to item number 2, he points out that individual speakers of a language do not necessarily agree among themselves as to what is or is not acceptable. Likewise, there are individual differences in native speaker judgment about how 'native-like' a learner's pronunciation must be to be acceptable. Different language groups as a whole seem to differ in their toleration of foreign accents. Some

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languages, in addition to being the native tongue of a group of people, serve as a means of communication between different groups whose native languages are not mutually intelligible. Nowadays, there is a high probability that if there is a language in common, it will be English. In this situation English is playing the role of an international language. As a result, we need to sharply differentiate between English as the native tongue of a group of people and English as an international auxiliary language. Mark Lester firmly maintains the idea that English as an IAL belongs to its users in the same way that English as the native tongue of a group of people belongs to that group of people. These kinds of English have different roles, different standards of correctness, and should be taught in different ways. He represents their relationship as two overlapping circles as below.



Two basic assumptions about language teaching that follow from the language as a means of communication of a group of people who speak that language as a native tongue, were mentioned above. When we look at English as an IAL, our basic assumptions must be different. English is taught because of its value as a window to the world. In other words, it is taught as a highly useful inter-

national language will be a major channel of communication between citizens of that country and all other outside groups. In the case of English as an international language, what about the results of our assumptions? As to this question, Mark Lester presents the following notions

The first notion is that subject matter of a language program should be drawn from a culture and life style of universal interest. There is no reason why in a classroom that teaches English as an IAL, there should be any special emphasis on the culture and life style of native English speakers more than any other group. The second is that the native speakers of the language are not the final arbiters of acceptable levels of performance. English as an IAL, is not the special possession of native English speakers, and thus native speakers do not have any special right to determine acceptable levels of performance. Instead, the entire world-wide community of people who use English as an IAL should ultimately determine acceptable levels of performance. It is very noteworthy that these assumptions about teaching English as an IAL have been presented by scholars whose native tongue is English.

III. Accuracy or Expressiveness

Once it was heatedly argued among several distinguished Japanese and non-Japanese scholars who have been engaged in teaching English for many years in Japan, which we should aim at accuracy or expressiveness. It is and perhaps should be possible for us to aim both at the attainment of accuracy and the ability to express ourselves in English freely. And we should try to find or explore ways to facilitate the attainment both of them at the same time,

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instead of dealing with them as if they were an either-or-proposition. However, as far as the performance of our students is concerned, we should perhaps admit some tolerance towards their levels of accuracy. Since it is extremely important for us to have an objective in anything we attempt, we need to re-examine our goals quite regularly, to see how realistic or unrealistic they are, how sound or unsound they are theoretically how meaningful or meaningless they are educationally and how achievable or unachievable they are methodologically. So, let me describe briefly the argument and the assumptions of the scholars who maintain that expressiveness in performance is basic. Education is generally prescriptive and it gives a lot of value to correctness and accuracy in class. This is one of the serious faults in our education today. This kind of teaching is not in accordance with the basic nature of language and modern linguistic theory. Linguistic competence cannot be attained by simply emphasizing accuracy and correctness. English teachers must realize that their students are non-native speakers of English and that they are real speaker-hearers. As real speaker-hearers, they are bound to make errors whenever they try to learn a new language. And as non-native learners of English, it is almost, if not absolutely, impossible for our students to acquire native competence. Language learning and language activities are creative activities, therefore, if we emphasize creativity we can build steps in the process of language learning and teaching and that allow some errors our students make in the process to be considered as part of their creative efforts. When we consider errors that our students are likely to make in the process of acquiring a new

language, we can develop a tolerant attitude towards our students and their errors. English education should be viewed from two sides, i.e., teaching from the teachers' side and learning from the students' side. As a teacher, it is imperative that we present our students a model which is as near perfect as possible. But as we deal with the subject as students of English, then it will be virtually, if not totally, impossible, for us to acquire an impeccable working knowledge of the language. The most important fact of linguistic life is that one gets to use a language correctly only after one has used it incorrectly.

Next, I would like to discuss the standpoint that accuracy is the first thing in learning and teaching. Some scholars hold that accuracy is not only apart, but also a necessary condition—the very soul of expressiveness. One of them points out seven different kinds of accuracy which maybe divided into three groups: Those having to do with the written language. Secondly, those having to do with the spoken language. And thirdly, those which have to do with both the spoken and the written languages. In the case of spoken language the accuracy is divided into the following two classes:

1. accuracy in the pronunciation of the speech sounds of the English language.
2. accuracy in matters of word stress, sentence stress, and intonation.

In the case of the written and spoken language, we have grammatical accuracy, syntactic accuracy, semantic accuracy and stylistic accuracy. He insists that we all know that English can be

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taught in the following three ways: First, as a mother tongue; secondly, as a second language; thirdly, as a foreign language. In Japan, we know that English is and can be taught only in one way— as a foreign language. It is my feeling that in order to discuss this kind of matter, we must clearly define the concept of the English which we are teaching, i.e. as a foreign language or as an international language. If we continue to regard English as a foreign language, the result and final goal will be nearer to native speaker performance and it would be preferable to use materials based on the culture of English speaking people where the language is firmly rooted. Accordingly, abhorrent varieties of English and imperfect performance will be regarded as a kind of error or insufficiency in learning, and both the teachers and the students will hold the idea that English is another's language not their own.

IV. Error Analysis

As mentioned above, our students learn a new language through making errors. Therefore, it may be worth focusing on some historical, linguistic observations on error analysis. In the course of learning, learners regularly produce utterances in speech and writing which are judged by the rules of the second language as erroneous or ill-formed. Traditionally, the attitude to errors was what they were signs that the learner had not yet mastered the rules he had been taught and that they were, therefore, to be dealt with by repeating the explanations until the errors disappeared. Error meant that his learning was not efficient enough. This point of view gave way later to the notion that errors were an indication of the difficulties the learners had with certain aspects of the

language, which could be explained by the persistence of the habits of the mother tongue and their transfer to the new language. In this case errors were to be dealt with not by further explanation of the target language rules, but by more intensive drilling of the sound patterns and sentence structures of the language. Errors were the result of interference and in an ideal teaching situation could be avoided. From this notion, 'Contrastive Linguistics' developed. In more recent years, doubts have increasingly been voiced about the status and applicability of contrastive linguistic studies to language teaching; firstly, not all difficulties and errors can be traced back to the influence of the mother tongue and consequently other explanations must be sought; secondly, what contrastive analysis predicted as a difficulty did not always in practice turn out to be so. And thirdly, the purely theoretical problems of making adequate comparisons of languages made the whole operation of doubtful validity. As a result, the theoretical basis for such studies has been questioned and its value for language teaching reappraised.

Language acquisition and second-language learning could now be approached as a problem of cognitive learning and the possession of a second language was seen as the possession of knowledge of a certain kind rather than as a set of dispositions to respond in a certain way to external stimuli. A language user possesses a set of cognitive structures acquired by some dynamics of data-processing and hypothesis formation in which the making of errors is evidence of the learning process itself and probably not only inevitable but necessary. Chomsky makes a distinction between what a speaker knows of his language (competence) and how he uses it for communi-

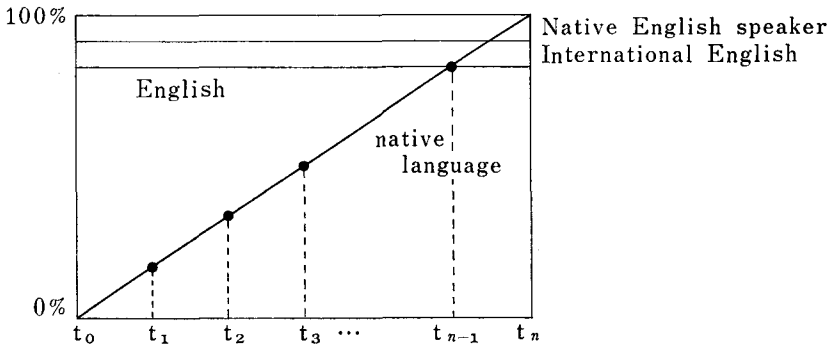
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cative purposes (performance). Native speakers are assumed to have a perfect knowledge of the systems of their mother tongue, but they nevertheless, produce utterances which are judged 'ungrammatical' by other native speakers. It is necessary, therefore, to make an equivalent systematic distinction between errors, typically produced by people who do not yet fully command some institution-alised language system (e.g. learners or dialect speakers) and mistakes or lapses, which are failures to utilise a known system correctly. The native speaker is normally capable of recognising and correcting such lapses or mistakes, which are not the result of a deficiency in 'competence'. It is necessary when undertaking an error analysis of learners utterances to be able to distinguish between lapses and errors, since language learners are subject to the same failures in their performance in the second language.

The significance of the study of learners' errors given so far has been seen in its relevance to viewing the learner's 'approximative system', (by Nemser 1971) or 'idiosyncratic dialect' (by Corder 1971) at any particular stage in his learning, rather than providing the practising teacher with information and insight of a practical sort in the developing of teaching materials and classroom practices, e.g. corrective or remedial procedures. At this point we must note that error analysis can be seen to serve two related but distinct functions. The one, pedagogical and 'applied' in aim, and the other, theoretical, leading to a better understanding of second-language learning processes and strategies. As to classification of errors, the traditional classification into errors of omission, addition, substitution and word order is too superficial to be of benefit to the learner or

to explain difficulties. Satisfactory classifications began with an analysis which assigned errors to levels of language description, i.e. errors of orthography, or phonology, of morphology or syntax, or vocabulary, and within each level according to systems, e.g. vowel or consonant system, tense, aspect, number, gender or case. More recent classifications attempt to explain errors linguistically within the framework of various generative and transformational models of description. In such cases errors are described in terms of breaches of the rules of the grammar or phonology. Burt and Kiparsky (1975) make a hierarchical distinction between global errors which involve deviance in the overall structure of sentences and local errors involving the structure of constituents of simple sentences or subordinate clauses. From the standpoint of English as an international language, systematic or persistent errors are looked at by Mark Lester as follows: Systematic error is considered a stepping stone along a pathway that leads from the learner's native language to native speaker English. Thus, the assumption is that the stepping stones are necessary way stations that the learner must traverse if he is to make progress. From this point of view, the in-between stages cannot properly be called 'errors' even though they deviate from native speaker norms of the target language. When we accept the assumption that systematic errors are regarded as necessary stepping stones for our students in the learning process, we had better use the term interlanguage to avoid the negative connotations of the word 'error'. It might be helpful to represent the interlanguage model in terms of a diagram designed by Mark Lester.

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The vertical line represents the percentage of English that the learner is capable of using in his creolized interlanguage. The horizontal line represents time. The stages below the level of international English comprise a hyphenated variety of English which may or may not be intelligible to native English speakers unaccustomed to interacting with native speakers of other languages. International English is represented in the diagram as a belt rather than a single line. We may think of international English as a restricted range of interlanguage variation, the lower limit of the range being defined by the speaker's ability to express himself fully and clearly within a restricted vocabulary area, and upper range being defined by the speaker's ability to use English without a language-specific accent, i.e., native English speakers might recognize that the speaker is not a native speaker of English but could not easily identify what his native language is.

V. Conclusion

When we consider how and in which direction we should try to reform English education in Japan, we must understand its historical

change and present international situation. In this regard, the following four fundamental facts will be observed. 1. Before 1950, our eyes mainly opened to the advanced countries of Europe and the United States and our communication with the world civilization was a receptive type i.e., to absorb and digest the advanced civilization. Now, we have to inform our nation correctly and maintain mutual understanding among many different countries. 2. We must consider qualitative and quantitative changes in students which cause diversity in higher educational systems. 3. International affairs are not only oriented toward some advanced countries, thus we have to keep good relationships with a wide variety of cultures. 4. As a result of the item number 3, the concept of English has been changed. Before World War II, one of the purposes of our studying English was to communicate in both passive and active ways, with native speakers of English whose governments seemed to have taken the initiative in the world. Today, English is a universal language—the lingua franca. Accordingly, by being much more realistic about what should be taught and what resources are available to teach it, international English can achieve much more effective results by abandoning the illusory, unobtainable goal of teaching the standards of the native English speaker.

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