SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR MULTINATIONAL ENGLISHES: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC VIEW OF THE LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Most Japanese have tried to learn Anglo-American English. The problem, however, is that they have failed to distinguish between the recognition model and the production target. The production target for Japanese learners of English cannot, need not, and should not be Anglo-American English, but it should be an indigenous variety of "valid English," while the recognition model can be any "valid English," either native or non-native. Noting that English is used between native speakers, native speakers and non-native speeakers, and non-native speakers, the cultural emphasis should be placed on the cultures of specified countries. Native speakers as well as non-native speakers should be taught to interact effectively with one another. This paper explores aspects of the English language from a pedagogical perspective of Multinational Englishes (ME), i.e., spoken and written Englishes which are used by people of different nations to communicate with one another, where linguistic and cultural assimilation into native English-speaking nations is not required.

1. Introduction

Most Japanese have tried to learn Anglo-American English. The reason is quite simple: they have been taught to believe that native British and American English are "the" standard forms of English and the only norms. Hence, they have thought that the non-native speaker English used by other peoples is "non-educated English," or "broken English." As a result, the Japanese have aimed for linguistic assimilation into native English and made strong efforts to learn as near native English as possible. The problem with this approach, however, is that they have failed to distinguish between the recognition model and the production target.

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2. Multinational Englishes

Let me put forth some suggestions for Multinational Englishes (ME) from a sociolinguistic point of view. ME is used here to mean spoken and written Englishes which are "used by people of different nations to communicate with one another" (Smith, 1976, p. 38), "where linguistic and cultural assimilation into native English-speaking nations is *not* required" (Tohyama, 1979, p. 380). Japanese, or any other language, of course, could be the basis of a multinational language. For historical and economic reasons, however, English has already become the basis of a multinational system of communication, and thus serves as the focus of this discussion.

First of all, we must distinguish between the recognition model and the production target. The production target for the Japanese—what we want our students to be able to speak or write when they complete their work in our educational system—*cannot, need not, and should not* be Anglo-American English. Our students *cannot* acquire the entire system of grammatical rules; they cannot generate an infinite number of grammatically correct novel sentences in a foreign language, chiefly because the grammatical rules of any language have yet to be completely described. The knowledge that speakers have of the grammar of their language is still intuitive, and thus the grammaticalness of sentences is judged intuitively (Higa, 1978). The study of a grammar is an attempt at describing and characterizing the intuitive knowledge possessed by native speakers (Chomsky, 1965). A person's acquisition of this intuitive grammatical knowledge is said to be possible, if it is attempted before he or she reaches his or her teens (Lenneberg, 1967). Since the majority of our students only begin learning English in junior high school, it is regarded as impossible for them to acquire the same competence in English as native speakers.

There are three factors that tend to act as a brake on the developmental process: communication needs, cultural factors, and identity (Lester, 1978). First, for most people the purpose of learning English is communication. When sufficient skill has been developed to meet the learner's communication needs, there may be little motivation for the learner to master increasingly idiosyncratic details, especially when they play a relatively small role in communication. An example would be the complete mastery of the uses of articles. The second factor is the need to maintain a balance between linguistic and cultural roles. Suppose that by some linguistic magic a person were given native speaker ability in a foreign language. That person would know to how to talk like a native but he would not know how to behave like a native. A foreign accent is a signal to the native speaker that the person with

the accent cannot reasonably be expected to share the jokes, allusions, and mores that are common coin to all people brought up in that culture. Our students *need not* master Anglo-American English. This position is clearly at odds, for example, with national language policies, such as Japan's, which stress reciprocity between language and the culture of its native speakers. This position is *not* at odds, however, with the freedom of individuals to choose the cultural loading in their language study and use.

The third factor that operates against foreign language learners endeavoring to develop native speaker ability is that of identity (Lester, 1978). Native speaker English is the language of individuals in specific countries. Some learners acquire English with the wish of identifying with the people and culture of an English-speaking country—immigrants probably being the largest group of this type. However, most English learners around the world do not wish to detach themselves from their own cultural and national identity and form a new identity with the people and culture of a specific English-speaking country. In many parts of the world English is still regarded as the language of a colonial power. In this period of de-colonization, to aspire to native speaker proficiency in English is to reject local identity. Our students *should* be enouraged *not* to imitate Anglo-American English. This does not mean that students and teachers cannot choose Anglo-American forms if they are found to be useful in particular situations. The issue is one of balance, however, particularly in terms of redressing the balance which has favored Anglo-American English to the exclusion of nearly all alternatives. There are many "valid varieties"[1] of ME being used in the world, and they should be accepted without prejudice by native or non-native speakers. There is no room for "linguistic chauvinism" (Smith, 1981, 1984; cf. Suzuki, 1975; Nakayama, 1986).

In referring to the English used in English-language newspapers published in Japan and Soviet broadcasts to "Third World countries," Quirk (1988) maintains that an American or a British or Australian orientation is not just irrelevant, it is rightly felt to be undesirable. English for these purposes has to reflect not only what is going on in America and in Britain, but equally what is going on in Japan and the Soviet Union. English for these purposes has to be understood not only by Americans and Englishmen, but equally by English-speaking Japanese and Russians.

Quirk (1981) proposes *Nuclear English* in which English becomes a nucleus for adaptation to international uses. To satisfy the relevant need, Quirk holds, *NuclearEnglish* would have to possess certain general properties. It must be (1) decidedly easier and faster to learn than any variety of

natural, "full" English, (2) communicatively adequate, and hence a satisfactory end-product of an educational system, and (3) amenable to extension in the course of further learning, if and as required. The properties of *Nuclear English* must be a subset of the properties of natural English, presumably of the "common core" which constitutes the major part of any variety of English, however specialized, and without which fluency in any variety at a higher than parrot-like level is impossible (Quirk et al., 1973, p. 8). Taking an example from grammar, Quirk (1981) suggests that:

> It might, for example, be decided that the English tag question (so often in the English of Wales and of Southeast Asia replaced by the invariant *isn't it*? or *is it*?) was disproportionately burdensome, with its requirement of reversed polarity, supply of tensed operator and congruent subject: I'm late, *aren't I*?/ *am I not*? She used to work here, *didn't she*? they oughtn't to go there, *ought they*? For all of the italicised pieces, whose function as a response promotor is arguably worth retaining, we could achieve the same objective with *isn't that right*? or *is that so*?, in full English a perfectly acceptable expression, though of course a minority one (except as shortened to *right* in American English). (p. 156)

Higa (1984) claims that most examinations in English are based on memorization and perfectionism. He stresses that English is not like other subjects, for instance, mathematics. Even if the grammar or tense is wrong, people can communicate to a certain extent. Since it is impossible to reach the level of a native speaker of English, teachers have to consider how many points should be deducted if students make such mistakes in examinations. In this regard, Higa (1984) believes that in an early stage of learning, it is all right for Japanese to create *Japanese-style English*,[2] by simplifying the sentence structure, pronunciation, intonation, etc.:

> If the use of the articles "a" and "the" is difficult, just find a way not to use them, for instance, "my car," "that boy," "this man,""his house," etc. If the usage of the passive voice is difficult, why not use only the active voice? If the sound of "th" is difficult, how about substituting it with the "t" sound? (p. 7)

The thrust of these positions is that intermediate or otherwise less-than-fully developed levels of English are perfectly acceptable when employed for ordinary communicative purposes. This view of the English language may be well contrasted with views of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL), largely Anglo-American-dominated views of the language. When the term ESL is used, "the reference is usually to a situation where English becomes a language of intruction in the

schools, as in the Philippines, or a lingua franca between speakers of widely diverse languages, as in India" (Marckwardt, 1963, p. 25). Another type of ESL situation is observed in the U.S.A. The overwhelming thrust in the U.S.A. in teaching ESL "has been aimed at the linguistic and cultural asimilation into an English-language nation of indigenous groups and, more especially , of immigrants, having other languages as their mother tongue" (Strevens, 1980, p. 92).

What is the view of EFL? EFL is "English taught as a school subject or on an adult level solely for the purpose of giving the student a foreign language competence which [s/]he may use in one of several ways—to read literature, to read technical works, to listen to the radio, to understand dialogue in the movies, to use the language for communication possibly with transient English or Americans" (Marckwardt, 1963, p. 25). In short, English has been used mainly for the purposes of absorbing the cultures of England and the U.S.A., and interacting with Englishmen and Americans. Both ESL and EFL are largely Anglo-American-dominated or intranationally-oriented views of the language in that these views, more or less, impose Anglo-American norms on non-native speakers. Richards (1976) states that:

> EFL textbooks are about life and customs in Britain or the U.S.A. This is not a matter of prescription but of choice. Thus, for the Japanese student, English is the language of the British or of the Americans. Textbook writers cannot sell their textbooks in Japan if this requirement is not met. (p. 46)

ME, however, can be oriented to *any* national variety of English. The recognition model for the Japanese—the spoken and written text which is used in the classrooom, and the teacher's English itself—can be *any* "valid English," either native or non-native. One implication of this view is that competent non-native users of a language may employ a number of registers or alternative forms of the language depending on the communicative situation and the audience. This could mean, for example, that a writer or speaker would have the freedom to choose English for academic publications, or English for casual conversations with other non-native speakers. British and American Englishes are *not* the only norms. Any "valid English" is acceptable. It may be non-native speaker English as well as native speaker English. This does not mean that we should be lowering the level of English language education, but it rather means that we should be raising the level of intruction, because we are committed to the view of ME. It is now necessary for students listen to and read "valid" ME spoken and written by multinationalists all over the world (Smith, 1978; Nakayama, 1987a, p. 1982a).

Let me call your attention to the fact that Englishes are used between (1) native speakers of different nations, (2) native speakers and non-native speakers, and (3) non-native speakers of different nations (Nakayama, 1980). English language education in Japan and many other countries seems to have put almost all of its emphasis on the interactions between native speakers and non-native speakers (e.g., Americans and Japanese). However, Englishes are also used between native speakers of different nations (e.g., Englishmen and Canadians), and more important for our discussion, Englishes are today used more frequently than ever before between non-native speakers of different nations (e.g., Japanese and Filipinos). The Japanese must frequently interact with users of various non-native ME; they should be more willing to accept other non-native varieties of Englishes.

Note here that the cultural emphasis of ME should be placed on the cultures of specific countries in which the students are interested or for which they have developed specific needs. English language education in Japan and many other countries has stressed that language and culture are inseparably bound together, but by stressing the reciprocity between the two, it has been implied that English is, therefore, inseparably bound to British and/or American culture. This is unacceptable, because when the Japanese use English to communicate, for example, with Filipinos or Chinese in multinational settings, Japanese culture, Filipino culture, and Chinese culture will be the operative systems. Language and culture may be inseparably bound together, but English can *not* be bound only to the cultures of England and the U.S.A. English should also be bound to the cultures of Japan, the Philippines, and China when used by those non-native speakers (cf. Nakayama, 1982b; Suzuki, 1971). There is no room for cultural imperialism.

Lastly, native speakers as well as non-native speakers should be taught to interact effectively with one another. Suzuki (1979) maintains that when Americans come to Japan, for instance, they should be prepared to take "No" as "Yes" and vice versa, when speaking with Japanese in English (*Englic* is his term), and to take "shink" or "sink" as "think." Likewise, when they deal with people in other countries, they should learn to understand the linguistic idiosyncrasies in those countries as reflected in their English. If the influential view of English is that it is simply the native tongue of certain people (which happens to be used by peoples of different countries), the native English-speaking people will continue to have an unfair advantage over others. Metaphorically speaking, "it is like a skilled golfer beating a beginner in every match by not allowing handicaps" (Suzuki, 1979, p. 14,

1978, 1985, 1987). In other words, non-native speakers are forced to play "English-using games" without linguistic handicaps. Englishmen and Americans should be less insistent on requiring non-native speakers to conform to Anglo-American norms and should accept non-native varieties of ME. Suzuki (1979) states that:

> An ideal international language would be one that is equidistant to all the people who use it. Since English is the international language of today, efforts should be made to bring it a little closer to non-native English-speaking people and away from native English speakers. (p. 14)

Smith (1978) advocates that:

> Native speakers must be taught what to expect in spoken and written forms when they communicate in English with other [inter]nationals. [I think] native speakers should listen to tapes of non-native speakers talking in English, read business documents written in English produced by multinational corporations, and read literature written in English by non-native speakers. They should be encouraged to write in English for a multinational audience as well as for a national non-native English-speaking audience and see how these differ from writing for a native English-speaking audience. (p. 7)

A few years ago, much prominence was given to the belief expressed by R. W. Burchfield that in a century from now the languages of Britain and America would be as different as French is from Italian. Quirk (1985) does not share this view. We live in a very different world from that in which the Romance languages went their separate ways. We have easy, rapid, and ubiquitous communication, electronic and otherwise. We have increasing dependence on a common technology whose development is largely in the hands of multinational corporations. Moreover, we have a strong world-wide will to preserve intercomprehensibility in English.

In sum, we have discussed the English language from the perspective of Multinational Englishes (ME), advocating that native speakers as well as non-native speakers should be taught to interact effectively with one another. Noting that English is used between (1) native speakers of different nations, (2) native speakers and non-native speakers, and (3) non-native speakers of different nations, the cultural emphasis should be placed on the cultures of specified countries in which the students are interested. The recognition model can be any "valid English," either native or non-native, while the production target cannot, need not, and should not be Anglo-American English, but it should be an indigenous variety of "valid English."

3. Conclusion

If we agree with the perspective of ME, what might the consequences be? First, we should stop calling English a foreign or second language and begin to call it a multinational language. Second, not only non-native speakers, but also native speakers should be taught to interact effectively with one another in multinational communication. Third, we should note that English is now used between non-native speakers of different nations in multinational settings. Fourth, the cultural emphasis should be placed on the cultures of specified countries in which the students are interested or for which they have developed specific needs. Fifth, the recognition model can be any "valid English," either native or non-native, while the production target should be an indigenous variety of "valid English" rather than Anglo-American English.

Finally, users of ME, both native and non-native, should be educated in the distinctive features of other national varieties of spoken and written Englishes and patterns of cultures which are reflected in these Englishes. With *mutual educational efforts* we would be able to broaden those areas of Englishes and cultures that are shared world-wide. Teaching English from the perspective of ME could also provide a foundation for the kind of linguistic, cultural, and educational policies needed in many parts of the world today.

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Notes

1. For "valid varieties" and/or "valid English," see Quirk (1981):

   > It is clearly a matter of internal policy for governments (in India, Nigeria, and many other countries...) to decide the variety of indigenized English to be taught in their education systems, weighing the immediate local needs of the many against the wider needs of those who must in addition master a form of English current in international use. It need scarcely be added that this question arises only in countries making use of English for internal purposes. Other "national" varieties of English are of course equally discernible; but while "Japanese English," "German English," "Russian English" may be facts of *performance* linguistics, there is no reason for setting them up as facts of *institutional* linguistics or as models for the learners in the countries concerned. (p. 164)

2. Kakehi (1986) maintains that English today has two aspects of usage coexisting in the world: (1) English as a native language for Englishmen, Americans, etc., and(2) English as an international language, which is used by people of different nations to communicate with one another. Viewed from the latter aspect of English usage, the varieties of English in the world are of the equal quality which do have their own values. Kakehi (1985) calls the interlanguage *Satellite English* and states that:

   > Why *Satellite*? Because it is a step to the moon. Of course, our constant efforts should be directed toward the perfect English, but we cannot reach there in a leap or two, so we have to build a sort of space station which is strong enough to carry us far and long to our final goal. (p. 28)

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