Issues and Perspectives in English Education in Japan  
--- With Special Reference to Three Facets in TEFL ---

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The aim of this lecture is to inspect and discuss issues and perspectives in English education in Japan with special reference to three broadly-defined areas in TEFL (Teaching of English as a Foreign Language). The keyword here is TEFL, which should be regarded as quite different from TESL (Teaching of English as a Second Language). My conceptualization of these facets in TEFL are language education, intercultural understanding education, and human education. In my lecture today, I will examine whether these three important aspects of the English language educational process have been adequately understood, and carried out as they should be. The examples and cases taken up here are mainly those of the secondary education, but the discussions apply to the primary and tertiary education.

Language Education
Language education has three main characteristics in terms of language function. First, language has a communicative function. Recently, this aspect has been emphasized in the Course of Study published by MEXT (the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology).

Second, language has a cognitive function. The different languages reflect their own distinctive ways of thinking. This aspect of comparison between language and thought is rather neglected, as revealed in neglecting grammar in school education. Awareness of and interest in language, however, cannot be cultivated fully without developing a cognitive code for language learning. Otherwise, language learning would be mere parroting.

Thirdly, language has a relative function. If the former two functions are concerned with 'skills' and 'knowledge' respectively, this last function is concerned with the human 'spirit' or 'mind'. This part of language education deals with the relations between language and individual identity, on the one hand, and language and social identity on the other. In other words, we are concerned here with the psychological and social functions of language.

Intercultural Understanding Education
No one denies that every foreign language education plays a vital role in intercultural understanding because language and culture are intricately and inseparably intertwined. Many salient discussion issues can be raised by pointing out that English education constitute an important component of intercultural understanding education. In short, we may assert that the attainment of goals which are projected for English education can be gleaned in the following definitions of intercultural understanding.

1) Coexisting with others from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
2) All peoples—regardless of nationality, race, or culture—should express their "raison d'être".

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3) There should be no discrimination or prejudice between peoples of different races and ethnic groups: All languages, political forms, ideologies, religions, and cultures should be equally respected.
4) There should be full equality in the relationship between those who economically 'have' and those who 'do not have'.

The reason the above issue is raised is that we have not yet got rid of the following idea, a relic from Japan's past, which has been incorporated as an aim of educational policy:

The objectives of English teaching are ...., and to develop as an integral part of the same (the four skills) an understanding of, appreciation for, and a desirable attitude toward the English speaking peoples, especially as regards their modes of life, manners, and customs. (The Course of Study, 1947 and 1951)

Moreover, to most people, their views of intercultural understanding education has a tendency to be inclined towards 'Anglicization' or 'Americanization,' which goes under the name of 'globalization'.

**Human Education**

By the term 'human education' we mean that the teaching of foreign languages should contribute to individual character building and thus contribute to an everlasting world peace. As is written in the Fundamental Law of Education, to make good citizens and to establish peace in the world are major objectives of every subject studied in school in Japan, and foreign language education is no exception. This claim is not new: it was mentioned in the Recommendation 59 of IBE (International Bureau of Education) as early as the 1960s:

The teaching of modern foreign languages is not an end in itself, but should serve by its cultural and human aspects to train both pupils' mind and character and contributes to better international understanding and the establishment of peaceful and friendly cooperation among peoples.

The pointed question is how we should attain this goal? Two issues are taken up for this discussion. One is the subject matters that are used for the text (narrative or dialogue, written or spoken) in the teaching materials. This can be found in the expressions and utterances used for reviews and practices. The other is the teaching attitude or stance particular to a foreign language classroom: English teachers are very likely to do something quite contrary to that which we consider as contributing to human education.

As a conclusion, some of the important factors in the above facets are reviewed and it is emphasized that there should be a good balance among the three facets in TEFL when we consider the goals of English education in Japan.