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New English in the Education System—Focusing on Singaporean English

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The English language has attained the unprecedented status of being an international language. As it has become more widespread, the problem of norms has emerged in the "outer circle" of English-speaking countries, where English has a range of internal functions. English is no longer an extension of American or British culture but an instrument for the expressions of culture-specific meanings. There are two points of view on the issue as to whether or not new varieties should be recognized formally in the education system. Prator (1968) and Quirk (1982) took the position that only the native British or American standard was safe to be recognized as an adequate model for teaching purposes. On the other hand, there are arguments in favor of the local standard being a teaching model, such as those put forward by Kachru (1982), Platt (1982), Platt et al. (1984), and Strevens (1980). Key issues in the above arguments were intelligibility and identity. This study deals with the issue of recognition of New English in the education system with respect to one of the varieties of New English—Singaporean English. Further discussion will then be made in the light of findings with respect to teaching English as an international language in Japan.

英語教育における新英語の認容——シンガポール英語への考察——

英語は、今日国際語として確固たる地位を確立した。英語を母国語として話す人の数より公用語として話す人の数の方が今では勝っているほど、その言語としての役割は果てしなく大きい。今日、公用語として英語を使用している国々は多く、そうした国々の英語はその国独特の社会的、文化的な意味合いを持ち大切な伝達の手段になっている。英語はもはやイギリス、アメリカ或いはオーストラリア等のいわゆる定型の中に閉じ込められるものでなく、その他の多くの国々で使用される言語として認識すべきであると考える。こうした外圏(outer-circle)において公用語として使用されている英語をNew Englishと考える時、教育においていかにNew Englishをとらえるのか、つまり教育におけるNew Englishの認容の是非という問題が提起されてくる。本論においては、New Englishの一つSingapore-Englishに焦点を当てながら、この問題を考察していく。さらに我が国においていかにこのNew Englishを英語教育の中にとらえていくか、という事に関しても考察を進めていく。

1. Introduction

It is widely accepted that English is an international language in the number and geographical spread of both its native and non-native speakers. Indeed the use of English has spread beyond the nations which used to be British or American colonies. According to Crystal (1988), over 700 million people are using English, of whom approximately 330 million are native speakers. Therefore native speakers are now in a minority and one should notice the fact that "not only is English still spread but it is even being spread by non-English mother-tongue interests" (Fishman, 1982). As English has become more "international," the problem of norms has emerged, especially in the "outer circle" of English-speaking countries, where it combines a range of internal functions with the norm developing varieties. In fact, English is stable and institutionalized in outer circle countries such as India, Nigeria, Singapore, and Zambia. In these countries, English is no longer an extension of American or British culture but an instrument for the expression of culture-specific meanings. The new varieties and innovations created by users in the outer circle might be regarded as being deviant by inner circle users such as Britons, Americans, Australians, or Canadians. As a result, the emergence of new, stable, non-native varieties is calling into question current language planning, namely, should the target language be an external model or a formalization of the new variety of English? In other words, the question is whether or not the new varieties should be recognized formally in the education system.

2. Singaporean English

Singaporean English is clearly a speech continuum. There are variables in certain characteristics, and there are also considerable differences in usage from the basilect through mesolect to the acrolect (most localized version of English through the textbook standard). Generally speakers of a higher education standard tends to speak close to the acrolect. Syntactically, their variety of English approaches standard British English, but phonologically, they tend to monophthonize some diphthongs, producing vowels of unvarying quality, and reduce consonant clusters. In addition, they are likely to include Singaporeanisms in their lexical choices. Further examination of some of the variables in Singaporean English with respect to its phonological, lexical, and syntactic characteristics will help clarify these points.

2.1 Phonological Variables

Platt (1982) found that reduction or modification occurred in 71 percent of words which in standard British English ended in a two-consonant cluster. An example of this is "recent" which was frequently reduced to "recen." The phonological variables in Singaporean English can be shown as follows.

Speakers of Singaporean English:

1. tend to shorten their vowels (e.g., see /si:/ becomes /si/ or /s/);
2. tend to use a monophthong where a diphthong is used in standard varieties of English;
3. tend to shift stress to a later syllable (e.g., éducated becomes educáted);
4. tend to speak in "syllable-timed" rhythm, that is, all syllables are separated by equal time intervals;
5. tend to place a stress on the final syllable of word groups, particularly on the final syllable in the sentence (e.g., I give the ticke[ts]to him), even when not conveying contrast;
6. tend to lack liaison between words, producing a staccato style of speech.

2.2 Lexical Varieties

There are a considerable number of typical Singaporean English expressions. Some originated from different language influences, such as Chinese and Portuguese, some are adaptations of existing English words, while others relate to different styles of living or different sociocultural backgrounds. Following are examples.

Chinese Origin: The word *towkay* in Hokkien, for example, originated from *thauke,* meaning an employer of labor, usually a wealthy business man (e.g., "Lot of *towkay* used to live in this street").

Adaptation: Even some British English words have taken on a different meaning. The word *alphabet,* for example, substitutes for *letter,* and the word *deep* means the educated formal subvariety of a particular language or a Chinese dialect (e.g., "Pla(tt)? You write your name with three alphabet or four?" and "The deep Hokkien I cannot speak" [Platt et al., 1984]).

2.3 Morpho-syntactic features

A number of variable grammatical features are found in the mesolectal variety of Singaporean English. Platt (1977, 1982) identifies the following morpho-syntactic features in Singaporean English.

Variable lack of past tense marking: "I attend(ed) night school," and "My mum, she come from China many years ago" (Platt, 1982).

Variable lack of third person singular present tense marking: "My mother she work very hard," and "This radio sound good" (Platt, 1982).

Variable use of "be" as copula or auxiliary: By using a group of fifty-nine speakers (forty with English-medium education and the rest with Chinese- or Malay-medium education), Platt et al. (1984) identified the following implicational ordering: (a) pre-adjective ("This coffee house very dirty"); (b) pre-predicate nominal ("My car a Toyota"); (c) pre-verb + ing ("My sister also not working"); and (d) pre-locative ("My auntie in America"). These deletions and variable uses are also common in other varieties of English-based creoles and African-American English.

2.4 Aspect Markers

Already: In colloquial Singaporean English, *already* is used to indicate completed actions and events, as in "My father already pass away" (my father has passed away/died). However, there is another meaning connected with the word *already* in Singaporean English; it can also mean *anymore* ("I don't drink coffee already" (I don't drink coffee anymore.)

Used to: In Singaporean English, *used to* has no necessary connotation of a past action or state, although it may be used with the past tense. The following examples refer to habitual or general actions, and do not necessarily connote any past action. "All Europeans used to go there—Indian shop." "We used to speak English."

Would: A characteristic feature of Singaporean English is the common occurrence of *would* where *will* is normally used in other varieties of English. Particularly, local speakers of Singaporean English understand that *would* is more polite than *will*. Examples are "I hope the government would take action to put a stop to this practice," and "I trust that his son would retain his best for the game." However, at levels further along the Singaporean English continuum, the tense-aspect system of English is restructured, so that *would* marks any unrealized action or state.

2.5 Plural of Nouns

Plurals in nouns are mostly not marked by affixation. This tendency is strongly related to their background languages. Speech of even educated Singaporeans , however, includes such utterances as "There are quite a lot of active adult educationist(s)," and "I know people who speak with those accent(s)." Thus pronunciation is associated with the reason for the non-marking or plural nouns.

2.6 Use of Definite Article

Definite articles are inclined to occur more frequently than indefinite articles in Singaporean English, although there is often deletion of both articles. Chinese, which is a long-established language, makes a specific/non-specific distinction rather than the definite/indefinite distinction which English makes. This tendency can also be seen in many of the varieties of New English. Some examples are shown in the following: "I got very kind mother" (her mother is non-specific because it is obvious to the speaker that she has only one mother); "I didn'(t) buy the dress lah" (referring to a dress that has been discussed before) (Platt et al., 1984).

2.7 Deletion of subject and object pronoun

A final sentence particle *la* is often used when English is employed in formal settings. Again, this tendency to use *la* originated in Hokkien. Following is an example from Richards and Tay (1977): "That depend on you la, if you want to take off one day, or your office give you, that up to you la."

As seen in Singapore, English is stable and institutionalized. It is no longer an extension of British or American culture but an instrument for the expression of culture-specific meanings. This then raises the problem of the recognition of new, stable, and non-native varieties as a teaching model. Before addressing this problem, I would like to discuss what standard English is and what a native speaker is. The argument depends upon what concept of "standard" is used.

3. Dubious Concepts

3.1 "Standard" English

The term "standard" here is quite ambiguous, perhaps because so such thing exists. One interesting aspect of standard English is the fact that those who habitually use only standard English are in a minority in every English-speaking community. According to Platt et al. (1984), there are two ways in which to use the term "standard": "A 'standard' may be considered: (a) an ideal towards which one may strive but may not necessarily reach; or (b) as one of a pair which signals 'right' or 'wrong'" (p. 162).

As seen above, (b) is rather unrealistic because language functions in communication to create a need for mutual intelligibility and as a symbol of linguistic identity. In other words, language is part human behavior and part real life. "In real life, there is often no clear-cut dichotomy. After all, even between black and white there are many shades of grey" (Platt et al., 1984). To the learners of English in the "New Nations" (the "outer circle" mentioned before), and to those who are already partial speakers of the New English, some of the situations reflecting British or American life are quite unreal. They do not reflect their cultural settings or their norms of behavior. In these cultural settings, how can the external standards be the norm for the speakers of the New English? Besides, granting that, for example, American English implies authenticity in terms of "standard," it is not clear how differences between the speakers should be accounted for. Numerous varieties actually exist in American English: New England, southern, and so forth. Consequently, how can a specific "model" among the varieties be selected as a standard norm? American or even British English should be accepted as a linguistic abstraction rather than being a "standard."

3.2 The "Native Speaker" of English

Linguists are necessarily concerned with the native speaker, but their definitions are, in fact, as diverse as their theoretical inclinations. Coulmas (1980) put it as follows:

> One obvious answer is that linguists should describe what the native speaker says and try to discover patterns according to which his utterances can be systematized. A competing view states that what the native speaker knows in terms of language is what the linguist is after and what he should try to model. Still another position contends that linguists cannot do justice to their subject matter if they fail to explain what the native speaker does. We may thus observe that the respective conception of the native speaker as well as one's notion of what is and what is not interesting about him is very indicative with regard to the whole theoretical approach that one favors in the study of language. (p. 3)

Indeed, not every speaker performs equally well when the linguist is trying to assemble a good corpus. And there is no doubt that linguistic skills, in fact, vary among individual linguists when they choose informants and select a corpus. When linguists collect data and eliminate exceptional utterances from the corpus, how can they know in advance what is exceptional or deviant? Thus the "native speaker" is a dubious concept, and as Coulmas (1980) has claimed, "speakers who can serve as data suppliers have to be native speakers"

(p. 4). Here, importantly, those who have learned English as a second language should be excluded. Some arguments as to the concept of the native speaker are "the native speaker is a human being who is able to give information about his or her language (within a framework of field linguistics), theoretical linguists, by contrast, take the concept as an abstract idealization" (p. 4). Thus, it is rather difficult to define the concept for various speakers of English. I am taking the view that only those who speak English as their first language and can serve as data suppliers have to be native speakers. This is because "the ultimate judges of naturalness can only be the speakers of a language" (p. 4).

4. Should a Local Standard Be Accepted?

4.1. Arguments Against the Local Standard

Prator (1968) takes the position that only the native British or American standard was safe to be recognized as an adequate model for teaching purposes. He fears that to recognize non-native varieties as teaching models would be to accept the gradual drifting apart of varieties of English with a resulting loss of intelligibility. He argues that second language varieties are inherently more unstable than mother tongue varieties. He also claims that concession to non-native models has a multiplier effect leading to the gradual drifting apart of different varieties of English. Besides, he feels, it is unwise to tolerate deviation at one level of language (e.g., phonology), because ultimately other levels of language will be affected. Thus he takes a strong position against accepting a local standard as an adequate teaching model. Quirk (1982) also supports Prator's position, claiming that:

> Naturally, in this context, the divergence between one country's English and another's is seen to be in danger of growing much more seriously wide, with no common educational or communicational policy even theoretically applicable, but rather with nationalism strongly endorsing a linguistic independence to match political and other aspects of independence. (p. 16)

He argues that there are dubious advantages in exposing learners to a variety of standards embedded in a complex sociolinguistic matrix. He points to the BBC, All India Radio, and the Japan Times as offering a satisfactory international standard to aim at.

4.2 Arguments in Favor of the Local Standard

On the contrary, there are several arguments in favor of the local educated variety as a teaching model. As mentioned before, native speakers have lost the prerogative to control its standardization, and English is no longer the property of the English inner circle. Therefore pedagogical models selected for English should reflect local or regional characteristics. As Strevens (1980) says, "it must (a) be mutually intelligible with all other national and international forms, but (b) it must also be different from all others, and (c) recognizably an L2 form, not an L1 form."

Indeed the learners of English in the New Nations and those who already speak the New English feel it quite unreal that they use English textbook materials reflecting only British or American life but not their life. These materials don't reflect their cultural settings, their norms of behavior, and above all, they don't reflect the norms of use of the New English. The spread of a language usually results in an increased variation of functions and proficiency. The displacement of a language from its traditional locality also involves new acculturation. As has been claimed, non-native varieties of English are stable and efficient, capable of expressing culture-specific meanings in a "non-Englishized" context. They are conscious of the harm done by the elitist, prescriptivist manuals regarded as authoritative versions of native standard English. Therefore they argue for greater recognition of the varieties of New English in education. In fact, Kachru (1977) suggested a polymodel approach for school teaching. Richards and Tay (1977) also support Kachru's call for a polymodel approach to the teaching of English.

5. A Polymodel Approach

Kachru (1977) suggested that a monomodel approach presupposes that there is a homogeneous English L2 speech community, and that the functional roles assigned to English in each area are more or less identical. Hence, the goals for the study of English in various parts of the world are more or less similar. Such a position, therefore, presupposes that the "context of situation" for the use of English in all the English-speaking areas is identical, whereas the polymodel approach takes a diametrically opposite position. It is based upon types of variability in teaching English for cross-cultural communication, such as variability related to "acquisition," "function," and "context of situation." By showing the example of Singaporean English, he suggests that norms should vary according to the channel (speech or writing), with regard to school teaching. Written English should not deviate substantially from the British English standard, but speaking is different because phonology and vocabulary identify a speaker, for example, as distinctively Singaporean. Hence, in pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation, the acrolect (a local educated standard) can serve as a teaching model. As Kachru (1977) put it, we may have to recognize a "cline" in terms of the formal characteristics of an L2 variety of English, such as a functional diversity in each area where English is spoken, and a diversity in "proficiency." Importantly, the cline should apply not only to proficiency at the phonological level, but must also be interpreted in a broader sense, namely in the overall sociolinguistic context.

6. How Should We Teach English in Japan?

So far we have seen one of the varieties of New English, Singaporean English, with respect to its phonological, lexical, and syntactic characteristics. Recognition of New English in the education system was also discussed from two different points of view, those of Quirk (1982) and Kachru (1982). In Japan, however, English is not an official language and has been taught as a foreign language. The teaching situation of English is, therefore, different from the one in those countries where English is currently spoken with a range of internal functions. How should we deal with these varieties of New English in the teaching settings in Japan? The following is an approach for dealing with New English.

6.1 Reading

Reading materials published in New English speaking countries should be adopted as well as those published in native English countries. Japanese EFL students need not only British and American culture-oriented readings, but multiculture-oriented materials. By seeing and being familiar with them, students will find different ways of thinking, as well as different cultural and social values. This will help students a great deal in their effective cross-cultural understanding. Unless Japanese interactors have some idea of these different culture-oriented ways of thinking and different social values, their communication will not be successful. This is essential as Japan has close relationships with Southeast Asian countries where English is spoken with internal functions. As Nakamura (1986) has claimed, "the understanding of one particular foreign culture does not automatically guarantee communicative success in all international settings" (p. 6).

6.2 Writing

It is widely accepted that EFL students in Japan often lack consistency in logical structure in their English writing and tend to present ideas in a distorted manner. Present attempts at foreign language teaching have mainly been sentence-oriented. The emphasis is placed not on teaching the rhetorical patterns and structures of L2 writing, but on translating one or more sentences from Japanese to English. Hence problems of Japanese EFL students appear not only in grammatical errors, but are also seen on the rhetorical level when they are engaged in L2 writing. Even among advanced level EFL students, the same problem is often found in developing logical structures. Kaplan (1966), in his pioneering work of "Cultural Thought Patterns in Inter-cultural Education," claimed that one of the difficulties faced by L2 writers was the fact that their native language might employ rhetorical patterns different from those of English. This is due to the cultural patterns, as there are culture-specific ways of writing. For example, oriental writing, to use his specific term, is marked by what may be called an approach by indirection. In this kind of writing, according to Kaplan (1972), the development of the paragraph is, described by Yeats's phrase, "turning and turning in a widening gyre." He put it as follows:

> The circles or gyres turn around the subject and show it from a variety of tangential views, but the subject is never looked at directly. Things are developed in terms of what they are not, rather than in terms of what they are. (p. 46)

"Oriental" here is intended to mean specifically Chinese and Korean languages, and not Japanese. But Japanese, in fact, is similar to Chinese to some extent, as well as Korean, in writing. This idea of writing Japanese prose, called *ki*, *sho*, *ten*, and *ketsu*, originated in old Chinese poems and was introduced into Japan long ago. Thus Japanese people learned to develop paragraphs using this model when writing Japanese prose. Japanese EFL students tend to transfer this first language strategy to their second language writing.

As for teaching English composition, the American or British norm should generally be accepted as the core model. If Singapore English were accepted as a writing model, for example, then it would be difficult for both teachers and learners to deal with. As we have seen, Singaporean English differs from the British and American standard by its wide range of varieties in lexical features, such as lexical origin, morpho-syntactic features, aspect markers, use of definite article, and morpheme addition. These salient features might often be employed not only in speaking but also in writing by the Singaporean people. For Japanese EFL learners, who need to learn basic writing skills, those features are often beyond their comprehension. It is basic writing skills that they need to learn first. Then, as a second step, they need to learn how to develop paragraphs with logical cohesion in order to make their writing understood.

6.3 Listening

Listening materials in Japanese EFL settings need to include varieties of New English. American or British English has been adopted as the core model for listening comprehension for the past decades. In the light of the spread of the English language, however, it is necessary to understand different varieties of English. This gives support to Nakamura's (1986) contention that "the EIL (English as an International Language) approach to listening comprehension does not threaten their deep-rooted belief that the model should be a native English" (p. 4). As he has claimed, "either American or British English will continue to serve as the model because it is not likely that Japanese English (educated English with a Japanese accent) will be the model in the near future" (1986, p. 4). It is therefore necessary for Japanese EFL students to comprehend varieties of English in cross-cultural settings.

6.4 Speaking

As has been seen in the examples, spoken forms of Singaporean English are different from those of native English speakers. Spoken Singaporean English has its own standards and culture-specific meanings. This is important, and Japanese EFL learners should be encouraged to speak English using their own standards and to use it with confidence. Many of them, however, have some feeling of hesitation when speaking English. This is partly because some want to speak like native English speakers. Even Japanese EFL teachers want their students to perform like native speakers of English. This is reflected in too much correction of the learners' phonological and grammatical errors by teachers. As a result, learners lack confidence and hesitate to speak English. As Nakamura (1986) says, "speaking like a native is the completely unrealistic goal that EFL has been trying to achieve not only in Japan but in many other parts of the world as well" (p. 4). Hence, without penalties, Japanese EFL teachers should encourage their students to speak English with their own standards and culture-specific meanings. More attention should be paid to what the learners are trying to say, rather than how close their English is to the native standard.

7. Conclusion

The English language is no longer an extension of American or British culture, but an instrument for the expressions of culture-specific meanings.

Key issues in recognizing new varieties of English as teaching models are intelligibility and identity. There are two different points of view as to whether or not new varieties should be recognized formally in the education system, with Quirk (1982) and Prator (1968) in one camp, and Strevens (1980) and Kachru (1982) in the other. As we have seen, within a limited British or American standard for English, we cannot express properly our own social values and the flavor of our own culture. As Strevens (1980) states:

> In ESL areas where local L2 forms have developed and where they command public approval it is these forms which constitute the most suitable models for use in schools, certainly more suitable than a British or American L1 model. (p. 90)

Thus, we need an attitude of acceptance for the varieties of English, not only for intelligibility among people, but also for identity. In fact, different varieties of English are being used in international communicative settings, and the number has been increasing.

In Japan, where English is not an official language but a foreign language, it is generally appropriate to accept native English (American, British, Australian, etc.) as a suitable pedagogical model. Along with this core model, the new varieties of English can also be introduced into classroom settings. Varieties of New English will develop more in the future, and acceptance of the local variety as a proper teaching model will depend on government language policies and particular educational policies. "It will also depend upon the attitudes which the people in the New Nations have to the particular policies" (Platt et al., 1984). As for introducing New English to Japanese EFL students, further discussion and elaboration are necessary—namely, how we are to deal with new varieties. This is because the concept of New English is quite valuable and should be included in the English language curriculum.

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