

# A Paradigm of Foreign Language Teaching\*

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I'm very happy to be able to speak with you this afternoon about the problem of English language teaching in Japan.\*\* JALT, as the name of this organization suggests, embraces both Japanese (*or* local) teachers and those from other countries. I am very happy because I can talk at the same time to both groups of teachers who are all involved in the Herculean task of teaching English here in Japan. The educational environment, as it were, in which English language teachers are working is far from being ideal in terms of class size (40 to 50 students on average at the secondary school level) as well as students' lack of commitment to learning another language. Large class size and learners' great reluctance are two of the things that make our work difficult. The problem of large class size is so obvious to those who have taught in Japanese schools

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\* This article is the edited text of a keynote-address originally prepared for the Japan Association of Language Teachers (JALT) Summer Seminar held at Ueda-shi, Nagano-ken on Aug. 5th, 1989. My sincere thanks go to one of my teaching colleagues, Ray Ormandy for his various invaluable suggestions and comments for the preparation of this paper.

\*\* My concern here is with English language teaching at *general* schools—junior and senior high schools, both public and private, where English is taught virtually as a required subject, but not with English teaching at *special* schools for English—English 'conversation schools', for instance.

that I will not have to refer to that problem in particular. The problem of students' reluctance to learn the language, however, is something that I would like to discuss in some detail before going on to the main subject for today.

Students' motivation for learning English at the junior high school level, especially when they first start learning the language is normally at an all-time high. Initially almost all the students are interested in learning a language that is new to them. They gradually lose interest, however, in the venture of learning another language and some of them even begin to wish that they didn't have to learn English in school at all. Some even begin to hate the language. I should rather say that they just want to learn to speak the English language, but they stop trying hard as they realize it's no easy thing to do. What is the cause? What is the difficulty that makes our work hard? Is it because English classes are boring? Or is it because textbooks are boring? Yes and no. In fact, being adolescents, they are going through a period of life when they begin to wonder if what they are doing is the right thing. In other words, they begin to think about life seriously; on top of that they are most affected by the surroundings in which they live. Their attention is drawn to all sorts of things that make their lives enjoyable if only for a short time.

So we can't blame learners for a loss of interest in learning a new language which requires of them a great amount of time and energy as well as patience. Furthermore, there is the problem of market economics. The underlying ideology of market economics in a service and commodity-intensive society necessarily works against foreign language learning and teaching. This ideology holds that consumption is a virtue or something that is enjoyable and fashionable, whereas labor—working with our hands and backs—is outdated or old-fashioned. Naturally, learners who have lived in such a society since their birth prefer

a comfortable and fashionable way of life which rejects 'labor'—a prerequisite to learning a foreign language. In this way, learners, although initially taking a great deal of interest, begin to lose that interest as soon as they find that they will not be able to speak it as quickly as they had expected. Their initial expectations often end up an anticlimax.

Considering the society in which the learners live, we can argue that English lessons could not be interesting to many, if not *all*, students as long as the lessons are designed to conform with this commodity-intensive ideology, or unless the lessons are so designed as to challenge the ideology and make learners look at things behind the ideology and their vernacular domain in a new light. Teachers, of course, play an important role in this respect, but textbooks are no less important because students are more frequently exposed to them than to teachers. On top of that, students do not have the right to choose textbooks; they are forced upon them and will be as long as the present system continues. Some people insist that we shouldn't over-emphasize the importance of textbooks. I agree, but we should remember the fact that textbooks are foisted upon them whether they like them or not. We should also remember that these learners have not yet matured enough to judge textbooks properly even if they did have the right and opportunity to make their own choices. If the textbooks available are of poor quality, therefore, students' labor, so to speak, would eventually end up fruitless.

Another important fact, which is unreasonably overlooked by many people, both academic and lay audiences, is that foreign language textbooks cannot be prepared free from ideology\*. I

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\* *LDCE* (New Edition) defines the word *ideology* as follows: *sometimes derog* a set of ideas, esp. one on which a political or ECONOMIC system is based: *Maxist ideology / the free market ideology of the extreme right*. I am not using the term in a derogatory sense of the word here, but rather to mean simply *a set of ideas or thoughts*.

don't believe in the neutrality of textbooks in terms of ideology. Most textbook writers seem to think that foreign language teaching materials can be so designed, but I think they are wrong. They seem to assume that textbooks prepared entirely for the acquisition of skills are free from ideology. That attitude itself, however, is an indication or reflection of their ideology with regard to foreign language teaching or language itself. They look at language teaching or learning only in terms of acquiring "skill" or "technique". Language, of course, is something that is made up of elements the structure of which we can analyze and explain with the help of modern linguistics. Indeed, we can't overemphasize the contribution that modern linguistics has made to the study of language. The greatest contribution, in my judgement, is that it has proved that all languages, whether they are socially 'large' or 'small' (geographically limited or extensive), are equal in terms of linguistic value. No language is superior to another as an object of scientific study—linguistics. Linguistics as an academic discipline is a scientific approach to language. It is an approach which only those people trained in this highly developed skill or technique can make use of in language description. In other words linguistics is an academic discipline entirely based upon sophisticated "skill".

To look at language teaching or learning in terms of acquiring "skill", therefore, is to look at language in terms of "skill", hence the proposition that language is a means of communication, which has been traditionally propounded in the West. Language, on the other hand, as I will discuss later, is *social* as well as "technical" in that it delineates ethnic as well as individual boundaries. If that is a legitimate proposition, it may be logically construed that whatever sentences we prepare to teach will contain, in a certain context, an ideology of some sort or another that we may not be aware of. Look at the following examples:

- (1) In Japan, there is only one language. Everyone speaks Japanese.
- (2) Everybody in England speaks English.
- (3) English is used by the Americans as their mother tongue.

The first two statements are from some of the senior high school textbooks that are currently used. The last one is a statement I made; I often use it to test the students I first teach at university to see if they realize that it is socially an incorrect statement. Examples of this category are inexhaustible in the English textbooks, both junior and senior, that are in current use. It is not only the ignorance of the writers but also the ideology behind those statements that is more than detrimental and harmful to young students' entitlement to form a balanced view of the world. The ideology behind the statements quoted above is that the writers regard a socially 'large' (*or* extensive) language as being superior linguistically and even culturally, thus ignoring other socially 'small' (*or* limited) languages. This is dangerous because it will cause learners to develop prejudice against linguistic minority groups. Exposed to the first statement that I mentioned earlier, students will suppose that there is only one language in this country when there are actually several, such as Ainu and Wilta as indigenous languages and Korean as a foreign language. I must emphasize here that ignoring the existence of a language is ignoring the people who use it and that ignoring other peoples in the country in which we live is ignoring the fundamental language rights\* of those people, ultimately ignoring their fundamental human rights.

Regarding statement (2), I should mention the fact that the linguistic minority project team headed by Professor

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\* The idea of 'fundamental language rights' was first referred to in Quebec's language act—'Bill 101' (1977).

Widdowson at London University, Institute of Education, has discovered that about one hundred languages are used in Britain. The statement "Everybody speaks English in England", therefore, is quite incorrect. Suffice it to say that 19 percent of the Welsh speak their mother tongue—an indigenous Celtic tongue. The ideology behind the statement as in statement (1) is that the writer disregards languages used by ethnic groups other than Anglo-Saxons in Great Britain. Presumably he will think that it is best for other ethnic groups to be incorporated into the mainstream—an indication of centralism.

I have often used statement (3) to make my students realize that the United States of America is a multi-lingual nation with American Indian languages totalling two hundred (Leap, W. L.: "American Indian Languages" in Ferguson, C. A. & Health, S. B.: *Language in the USA*, Cambridge University Press, 1981) and that there are hundreds of languages other than English in the nation, though English is, in fact, most commonly used.\* It should be natural, therefore, to think that a number of different languages other than English are being used as mother tongues by different ethnic groups. Japanese students, however, tend to think that in the United States there is only one language, which is English, and that it is used by White Americans. I agree with Professor D. Charles Douglas Lammith of Tsuda University when he insists that for Japanese students the only significant foreign country is the United States of America and I think I should add that for them the language used in the United States is English and nothing else. English textbooks seem to me responsible, to no small extent, for this sort of, as well as other, distorted and false images of the United States of America and other countries (*or areas*) for that matter con-

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\* 85% of the population is of English mother tongue and anywhere between 94% and 96% of the population is English speaking. (J. A. Fishman: "'English only': its ghosts, myths, and dangers" in *The International Journal of Sociology of Language* 74, 1988.)

veyed to the learners. So an important issue, in my judgement, is the problem of textbooks.

## (2)

Foreign language teaching textbooks, including English textbooks should be so designed as to give learners the opportunity to at least think about, if not deeply understand, universal questions that any foreign language teaching is expected to raise. These questions form a paradigm on which all foreign language teaching is based. Universal questions concern every learner in any place and at any period of time. The paradigm is formed of the following three categories: (1) Understanding the functions of language, (2) Understanding different cultures and (3) Understanding man and society.

First I should like to expand on the initial category and explain some of the problems regarding the understanding of the functions of language in which language teaching is involved. The functions of language important for our consideration are:

1. language as a means of communication (communicability)
2. language as a symbol (symbolity)
3. language as a social function (sociality)

By the first function I mean that, whether it can be expressed in letters or characters or it is only made up of sounds, communicates something to relate different people with different backgrounds to one another. (See Lesson 12—"Ranmaru has his language" in *The New Crown English Series 1* [to be abbreviated as NC hereafter], Sanseido, 1989.)

As a dog, Ranmaru is a metaphorical figure. He speaks an entirely different language from that of humans, which is syllabic. That is an important problem, but more important is

the fact that Ranmaru with an entirely different language can relate to his master because the master understands the dog's language. If he didn't comprehend Ranmaru's language or vice versa, the master and Ranmaru would have far fewer chances to understand each other than otherwise. Learners will replace Ranmaru with a person of any ethnic group. All in all, students will have to understand the importance of language as a means of communication in relations with other people. Anyway it should not be our sole purpose in foreign language teaching at school for learners to be able to buy a return ticket, for instance, without any difficulty at an airport in the USA, or wherever it is, at some unspecified date in the future. Acquiring that sort of linguistic ability is the result, not the aim.

By the second function I mean that language is like a map which is not a territory as General Semantics puts it. The relationship between words and things is arbitrary as Ferdinand de Saussure theorized in the 19th century. The word, in fact, is not the fact. Because of this function of language we can tell lies or make up stories; because of this function of language we have various stories as well as great literature. (See Lesson 2—"Moonland school" and Lesson 11—"I am a dog" in NC 2.) Tall tales like "Paul Bunyan" are possible simply because the word is not equal to the thing. Fictions, however fantastic, are also possible because words are symbols distinct from facts. Modern poetry, which is often abstract, is also possible simply because vocabulary is used as symbol removed from the fact itself. With proper instruction learners will see one of the important functions of language. Applying what they have learned from language teaching to their everyday life, they will be ready for a more sophisticated linguistic life, say, in politics; they will not be deceived by the promises that politicians make nor will they readily accept apparently attractive words used in advertisements. If students are instructed in this area of linguistic facts,

they will be far better equipped for life.

The word is not the thing. The word, therefore, is a symbol. It is a mere symbol in itself, but when a symbol is used for some time, it begins to acquire some meaning and people begin to suppose that the symbol is the fact itself. This generalization is the result of the process in which people equate word symbols with facts, which among other consequences often leads to prejudice. (See Lesson 11—"Naming" and Lesson 14—"Prejudice" in the *First English Series 2* [to be abbreviated as *First* hereafter], Sanseido, 1989 and Lesson 4—"Alice's adventures in Wonderland" in NC 2.)

By the third function I mean that (1) language is an ethnic boundary and (2) language is often hierarchical. Language and ethnicity are bound up with each other just as language is a symbol of an individual's identity. Unfortunately, however, this has often been ignored in human history and a great number of 'small' languages have been 'conquered' although no language (i.e. no nation-state with its particular language) has the right to conquer another. (See LET'S READ—"Language—Life of a People" in NC 3.)

Wales is one of many unfortunate "nations" which have been incorporated into or annexed by a larger one, i.e. England. As a result of English linguistic intrusion there are only nineteen percent of the Welsh who are still capable of using their indigenous language. The loss of Welsh is the deprivation of their fundamental language rights, which has, in turn, invited the loss of their fundamental human rights, thereby making Wales an inner colony or "third world" inside Great Britain. For many Japanese high school students, however, Wales does not exist. For them England is Great Britain or Britain is Greater England. For them, English is the only language that is used in Great Britain in spite of there actually being a hundred languages spoken there. Considering the sort of education that they have received, we can't blame them for their ignorance

in this respect, but I think we have to make them realize that ignorance itself can be a *crime*. Their ignorance about a socio-linguistic situation in Great Britain, especially that of ethnic minority groups will blind them to some of the crucial problems that face the linguistic minority groups everywhere. In other words, their ignorance often results in their indifference to the fundamental human rights that people, minority groups or otherwise, should enjoy.

For these reasons, I suppose that Wales is a good example to help students to understand that linguistic minority groups exist in Japan as well as in other parts of the world. This is particularly significant for Japanese learners because they have been indoctrinated or conditioned by their national language ideology\* to think that there is only one language used in this country. They seem to be convinced, as well, that there is only one ethnic group in Japan—a Japanese race, hence the centuries-old myth that Japan is racially homogeneous with no ethnic problems, as suggested even by former Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro. There is another reason that Wales is a good reference. Students will learn that language is socially hierarchical. In Britain the standard language, i.e., the socially largest language, or taught mother language to quote Ivan

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\* The idea of a 'national language' first developed in France as a need arose to incorporate linguistic-minorities—Bretons, Catalans, Basques, Flemings, Alsatians, etc.—into the mainstream when the country aspired to grow into an empire. A national language is a taught language; it is an *artificial* language unlike a vernacular tongue. It has often been used as a 'weapon' to unify a land, thereby causing the oppression and even genocide of linguistic minorities. The idea of a 'national language' was introduced into Japan in the Meiji era and it played an important role in unifying Japan. The paradoxical result of the successful unification, however, is that for many Japanese people Japanese seems to be the only language used in the country as indigenous languages—Ainu and Wilta, for instance,—were killed off as 'barbarous' languages.

Illich's words,\* is English. Those people whose vernacular languages are not English have to learn English simply because they cannot survive unless they do so. The better command they have of the language, the better the social position available to them. That is a universal socio-linguistic reality where there is the contact of more than two different languages in a given area. Almost all the Ainu and Wilta people in Japan, for example, are able to speak Japanese just as fluently as the native Japanese simply because they have had to learn it in order to survive. The same is true of the Indo-Chinese refugees who have decided to reside in Japan. Their Japanese language level often determines their social position. In the same way, people whose mother (vernacular) tongue is not 'standard Japanese' often have to learn the standard dialect in order to survive or get a better position.

By the way, let me make a brief comment here on the process by which a language acquires a superior position over another. Linguistic imperialism in the modern sense of the word apparently dates back to the age when Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) left Palos for Cipangu on August 3rd, 1492. Queen Isabella gave Columbus permission to colonize other lands as she signed her 'stipulations' with him. More important in a sense, however, is the fact that a book was published fifteen days after Columbus left. It was *Gramática Castellana* written by Elio Antonio de Nebrija, who, in the introduction to the book, argued that 'Language has always been the consort of empire, and forever shall remain its mate. Together they come into being, together they grow and flower, and together they decline.' He went on to say that grammar would 'gather scattered bits and pieces of Spain and join them into one single kingdom.' For Nebrija, grammar was a weapon to sub-

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\* Illich, Ivan: "Taught Mother Language and Vernacular Tongue" in D. P. Pattanayak: *Multilingualism and Mother-Tongue Education*, Oxford University Press, 1981.

jugate other peoples. In this way *modern* language aggression or linguistic imperialism started. In this way language has become a commodity, English being the most *valuable* commodity today. From the facts that I have discussed students will learn that language is obviously more than just a means of communication; it has great social implications as well.

We should realize that English is socially the largest language in the modern world. Japan has had to "produce" a number of people competent in the use of English in order to survive internationally. English, therefore, is a *must* for Japan. But that does not necessarily mean that all the Japanese have to speak it, because there is no practical need for such wholesale competence and more importantly and theoretically it is *colonial*. One of the most popular words in recent Japan is "internationalization". In order to be 'internationalized' we have to learn to speak English. That is *the* rationale under which English is taught practically as a required subject at the high school level. The idea of English, however, as *the* language that will help internationalize us is quite dangerous as it presupposes that unless one learns it properly one cannot be "internationalized". What would you do if you were poor in English? You should be prepared to be treated as being "uninternationalized" and, therefore, as "rubbish", "a sub-human" "an idiot" or what not. English taught as a subject at school, therefore, should be more than just a means of drilling learners to perfect a linguistic skill.

### (3)

Now let me proceed to the second universal question—"Understanding different cultures". Language reflects culture. To teach a foreign language, therefore, is also to teach the culture in which it is used. If you learn a foreign language, you will learn something about the culture in which it is used

whether you like it or not. I say this because I believe in language relativity and the close relationship between language and culture. Let me quote here from the comments made by a Japanese professor about his experience teaching Chinese students. According to the professor, many of his students who are learning Japanese do not seem to take interest in, or intentionally disregard, Japanese culture. Obviously they are trying to learn the language only as a means of communication. They are doing so since Japan is gaining an important position in relation to China, but apparently they do not want to learn Japanese culture because, as the professor puts it, either they still think that their country and their culture are of unparalleled excellence or it is that Japanese is the language that reminds them of their bitter past; they are trying to forget it by taking no interest in the culture that the language reflects. Whichever way they think, I doubt that they can help learning something about Japanese culture once they have started learning the language. So the problem will be in what manner cultural items should be presented in the syllabus.

In preparing English language textbooks, there seem to be two important problems to consider: (1) What countries (*or areas*) should be chosen? and (2) What cultural aspects of those areas should be dealt with? Let me expand on the first problem. Generally we should choose those countries (*or areas*) which will give learners a balanced view of the world. English in Japan is the only *official* foreign language taught at public schools. It is the only officially endorsed window to other cultures. Cultural syllabuses in English teaching in Japan, therefore, should not be so designed as to prejudice learners to a particular culture. In other words, cultural items prepared should aim to give learners a sense of proportion in which they view other cultures. This is, of course, no easy task, but our foreign language teaching will be something unworthy of the name unless we try hard to realize our aim. Most of the English

textbooks that have been used in school still leave much to be desired in this respect. An underlying ideology of those textbooks is Anglo-Saxonism. Central characters are Anglo-Saxon; topics are Anglo-Saxon—everything is Anglo-Saxon oriented. Looking at the history in which English has spread, you will see the cause of this ideology. Whatever the cause, however, an important thing to remember is that Anglo-Saxon oriented textbooks will turn out Anglo-Saxon oriented people, or inversely anti-Anglo-Saxonist people, which, in turn, will prejudice them toward other peoples. The worst result of this sort of teaching is that for learners *gaijin* invariably means “White Americans” or “English people” (not British people, by the way); the word is rarely used to refer to or even include Asians.

Coming back to our main topic, I think there are four areas that should be given top priority in syllabus preparation. They are (1) the U.S.A. and the U.K., (2) Africa, (3) Neighboring countries and (4) Japan. In my opinion, these four areas should be systematically dealt with in a series of textbooks. Africa, for instance, should be considered as a topic at least once at each stage. There are three stages in junior high school textbooks, so learners will have a chance to study Africa at least three times by the time they leave junior high school. Having said that, however, I am not suggesting that we exclude other areas—Australia, Canada, New Zealand, etc., where English is used as a mother tongue for many people or India, the West Indies, Sri Lanka, etc., where English is used as a common language. Indeed as many of the countries as space allows should be dealt with, but practically since not every one can be referred to, we should select from among them. So the question will be “Why those particular four areas?”

The U.K. is *the* country from which English has spread to such an extent that some people call it a ‘world language’ and others even call it a ‘universal languages’ and still others call it an ‘international auxiliary language’; it is one of two

countries most closely connected with the modernization of Japan, along with the U.S.A. which forced Japan to open its doors to the world when the U.S. government sent Commodore Perry to Japan in 1853. In other words, the U.K. and the U.S.A. are two of the countries representative of Anglo-Saxon culture in which the English language has been nurtured.

There are various reasons for the choice of Africa. One is that Africa is the area that the Japanese people prove to be most ignorant about when it is quite frequently televised. Most Japanese still seem to think of Africa primarily as a place of wild animals and *primitive* manners and customs totally strange to them—an offshoot of Anglo-Saxonism in traditional textbooks. This sort of distorted image of Africa will never contribute to international understanding. Another reason is that understanding Africa will help us understand Great Britain and the U.S.A. better. Africa made it possible for Britain and America to be industrialized. It was the three-way trade of the slaves that made it possible for the nations to gain and amass the capital necessary for their industrialization and modernization. Although it is not common knowledge among the people in developed countries, the fact is that more than sixty million Africans were sold in the Americas during about four hundred years up to the mid 19th century through the slave trade. It means that Africa lost (*or was forced to lose*) an important labour force which might have otherwise been used for their modernization. A third reason is that when learners are properly exposed in a textbook to an African *vernacular* culture entirely different from their own, they will begin to see their own culture from an entirely different angle and, hopefully, begin to wonder what it really means to be 'modernized' or 'developed'. People often seem to be convinced that to be 'modernized' or 'industrialized' is naturally superior to 'being primitive'. This popular (*or snobbish*) way of thinking in terms of 'modern' vs. 'primitive' itself should

be reconsidered and reexamined. (See Lesson 7—"Niger" in NC 3.)

Now about "Neighboring countries". Neighboring countries like Korea, China, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam and so forth are bound up with the modern history of Japan. Unless the Japanese people understand what the people in those countries think of Japan and its people, Japan will continue to be 'isolated' in Asia. As an actual fact, Japan modernized itself at the expense of its neighboring countries, just as Western countries made themselves rich at the expense of Africa. Some people insist that thanks to Japan (or Japanese intervention—or aggression, in fact) Asian countries were made independent of European colonialism just as some people in England insist that thanks to the British Empire India became an independent country. I think they are wrong, but that's not the main point. The point is that far more people than it is commonly supposed in neighboring countries will never forgive Japan as they still remember very well some of their ghastly experiences during World War II. "War"—a lesson in *The First English Series*, which was replaced by "My Fair Lady" due to political pressure in the autumn of 1988—was a lesson designed to make students realize how some Asian people feel towards the Japanese. (See Appendix.) Anyway it is more than obvious that learners' ignorance of the rest of Asia won't do anything to reduce Japanese discriminatory attitudes towards other Asians. Thus Asia is an area that should be included in cultural syllabuses.

Next I would recommend that Japan be taken up as a means to understand different cultures. Understanding different cultures should begin at home just as should charity. We should begin with an examination of problems of different ethnic groups in Japan so learners can realize that Japan is also a multi-racial country, contrary to popular belief. It is true that our racial homogeneity is uncomparably high but it is not made up of a single ethnic group. The Ainu and the Wilta, for instance, are two of the indigenous ethnic groups in Japan as I have men-

tioned earlier and they should have a proper place in English teaching syllabuses. (See Lesson 6—"A person with two names" in First 2.) Due attention, however, should be given to the Koreans as well, since Korea is the *foreign* country nearest to Japan. Actually it is the most *distant* land in terms of familiarity.

Most young (Japanese) learners do not seem to know what has happened between our countries especially since Japan 'incorporated' Korea through the "Act of Union" in 1910. It is a history in which Korea was forced to cooperate to build up Greater Japan; it is the history in which Korea had to suffer as it was exploited to build up the Japanese Empire. The Japanese government's policy was to impose the Japanese language on the Koreans as their national language. Perhaps parallel with this history in which a nation was conquered by an adjoining country with stronger power is the history of the British Celts. Both histories are indicative of what happens when one country grows into an empire.

For the Japanese, therefore, Korea is a slip of litmus paper, as it were, to test us as to the extent to which we are 'internationalized'. If we continue to avoid confronting the 'Korean problem' to try to make the relationship between our countries better, we are not going to learn to live harmoniously with people in cultures different from our own. For the Japanese, Korea has been a 'taboo' subject. It has been so in textbooks as well. A little more than ten years ago, China was a taboo subject also. When the first edition of *the New Crown Series* was published in 1979, it was severely criticized and rejected by some teachers as it contained the word *China*. Today China is no longer a 'taboo' subject in English textbooks; but Korea still is.

The fact that Korea is a 'taboo' subject in high school textbooks is symbolic of Japanese attitudes toward the Koreans, which is exemplified by the result of a questionnaire conducted

by the Kanagawa Prefectural Authorities to the 602 government officers that the local authorities had hired in 1983. The results reveal that for them the U.S.A. is the most esteemed nation while Korea is among the five most unfavourably considered (*or* disrepected) countries. Let me hasten to add that the Koreans don't care for the Japanese either, for the very legitimate reasons I have already mentioned. Whatever the reason and whatever the history behind the reason, however, it is clear that unless we learn to live with a people we don't like, we can't expect much from any foreign language teaching, let alone English teaching. So, to make young people understand Korea better along with the history of both countries might be a first honest step towards the 'internationalization' of Japan through English teaching.

Now I will briefly discuss the second problem: "What sort of cultural items should be dealt with?" There are two aspects in the choice of cultural items in connection with the understanding of different cultures. One is an aspect which is concrete rather than abstract. Questions like "What is the population of London?", "What is the currency in the United States?", "What is 'Fish and chips'?", "What are 'stalls'?", "How many states are there in the United States?", "What is a 'semi-detached house'?", "What is a 'flat'?", etc. are all concrete concerning *realia*. This aspect is concerned with information other than with the "values" of a people. The sort of information elicited from the questions above is obviously important for those learners of the language, especially those business people who are planning to go to the United Kingdom or the United States in the near future. Those people certainly need various kinds of information about the country they are going to visit—currency, housing problems, popular food, etc.

These cultural items, however, are not important for foreign language teaching at school. They should be minimized unless they provide something intellectual for students to think about.

Information is information is information. It is not concerned with the "values" of a people. Values can be a topic for a subject of thought and discussion. Even those learners who may not be in need of a practical command of the language in the future, will take interest in a topic which concerns their life or stimulates their imagination. So the other aspect is one of the values of a people. Values are often evident in the vernacular domain of the people, which I'll call *cultural ethos*. Nursery rhymes or Mother Goose as they are usually called in Japan, for instance, contain the cultural ethos (or vernacular domain) of Anglo-Saxons. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, for instance, is a piece of work symbolic of English (not British!) cultural ethos in that the work contains a great deal of English sense of humour or play (or game) with a remarkable feature of 'nonsense', 'competitiveness' and 'spite'. (See Lesson 7—"Alice in Wonderland" in NC 2 and Lessons 5—"School Uniforms" in *First 2*.)

(4)

The final question that all foreign language teaching is expected to raise is "Understanding man and society". You may argue that the theme is not proper to foreign language teaching, but rather to social sciences, but you should realize that foreign language teaching at school is an important part of education, the aim of which is to make learners understand what man is and what society is. If you look at language teaching at school only as a subject to drill learners in a language skill, you will naturally conclude that *that* is nonsense. But if you look at foreign language teaching as the comprehensive learning experience that it should be, you will realize that "Understanding man and society" has an important place in foreign language teaching.

The realization that English at school should basically be

a comprehensive learning experience rather than a subject to enable students to converse with English speaking people with no difficulty is especially important for Japanese teachers of English. It is because the Japanese English specialists—those scholars who specialize in English or American literature or English linguistics and language teachers—have been, for the most part, non-political except for a few. Among the few were Mr. Nakano Yoshio, the late professor of English literature at Tokyo University and Mr. Arakawa Sobei, a reputable lexicographer of loan words. As a leader of the peace movement Mr. Nakano was deeply committed to the problem of Okinawa in postwar Japan. Soon after the end of the war Mr. Nakano commented that “No English specialists had voiced themselves against the war. None of them had the guts.” His severe criticism of the English specialists for what they had done or not done before and during the war is echoed in Mr. Arakawa’s words: “Who among the English specialists said a word against the Vietnam war?” Japanese English specialists have learned quite a lot from the West since Japan opened its doors to the outside world toward the mid 19th century, but they have mostly learned highly developed theories or “techniques”, but not the ideologies or thoughts underlying the techniques. Noam Chomsky, for instance, was once so influential in the world of linguistics in Japan that teachers as well as linguists spent an enormous amount of time and energy studying his linguistic theories, but none of them seemed to be at all interested in his political persuasive arguments.

Why are they so non-political? A possible reason is that they have to spend a great amount of time learning his linguistic theories with no intellectual energy left for the exploration of his political thoughts. Another reason seems to be closely related to Japanese culture in which achieving one particular thing is highly evaluated in the field of human activities—academics, sports, cookery, carpentry or what not rather than taking

interest in varieties of things and achieving nothing. No wonder many English teachers are interested in English alone, sometimes only in the field of English usage, for instance, the subtle difference in the meaning of "*I like to play baseball*" and "*I like playing baseball.*" English teachers also have to spend an enormous amount of time if they wish to learn to use English practically when they have almost no opportunity to use the language in an actual situation, hence have little interest in other areas of life, let alone politics. This attitude of English specialists and teachers is reflected in the textbooks that have been used in Japan. Generally speaking, English textbooks for high schools are devoid of political realities. Only recently textbook writers are beginning to take interest in topics such as "Acid rain", "Tropical rain forests", "Air (or Water) pollution", "Noise", "War", "Racial discrimination", "Detergents", etc. These topics will certainly help students understand the modern world better. If teaching materials have no topics with political implications, students will eventually be non-politically minded. That will never contribute to the development of democracy or, at worst, will help totalitarianism to reemerge! (See Lesson 9— "Nippon international" in *First 1.*)

(5)

I have discussed a paradigm on which all foreign language teaching including English language teaching should be based. The basic concept underlying the paradigm is that foreign language teaching at school should basically be a human and intellectual discipline, as all the subjects at school should be, rather than a skill-building subject. Having said that, however, let me hasten to add that foreign language teaching will no longer be something worthy of the name if it ignores the spoken aspects of the target language. The proposition that language is primarily speech is linguistically true. There is no language

that has no sound although there are a great number of languages that have no letters (*or* characters). Sound first, and letters next, not vice versa. Some 'language elitists', however, tend to forget this linguistic fact and some of them even argue that, "Spoken language a corrupted form of written language." They seem to think that written language is a correct language and spoken language is a corrupted one. Their argument has been largely accepted in Japan and the wrong idea of language has been transferred into foreign language teaching, hence the neglect of speech in English language teaching. It is a point of criticism that has been directed at English language teaching in Japan. English teachers have been criticized for nearly half a century since the end of World War II for the Japanese inability to use English practically. "You can read but not write or speak after a ten year's study of English. It's a waste of time and energy." It is a popular way of criticizing English teaching in Japan. What should we do? What is the solution? "Teach conversational English! Replace the present teaching syllabuses with something that emphasizes the teaching of spoken English." It seems a logical step forward, but it is *not*. Why not? First, practically, there is no need for all the Japanese to learn to speak English. Second, theoretically it is dubious. A foreign language is not a language that you use every day like your mother tongue. It is a *meta* language for mother tongue speakers; it is a language by means of which non-native speakers can look at their own language and culture in a different light; it is a language in which they learn a different *code* of thinking. So speech has a different priority when a foreign language is taught as a subject at school. In foreign language teaching "speech" or "sound" should be considered as an important element to give life to letters (*or* characters) of a target language. Letters are dead in themselves as they are. When they are given sound, they begin to assume life.

Let's take, for example, *okāsan* (or Mom) which is an emotionally-laden word for many Japanese as it is for many other peoples. It is said that when (Japanese) soldiers were going to die or kill themselves in battle during the war, many of them cried, "The Emperor—Banzai!" (I pray for the long life of the Emperor), almost invariably followed by a cry of "Okāsan". "Okāsan", as it stands, means "Mother (or Mom)". Apparently it has a lot of different implications and connotations for different people. Those implications are hidden until they are given a situation in which the word is uttered. The word *okāsan* will be "dead" (or meaningless or a mere symbol) until it is uttered either physically or mentally in the mind of a reader or a speaker. Learners will be surprised to discover that the word could mean far more than they think it can depending on the way it is pronounced. It could mean "I love you", "Help me!", "I want some money," "I miss you", "Do you really mean it?", "I am starving!", "How can you be so overly education-minded?", etc. It all depends. It is especially important for Japanese learners to learn that aspect of language because for them foreign language is primarily 'seen' rather than 'heard'. According to Ivan Illich, language was to be heard in a pre-industrial society. That's what language was and it is still so for some people, say, in Africa. The Mossi people in West Africa, for instance, whose language has no letters (or characters), hand down their history in drum language. (See Lesson 8—"The Mossi people" in *First* 1.) Their history is to be *heard*, not *seen*.

So, 'language activities'—questions and answers in a target language, dramatization, public speech, recitation, etc.—all should be practised to enable learners to realize that words are not alive as they stand until they are uttered in a given context. Let me repeat that 'language activities' should not be practised for the sole purpose of enabling all the learners to use the target language automatically. That is not the direct aim; it

is one of the desirable results but not the only purpose. Language activities should be practised to enable the learners to realize what language is and what language ought to be. Let me remind you here again that I am not talking about 'language activities' in connection with English teaching at language schools—special schools for English—in which teaching syllabuses should be designed functionally and operationally, but in connection with English teaching at *general* schools in which English is given as a subject like math, science, Japanese history, etc. The aim in teaching these subjects is to educate young people. Education, in my opinion, should be something to give students *weapons* (or tools) which will enable to realize their aims in life. There seem to be four important *weapons*: 'sense' (power to understand), knowledge, information and skill. These four weapons should be developed proportionately. The most important of them all is, of course, sense (that is, the power to understand or to make judgments; in other words, the ability to think). If we forget that, what we are doing will be something other than educating. The same can be said of foreign language teaching when it is given as part of general education at school. 'Skill'—an ability to use a target language—is one of the important weapons that foreign language teaching is expected to provide for learners. Many argue, therefore, that English teaching methods, textbooks and syllabuses as well as the general educational environment should be drastically changed in order to raise the level of speaking ability among learners. I agree, but they should bear in mind that whatever innovations they intend to carry out in the field of English teaching should be part of a general framework of education.

Finally, I should like, by way of conclusion, to refer to an essay on English teaching in Japan. The essay—*Eigo, aruiwa kotobanitsuite*, or *An essay on English or language*—was written in the middle of the 1970s by Oda Makoto, a novelist and social critic. He maintains that English teaching in Japan falls into

three categories: (1) a type of teaching appropriate for colonial countries, (2) a type of teaching for the rich and (3) a type of teaching for *genii* (i.e. unusually talented persons). According to Mr. Oda, the feature of the first type of teaching is that people who teach have an overwhelmingly advantageous position over those who are taught. People who teach are all-mighty Gods, models, norms and such while those who are taught are like "idiots" or babies. In this type of teaching learners are supposed not to be intelligent enough for intellectual training. They are just expected to parrot (*or mimic*) what native speakers say. If they learn to use a target language just as well as native speakers, they are qualified to be treated as ordinary human beings though they can't expect to become more than 'second-class citizens'. Exposed to this type of teaching continually, students will begin to wish that they could be like native speakers not only in linguistic terms but also in social attitudes and performance. They will begin to admire everything about the society in which the target language is used. In short, they will begin to lose their individual and national identity.

The feature of the second type of teaching is that it aims at learners from wealthy families who are in a far better position to learn a foreign language. They have far more chances to travel to learn and practice the language in the country where it is spoken. They have far more chances to learn the type of language that enjoys social prestige simply because they are rich. Confronted with this type of teaching, the ordinary person often has to drop out, or has to give up learning a language simply because he or she is in a financially disadvantageous position. The feature of the third type of teaching is that learners are expected to learn what only the unusually talented can achieve. The unusually talented learners, who are naturally exceptions, are able to learn to speak a target language quickly although they have had no opportunity to study abroad. In short, the ordinary learner with only ordinary ability can't or should not

expect to learn to speak like a native speaker. What is important, according to the novelist and social critic, is that we should learn to use our *own* English which could convey our intended meanings. That type of English may be phonetically and semantically, if not syntactically, different from 'good' English with the social prestige which only the unusually talented or those persons with a rich family background can master. That type of English may sound strange to native speakers, but we should use a brand of English which is our own. Otherwise we will never be able to recover from 'linguistic imperialism.'

Much of his argument, it seems to me, still holds true today. His arguments concern universal and basic questions concerning foreign language teaching and learning. In my judgement, we English teachers have not yet given answers to the questions that he raised nearly fifteen years ago. I hope that the arguments for a paradigm of foreign language teaching that I have discussed today will, in part, answer his criticism and indicate possible solutions to some of the basic problems connected with English language teaching in Japan.

Thank you.

#### Appendix

Part of the lesson goes like this:

One of my Malaysian friends described something that apparently happened in Malaysia during World War II.

One day a friend of his heard a terrible cry outside his house. He ran out. A young mother was crying bitterly because a Japanese soldier had grabbed her little baby girl from her.

What did the soldier do then? He threw the baby up into the air and ran his sword through it. The baby died on the spot.