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# Progress of The World Language Process in 2003

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*In 2003, the “World Language Program” became the “World Language Process.” The name change, following nearly 40 years of progress, serves to emphasize the organization’s pragmatic, co-evolutionary flexibility as an essential approach to developing an International Auxiliary Language (IAL). This essay discusses progress in 2003, introduces the WLP’s essential characteristics in light of JALT members’ needs and interests, and discusses recent developments. The paper also reveals the dubious status of “Global English” in view of multiple World Englishes, ever-increasing billions of non-English-speakers, and widespread*

*illiteracy in any language; it then clarifies the need for alternatives to English in light of these facts. Finally, the essay introduces the WLP’s innovate ACCESS method of teaching ANJeL Tun (Angel Tongue).*

世界言語プロセス(The World Language Process (WLP))は、言語教育の未来に可能性をもたらす重要なプロセスである。インターネットアクセスの導入いらい、一層その存在が知られるようになり、数十年に渡り真の国際補助言語の探究課題として定着した。筆者は、JALTメンバーのニーズ及び興味に照らしてWLPの基本的な特徴を紹介している。筆者は世界中の多様な英語に見られる、いわゆるグローバル英語が曖昧であることや、非英語国民が増加し文盲の人が世界に広がっている事を指摘している。また、以上の様な事実から英語に代わる補助言語の必要性を明確にしている。最後にWLPの天使の舌:ANJeL Tun (Angel Tongue)による革新的なACCESS教授法を紹介している。

## Progress of the World Language Process

In 2003, the World Language Program became the World Language Process (WLP). The name change emphasizes pragmatic, co-evolutionary flexibility in pursuit of the quest for a true International Auxiliary Language (IAL). As one part of this process, WLP volunteers are promoting a language called ANJeL Tun (Angel Tongue) as a bridge language for learning English. WLP Chancellors in China are seeking approval to use ANJeL Tun and a special methodology to teach staff members of the 2008 Olympics to speak essential English. Volunteers hope that the same rapid, low-cost teaching methodology may subsequently be used worldwide, both as a bridge language to English and as an independent IAL.

This essay introduces the essential characteristics of the WLP in light of JALT members' needs and interests. Persons seeking more detailed information about the theoretical basis of the WLP may consult the extensive web site, which includes an essay by this author (Britten, 2002).

Since at least the seventeenth century, there have been more than 200 attempts to construct some sort of shared world language. "The movement reached its zenith before the First World War, but has since declined due to certain inherent limitations. Nevertheless, it has greatly advanced the cause by empirically demonstrating the theoretical possibility of consistent grammar, regular orthography and cultural neutrality within a single language—though the combination has not yet been fully realised in practice." (Craig & Alexander, 1996, Chapter 5). The WLP seeks to overcome the limitations of earlier efforts, in part by promoting a global, co-evolutionary process of reaching the goal.

The arguable failure of Esperanto—perhaps the best known of the constructed languages—to achieve significant global acceptance seems instructive. As a constructed language—in other words, a program—Esperanto has thus far never achieved the "critical mass" needed to succeed as a true IAL.

WLP volunteers, though seeking a different path toward an IAL, recognize their indebtedness to all previous efforts and programs, particularly Esperanto. "There is no doubt that the best features of Esperanto, including the concepts of cultural neutrality, rationalised orthography, regularised grammar and global organisation, will live on—though not necessarily under that banner." (Craig and Alexander, 1996, Chapter 5) Building on previous efforts, the WLP may provide a means for realizing

the dream of a true world language, studied by persons in every country as the accepted standard of international communication.

It is important to note, of course, that the WLP is one among many efforts: there is a wide range of interest in the complex and controversial topic of constructed and auxiliary languages, of which there are currently hundreds. "Since the advent of the World Wide Web, so much material has appeared on constructed and auxiliary languages that it is difficult to keep track of it all..." (Bartlett, 2002)

Indeed, senior WLP volunteers have been researching the topic for decades, and are under no illusions about the difficulties of establishing an IAL, given the many attempts to develop constructed and auxiliary languages. (Kennaway, 2003)

### **Old goals; new technologies, media, and methods**

The WLP depends on an international network of volunteers devoted to co-evolving an IAL. Powerful new technologies—including the Internet and the Worldwide Web—have made the work of WLP volunteers somewhat easier, and this fact alone provides new reason to hope for greater success than previous efforts. Likewise, new media may help to spread a new IAL rapidly. Consider that DVDs for major movies commonly feature subtitles for many major languages all on the same disc, a feature unimaginable not long ago. If the WLP's evolving IAL were eventually included along with other major languages, a powerful study tool would be easily accessible to persons having access to DVDs.

WLP volunteers, again, recognize the many difficulties and barriers to be overcome by the Process. For example, a leading linguist in the "World Englishes" (WE) movement argues that

“all such attempts are now considered linguistic esoterica, mere symbols of the desire for universalist thinkers for a code of communication that would cut across cultures.” (Kachru, 1992, p. 2) WLP volunteers disagree with this summary, and expect it to be disproved in time, even as they study World Englishes in search of markers on the road toward an IAL. Contributions of scholars from WE and other fields, combined in an evolutionary, organic, constructive process—rather than a completed “program”—may help humanity achieve the goal of a true IAL.

New technologies and media may make this process faster than anyone imagines. Indeed, the WLP has become much better known since the advent of the Internet’s World Wide Web, a powerful multi-media communication tool that may greatly expedite the realization of an IAL. Not coincidentally, the author of this essay, a relative newcomer to the WLP, discovered the organization on the Internet while researching the history of constructed languages.

### **The dubious role of “Global English”**

Before outlining the WLP, it is helpful to consider the status of what we might call “Global English”—that is, “standard” English spoken worldwide—so that readers may better appreciate arguments for the utility and merit of the WLP. Although English is sometimes spoken of as “the world language,” or as “the global *lingua franca*,” the present and future roles of English remain both ambiguous and controversial. Not only must we consider the existence of various “World Englishes,” we must also weigh other factors working against “Global English”: more than four billion persons worldwide who do not speak English at all, (World Language Process, 2003) and the harsh reality of widespread illiteracy in any

language (Wallraff, 2000). Moreover, the population of poor and poorly educated persons in non-English-speaking countries is rising more rapidly than that of affluent, educated groups, thus disproportionately increasing the number of non-English-speakers. For these and other reasons, it seems probable that “Global English” will be restricted to a minority of affluent and well-educated persons who travel or communicate around the globe in relatively high-level professions.

Readers interested in English’s prospects will appreciate Barbara Wallraff’s persuasive essay, “What Global Language?” The author’s essential point is this: “English isn’t managing to sweep all else before it—and if it ever does become the universal language, many of those who speak it won’t understand each other...we monolingual English-speakers may never be able to communicate fluently with everyone, everywhere. If we want to exchange anything beyond rudimentary messages with many of our future fellow English-speakers, we may well need help from something other than English.” (Wallraff, 2000, p. 52-54)

If Wallraff’s view is correct, the WLP may offer precisely the “something else” lying outside the scope of her essay, by providing an IAL for global mutual intelligibility not only among elites, but also among the general populace. To achieve this goal, the WLP would need to be acceptable, and widely accepted, as a second/auxiliary language by native speakers of English. Such acceptance seems plausible in view of the WLP’s English foundation. The point is that transition from English to an English-related IAL, as proposed by the WLP, would be relatively easy—much more so than the transition from English to Esperanto. Whether or not all this comes to pass depends on acceptance, in the

global intellectual marketplace, of current WLP efforts, and, of course, the future role of “inner circle” English and World Englishes.

## **Widespread problems of basic literacy in any language**

Walraff explores many impediments to the spread of English. Other compelling evidence comes from a United Nations study, which shows most educational funding going to affluent groups, with poorer persons receiving inferior schooling or none at all (UN Population Fund, 2002). This bodes poorly for English as an IAL. Worse, in many countries, a dismayingly large number of men and women are entirely illiterate in any language (Walraff, 2000; UN Population Fund, 2002). Such persons are highly unlikely to receive English language education, and it is among such persons that the most rapid population increases are occurring. This makes Global English seem quite unlikely, particularly in view of the intricacies, irregularities, idioms, and irrationalities of, say, standard American English: the concomitant expense of long-term schooling needed to produce competency, let alone fluency, is very high, and even affluent countries with extensive English education, such as Japan, may not achieve satisfactory results.

In this regard, it is worth noting that the WLP’s curriculum developers have always been working to identify innovative technologies and pedagogical processes to combine in a low-cost, rapid teaching methodology. The goal of the Process is to produce basic competency—that is, the ability to communicate certain essential information and to ask necessary questions, particularly in a work-related context—in no more than 30 days of study, with a cost of about US \$20.00 per learner. This goal

is based on actual costs of producing currently available WLP materials, such as books and videotapes, and on experimental efforts already undertaken by volunteer teachers. The WLP seeks to build a very large group of volunteer teachers worldwide.

## **JALT, English, and the WLP**

Given the important role of English in JALT conferences and publications, and the fact that many JALT members teach “inner circle” English, the many uncertainties about Global English make the topic highly pertinent to JALT. JALT members should consider, for example, that even basic facts about the present role of English are hard to ascertain. For example, estimates of the number of speakers of English as a Second Language (ESL) are remarkably imprecise, dependent on varying definitions of a speaker as well as other ambiguous variables. Citing scholars including David Graddol and David Crystal, Wallraff shows estimates of ESL speakers stretching from 98 million to 518 million, and estimates of speakers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) ranging from 100 million to 1,000 million. In Wallraff’s summation: “No one is arguing that English is not widely spoken and taught. But the vast numbers that are often repeated—a billion English-speakers, a billion and half—have only tenuous grounding in reality” (Wallraff, 2000, p. 56). WLP volunteers share the conviction of Wallraff, and many other linguists, that English is currently not a global language, and that English may not “naturally” become the world’s IAL.

Again, in regard to JALT, Wallraff’s observations seem relevant to various Japan-centric concerns: the controversial role of English in Japanese education, persistently low scores in communicative tests of Japanese learners, and various controversies over linguistic purity and heritage. For just one example, consider the recent

Institute for Japanese Language report condemning excessive use of loanwords by the bureaucracy. (The Daily Yomiuri, 2003) Changing perceptions of the actual—or appropriate—role of English, and the possible evolution of an English-linked IAL, may have various implications and ramifications that JALT members may have to take into account.

## Methodology of the World Language Process

The WLP aims to teach people worldwide—particularly educationally marginalized persons—through an innovative “each one teach one” volunteer methodology based on Auxiliary Closed Captioned English with Simplified Spelling (ACCESS). ACCESS is the methodology WLP volunteers use to teach ANJeL Tun, a language based on “phonetization,” “elementalization,” (both terms neologisms) and “regularization.” (I will briefly define these three terms below.) Using ACCESS to teach ANJeL Tun is intended to be relatively inexpensive, fast, and effective. If successful, ANJeL Tun via ACCESS, or some variation on the WLP language and methodology, may provide a basis for a true IAL studied by all the members of the world community. Students would include today’s “native speakers” of English. I will suggest several reasons for considering this outcome credible.

The first reason is that the WLP’s pragmatic choice of English as the linguistic foundation affords powerful advantages. As Walraff makes clear, despite the dubious status of “Global English,” the language is quite widely taught, and undeniably has a very important status in the world. A simplified, rationalized variation of English—the core of the WLP—exploits the indisputable strengths of English, while avoiding, or at least ameliorating some of the well-known weaknesses inherent to the language. For many English learners

in classrooms around the world, “standard” English (i.e., American or British) may seem arbitrary, difficult, excessively idiomatic, culturally intrusive, and much too time-consuming and expensive to study. In contrast, the WLP may prove relatively easy, fast, and inexpensive, comparatively culturally neutral, and evidently designed with the long-term needs and benefits of worldwide users foremost in mind. If learners see the WLP in this light, it may spread steadily.

Space prohibits a detailed elucidation of the well-documented weaknesses of “standard” English orthography. Organizations supporting improvements of English spelling have existed for at least 400 years, starting with the Royal Society in the 16th Century. Supporters of such improvements have included famous writers such as Tennyson, Darwin, and Shaw, among others. Proposed modifications have ranged “from corrections of only the most extreme inconsistencies in English orthography to radical reforms which attempt phonemically to rationalise the alphabet.” (Craig & Alexander, 1996, Chapter 18)

Ken Spencer of Hull University recently published a study of pedagogical problems arising from Standard English orthography, demonstrating that schoolchildren learning English as their native language have far more difficulty learning to read than their peers in non-English-speaking countries, such as Germany and Italy. As summarized in one review of Spencer’s work, “English children have more difficulty learning to read than their counterparts in other countries because English spelling is so inconsistent... In a test of the 150 most commonly used words in children’s writing, only the words “in” and “is” were spelt correctly by every pupil.” (Passmore, 2002)

In response to the impediment of standard spelling, Spencer developed his own, “Simpl English,” printed above standard orthography, as a bridge orthography for his students. In regard to the WLP, the conclusion is obvious: English orthography alone—never mind other linguistic difficulties—demonstrably presents considerable difficulty even to native learners, relative to their peers learning other languages, and has done so for centuries. We thus cannot reasonably expect the majority of non-native speakers to embrace English as an effective and accessible IAL. Whether or not the current WLP-proposed orthography and other linguistic modifications prove successful (and WLP volunteers anticipate evolutionary changes no matter what basic structure they begin with) it seems clear that an IAL, if constructed with large amounts of English, will require an alternative orthography.

Of course, the WLP offers much more than an alternative orthography. Based on simplified English, the WLP can serve as a “bridge language” for those who may later want to learn the demanding variety of “professional English” used for communication between international businesspersons, educators, scientists, and other knowledge workers. This dual role of the WLP overcomes objections that it’s better to study English from the beginning—no matter how difficult, time-consuming, and costly—than to master the essential elements of the WLP, no matter how easy, quick, and cheap. Finally, and I think crucially, because the WLP is rooted in English, native speakers and current non-native speakers of English can easily adapt to this proposed IAL, with minimal investment of time and effort. According to WLP volunteers, a native English speaker can learn the ANJeL orthography with just a few days of memorization. The WLP web site includes a complete online tutorial for persons wishing to learn ANJeL Tun.

## The ANJeL Tun (Angel Tongue) orthography

The Angel alphabet consists of 39 symbols, each of which represents a unique sound. Unlike the traditional English alphabet, there is no duplication whereby different letter combinations can sound alike, as for example, “threw” and “through”, “bough” and “bow”, “blue” and “blew”, and “write” and “right.” It is hard to overstate the need for an improved orthography for an IAL based on English. Indeed, even the complexity of Chinese characters is arguably no greater than that of English, with its “tortuous orthography...we spell one sound of “o” in ten different ways (so, sew, sow, oh, owe, dough, doe, beau, soak, soul) and use the same letter “o” to represent six different sounds (so, to, on, honey, horse, and woman). So why (a baffled Chinese student might ask) doesn’t *English* simply succumb to a more rational system (Man, 2000 p.62)?

ANJeL Tun provides just such a rational system. In the first example above, for example, the long “o” sound is always represented by the letter X. ANJeL assigns a unique symbol to each unique vowel and consonant sound. The symbols used are similar to those of the traditional English alphabet, but unlike traditional English, ANJeL has no “silent” letters that can change the pronunciation of other letters in the word. It is consistent, and this enables new English learners to “see what we say” on captioned media, such as videotapes.

## Phonetization

Phonetization (a neologism) is the key to the Simplified Spelling portion of the ACCESS System. It was designed in part to agree with character sets encoded in new television sets, and has the additional advantage of permitting materials to be developed on any type-

generating equipment – including manual typewriters—that uses the standard English alphabet. However, the goal of phonetization may be realized with other orthographies, and the WLP is receptive to other means of achieving the goal of creating an IAL.

## Elementalization

Elementary ANJeL Tun exploits Chomsky’s distinction between “form” and “function” words to determine those words that should be taught and learned first. The English language has hundreds of thousands of form words, which designate both concrete things (boat, house, hammer, nail) and abstract concepts (boating, housing, hammering, nailing and, more intangibly, love, truth, beauty and other “spiritual” ideas). English, however, has at most only a few hundred “function” words, such as *of, to, if, and, for*, including relational words such as *above, below, next, after*. The function words are necessary to any form of discussion or writing that goes beyond pointing and naming. The most basic level of ANJeL Tun therefore seeks to teach only the function words. It is then simple to teach persons form words such as those needed for their employment.

## Regularization

ANJeL Tun alters English to create, as much as possible, a logical system of rules. Some of these concepts were developed and applied by Ogden and Richards. Of particular importance was Ogden’s system of BASIC. (BASIC English Institute, 2003) In regard to using ANJeL Tun as an Intermediate Teaching Method (ITM) the main idea is that it is easier to first understand and learn a system of rules and then later to comprehend the exceptions.

Because the WLP is a process rather than a program, any concrete examples offered now are subject to evolutionary changes as the process advances. However, one example of simplified English, provided by Ogden’s well-known BASIC system, may be useful here:

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.

Above we see Lincoln’s famous Gettysburg address, and below the speech as translated to the rules of BASIC, which is created by using a list of 850 English words. The translation is Ogden’s.

Seven and eighty years have gone by from the day when our fathers gave to this land a new nation – a nation which came to birth in the thought that all men are free, a nation given up to the idea that all men are equal. We are now fighting a great war among ourselves, putting it to the test if that nation, or any nation of such birth and with such a history, is able long to keep united. (Graham, 1968, p. 371)

Rendered in ANJeL, the translation appears as:

SeVeN aND ATE YiR HAV GxN BI FRUM hu  
DA weN dr Fxhr GAV Tk tiS LaND A Nk NAsiN.  
A NAsiN wic KAM Tk Brt iN hu txT haT xL  
MeN oR FRE, a NAsiN GiVeN UP Tk hu IDEU  
taT xL MeN oR EKWUL. WE oR Nd FITin iN A  
GRAT WXr AMUng drSeLF, PmTin it Tk TeST iF  
haT NAsiN, Xr iNE NAsiN Wit SUC A Brt aND  
HiSTORE, iZ Lxn ABUL Tk KEP YkNITeD.

Note that plurals have been eliminated in keeping with the current WLP concept of ANJeL. Again, it is important to note that ANJeL syntax is not identical to BASIC; various concepts are under discussion in conjunction with preparation of new teaching materials. Nevertheless, the example above provides a useful example of an IAL based on simplified English.

The essential aspects of the WLP seem easy to understand, and it seems reasonable to say that the WLP can help humanity reach the goal of evolving an IAL. Moreover, as a bridge language, the WLP also provides a means of thinking more clearly about the roles of English and World Englishes. In particular, the WLP may help to resolve problems that may arise from multiple World Englishes, particularly issues concerning linguistic acceptability within and between cultures, syntactical standards, and mutual intelligibility. Readers interested in the subject of World Englishes will find many resources. (see Kachru, 1986; International Association of World Englishes, 2003)

Given the stated pragmatism and flexibility of the WLP, worldwide volunteers hope to be able to overcome whatever obstacles their efforts may meet. Ongoing efforts in China may provide hints about future prospects of the WLP. The organization is actively seeking new volunteers, and volunteers hope that some JALT members will be attracted to the goals and methods of the WLP.

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