English as an International Language:

A Pre-reading Activity to Raise Students' Awareness

of Linguistic and Cultural Diversity

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要旨

　コミュニション能力の育成を主たる目的とする英語教育の必要性が叫ばれ、コミュニカティブアプローチが教育現場に導入されるようになって久しい。そもそもコミュニケーション能力とは、その言語の構造や、語彙の知識だけでなく、社会言語的能力、方略的能力から成立すると考えられているが、その二つはその言語の使用されている社会の文化と深く関わりを持つ。故に、言語習得にはその言語に関わる異文化理解が不可欠であるとの見方から、英語教育におけるコミュニカティブアプローチでは、特に英語圏の文化の吸収の必要性が強調されて来た。しかしながら、この急速なグローバル化の時代にあって、英語は世界の共通語としての役割をますます強く負うようになり、英語を媒体とした非母語話者同士のコミュニケーションが増えていく事が予想される。本稿では、実験的試みとして行った、学習者に英語、そして文化の多様性をより認識させることを目的としたプレリーディングアクティビティの実践を報告する。フィードバックから判断すると、学習者たちの反応は概して好意的であり、それらの目的を達することにある程度成功したと言ってよいと思われる。これからの方向を考察するに、母語話者の英語はモデルとして基軸に残すべきではあるが、言語的、文化的多様性に柔軟に対処できるよう学習者の意識、態度を変革し、地球市民としてグローバルな視点に立って考えることのできる人間の育成に関わることが、英語教育にも求められるのではないだろうか。

I. Introduction

　　It has been a while since it was advocated that English education in Japan should focus on teaching communication. Besides, it has been understood that teaching communication inevitably involves teaching culture. Nevertheless, communication in the English teaching field seems to have been assumed only between non-native speakers and native speakers, and English and culture being taught has been limited to English or American. Because of the rapid globalization movement across the world, however, the role of English is changing dramatically and it is suggested that English education should focus more on English as an international language. In this paper, one example of pre-reading activities for a college reading class which incorporates cultureal and liguistic diversity will be introduced. After the lesson, a

survey was taken among the students. Based on the students' feedback, pedagogical implications and future perspectives are discussed.

II. Theoretical Background

The communicative language teaching movement stresses not only learners' linguistic proficiency, but the communicative competence to deal with social contexts and sociocultural factors (Brumfit, 1984; Hymes, 1979). According to Canale and Swain (1980), the minimal components of communicative competence are:

(1) grammatical competence – knowledge of what is grammatically correct in a language,

(2) sociolinguistic competence – knowledge of what is appropriate linguistic behavior in different contexts, and;

(3) strategic competence – knowledge of ways to communicate intended meanings verbally or nonverbally when successful communication is threatened.

Out of these three components, numbers two and three are controlled by the culture of the speakers of the language, as each culture decides appropriate linguistic behavior (Holliday, 1994; Nakayama, 1982).

Smith (1984) has pointed out that behind communicative language teaching of ESL or EFL, there is an assumption that non-native speakers must acquire native speakers' communicative competence and that for that reason, native speakers' English and cultures must be acquired.

However, because of the rapid globalization of the world, English has been being used more and more in international settings. According to *English as a Global Language* (Crystal, 1997), English is dominant in almost all international domains, which has been accelerated by the prevalence of the Internet. According to recent statistics, 1,200 to 1,500 million people now speak English as a native speaker, with native-like fluency, or with reasonable competence, (*UNESCO Statistical Yearbook* 1995, *Encyclopedia Britannica Yearbook 1996*, cited in Crystal, 1997, p.55) for international communication, out of which only 320 to 380 million people are native speakers. Under these circumstances, interaction between non-native speakers must be increasing more and more in number.

Therefore, it is suggested that communication between non-native speakers should be looked at more closely and English language education should shift its emphasis more on English as an international language(EIL) (Cummins, 1997; Holliday, 1994; Kachru, 1994; Nakayama, 1982; Smith, 1984).

II. Pre-reading activity

The process of second language reading has been studied so much during the

past two decades or so and now most researchers have agreed that reading should be seen as the interaction between bottom-up processes (linguistic decoding skills) and top-down processes (cognitive skills) (Carrell, 1981, 1983; Cohen et al., 1979; Eskey, 1973; Hudson, 1982). In other words, the reader not only receives what is written in the text, but also actively gets involved with the reading by using background knowledge of the text in his/her schema. Schema is originally a psychological term which means one's previously acquired knowledge structure. Schema theory research shows that the greater the background knowledge a reader has of a text's content area, the better s/he will comprehend the text. Thus, activating schema is crucial for effective reading, and for this purpose, pre-reading activities are indispensable (Carrell, 1981, 1983, 1988, Rumelhart, 1980, Hudson, 1982). It should be noted that one obvious reason that a particular schema may fail to exist for a reader is that the schema is specific to a certain culture and is not in the reader's background knowledge (Carrell, 1988).

II. Practice of the Pre-reading Activity

1. Purposes

In the pre-reading activity which is to be introduced here, a video clip was shown in which several people from various countries were interviewed by the researchers about their countries. They spoke English either as a second or a foreign language. The specific purposes of the pre-reading activity were:
(1) to motivate the students to read the text,
(2) to activate the students schema (top–down process of the reading), and help their comprehension of the text; and
(3) to make students aware of the diversity of English and cultures.

2. Subjects

This activity was done to 5 classes of reading in 4 colleges — Bunkyo University, Kanagawa University, Kanto Gakuin Women's Junior College , and Rikkyo University. The total number of students was 167.

3. Material

The reading text which was used in this class is a passage "Black Cats and Broken Mirrors" from a textbook for intermediate English learners, *Even More True Stories* (Addison-Wesley Longman, 1992)(Appendix), which is about superstitions from various countries. For this reading material, the researchers had interviewed 8 people from 5 different areas and countries (two from China, two from Korea, one from Hong Kong, one from Venezuela, and two from Japan) in English. All the interviewees speak English as a foreign or a second language. They were asked to speak about

their superstitions by answering some questions by the researchers.

4. Procedures

The pre-reading activity was done according to the following procedures.

(1)　The students were given a worksheet which they were to work on during the pre-reading activity. This task was meant to focus students' attention on overall comprehension of the content of the spoken English in the video clip through listening to it with the visual aids.

(2)　The video clip was played three times.

(3)　The whole class checked the answers of the worksheet with the instructor and confirmed the comprehension of the pre-reading activity.

5. Feedback from the students

After the class, the students feedback was taken with a questionnaire. It was designed to assess how the pre-reading activity motivated them, helped their comprehension, and how it made them aware of cultural and English diversity. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. In the first part, the students were asked to answer four questions using a scale from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). In the second part, the students were asked to write the answers of four of the questions freely.
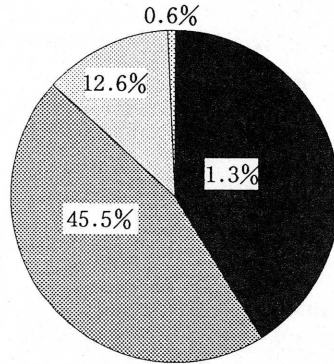
a. Part one

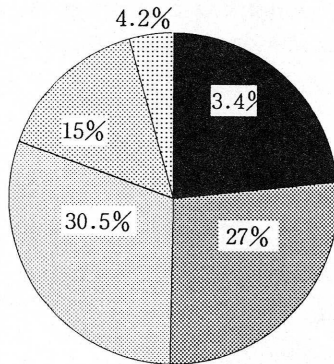The following are the results of part one. They are shown in percentage and in circle graphs.

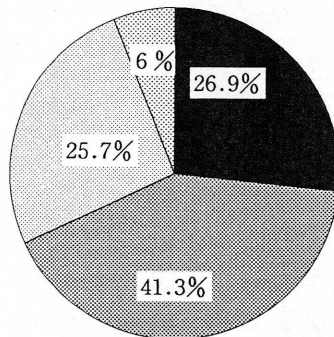(1)　Did you enjoy watching the video before reading the story?
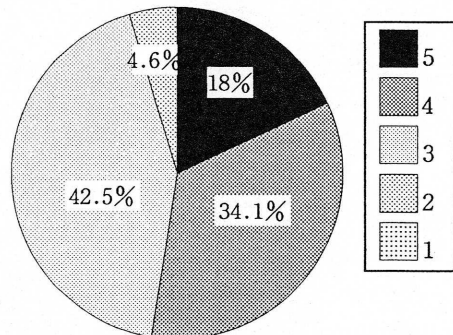
（2） Did you understand that different cultures have different superstitions?

0.6%

12.6%

1.3%

45.5%

（3） Did you realize that English differs in the country where it is spoken?

4.2%

3.4%

15%

30.5%

27%

（4） Did the video help you understand the story?

6%

26.9%

25.7%

41.3%

b. Part Two

The following is the main comments of the students on each question in part two.

(1) What was your favorite part of today's sessions?
 • Watching the video
 • Learning various superstitions in various countries
 • Listening to various kinds of English
 • Learning about various cultures

(2) What are you aware of now that you were not aware of before todays session?
 • Different cultures and different customs and beliefs
 • The fact that English is spoken in many countries
 • English is influenced by the speaker's native language.
 • I didnt know that English was this different according to the people who speak it.
 • Pronunciation of English varies according to the speaker.

(3) What do you think of English spoken by non-native speakers?
 • Japanese people's pronunciation was the worst.
 • It was easier to understand.
 • I learned that the attitude to try to communicate is important.
 • I learned that English is a common language.
 • It was hard to understand because the pronunciation was different.

(4) Write additional comments, if any.
 • This class was new and interesting.
 • This class was innovative.
 • I would like to have more classes like this.

III. Discussion

　　　The feedback from the students suggests that the pre-reading activity was successful in serving its three purposes. Also, the students reaction to non-native speakers English was favorable and most of them showed further interest in cultural and English diversity.

　　　Let us now discuss pedagogical implication and future perspectives of English as an international language. How can and should linguistic and cultural diversity be integrated into English classrooms? First, to discuss linguistic diversity, whose English should be taught? In other words, where should so called "standard English" stand in EIL settings?

　　　As for grammar and lexis, standard English should be the model. As Smith (1984) argues, out of the three components of communicative competence suggested by Canale and Swain(1980), the grammatical component of EIL should aim for standard English, as the grammar of educated English is virtually the same across

cultures (Nakayama,1982; Widdowson, 1994).

Out of linguistic elements, the phonological aspect may be the one where English spoken by non-native speakers is the most conspicuous and diverse. It is contended that intelligible pronunciation is an essential component of communicative competence, but to make students "perfect pronouncers" of English is not necessary at all (Munro and Derwing, 1995; Morley 1991). It is suggested that the educational model for pronunciation could be a native speaker's while the accepted target should be a good, identifiable, educated, local form of English. If students are successful in reaching this target, they will have few problems making themselves understood in international settings (Smith, 1984; Smith and Rafiqzad, 1979).

Secondly, how should cultural diversity be taught? As having been argued here, teaching EIL means to teach English on the supposition of wider varieties of cross-cultural communication, but in conventional communicative language teaching, cross-cultural refers mainly to the cultures of the native speakers and the non-native speakers. The communicative approach originates within the native speakers' community, so to a certain degree, ethnocentricity cannot be avoided (Holliday, 1994), but educators should adapt it to each situation to meet various socio-cultural needs. In this view, it isn't necessary to appreciate only the native speakers cultures.

It has been pointed out that in Japan, despite many trials and changes of English teaching curriculum this past decade, "the ostensible goal of internationalization being trumpeted" (Duff and Uchida, 1997, p.456) simply promotes Japanese nationalism, superficial internationalization, or conversely, westernization (Brown,1993; Edwards, 1989).

It is apparent that a paradigm shift in teaching English is needed. It does not mean, of course, that the goal of teaching English should be learning about all kinds of English and the communication patterns of all the cultures in the world. Learners should be exposed to different varieties of educated English in various countries in order to be used to them and made aware of the fact that English is a means of international communication (Nakayama, 1982; Smith, 1984). It must be recognized that comprehension is the responsibility of both listener and speaker. A listener will not understand anyone if s/he does not want to. It should be stressed that listeners must be more tolerant to the many varieties of educated non-native speakers' English (Nakayama, 1982; Smith, 1976) and English educators must make students more aware of it.

V. Conclusion

It has been argued that because of the current movement of rapid globalization of the world, English has been used more and as the medium of international communications and English education should make a shift in its paradigm. In EIL

classes, students must be exposed to various kinds of English in various cultural settings to be trained to develop linguistic, sociolinguistic and strategic competence with a full range of potential interactions. The objective of EIL classes is not to learn all kinds of English but to make students aware of the international role of English, make them tolerant of linguistic and cultural diversity and help them deal with it, as well as to learn how to cope with misunderstandings.

English language educators have the responsibility not only to enhance learners' linguistic skills but to raise learners as members of a wider society. Therefore they need to sensitize students to wider varieties of cultures and to make them aware that each of them is a global citizen and they need to use English for global communications. That should help bring about the real globalization of English education. Ultimately, that would help to raise not just westernized, but truly internationally-minded students.

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Black Cats and Broken Mirrors

Do you think that it is bad luck to walk under a ladder or break a mirror? Do you think that black cats and the number 13 are unlucky? There are over one million superstitions, and most people believe at least one or two of them.

Many people are superstitious about numbers. They think that there are lucky numbers and unlucky numbers. The number 13 is often considered unlucky. In some parts of the world, buildings have no 13th floor and streets have no houses with the number 13. In Japan, 4 is considered unlucky because in Japanese the word four is pronounced the same as the word death. Japanese never give gifts of four knives, four napkins, or four of anything. What are the lucky numbers? Seven is a lucky number in many places, and 8 is considered lucky in Japan and China. In China, businesses often open on August 8, and many couples register to get married at eight past eight on August 8.

Superstitions about numbers are so widespread that some people—called numerologists—make a living giving advice about numbers. In 1937, when the Toyoda family of Japan wanted to form a car company, they asked a numerologist if Toyoda would be a good name for the company. The numerologist said it would not be. He explained that Toyoda took ten strokes of the pen to write, and 10 was not a lucky number. Toyota, however, took eight strokes to write, and eight was a very lucky number. The numerologist recommended Toyota as a better name for the company. The family took his advice. As a result, millions of people drive Toyotas and not Toyadas.

In addition to superstitions about numbers, there are many other kinds of superstitions. There are superstitions about eating, sleeping and sneezing. There are superstitions about animals and holidays and horseshoes. There are even superstitions about superstitions. Those superstitions tell people how to reverse bad luck.

For example, in many parts of the world spilling salt is bad luck. Throwing salt, however, is good luck. So, people who spill salt throw a little of the spilled salt over their left shoulder. Throwing the spilled salt reverses the bad luck.

When the Japanese bump heads, they immediately bump heads again. According to a Japanese superstition, the first bump means their parent will die, but the second bump erases the first bump.

Because there are so many superstitions, it is not surprising that some of them are contradictory. In Germany, it is good luck when the left eye twitches and bad luck when the right eye twitches. In Malaysia, it is exactly the opposite: A twitching right eye means good luck and a twitching left eye means bad luck. Accidentally

putting on clothes inside out brings good luck in Pakistan but bad luck in Costa Rica.

Some superstitions have been with us for so long that they have become customs. In many parts of the world it is polite to say Health or God bless you when someone sneezes. People used to think that the soul could escape from the body during a sneeze. They said God bless you to protect people from losing their souls. Today we no longer believe that people who sneeze are in danger of losing their souls, but we say Good bless you anyway. We say it not because we are superstitious, but because we are polite.

Almost everyone is at least a little superstitious. One woman says that when she got married, her aunt gave her white bath towels. Never buy purple towels, her aunt said. If you use purple towels, your marriage will end. Does the woman believe that superstition? No, of course not, she says, Its silly. Does she use purple towels? well, no she answers. Why take chances?

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