

# Foreign Language Teaching and Education

Kan KATAYANAGI

September 1983

## Introductory

We admit that it is an unchallenged human tradition and imperative that the adult community, as individuals and as groups, has to educate its young, future members. Our present concern, as specialists in the teaching of foreign language or languages, in particular of English, is how the teaching of foreign language to the school age pupils and to those preparing for specialized studies is related to education. It is unfortunate that the term 'teaching' and 'education' are often confused and teaching of any knowledge or skill is considered in itself educational and hence to constitute a part of education. In the same token in our case, teaching of English, for instance, cannot be translated into Japanese except as 'English education' (英語教育). There simply is no technical term available in Japanese meaning 'teaching of English'.

In view of English as a school subject being so firmly established that in the future no citizen of this country will be exempt from the so-called 'English education', a tentative discussion is offered to clarify the relationship between foreign language teaching and education.

1. **Education as humanization:** Education in its primary sense is humanization of a young person who was born premature, incomplete as a human individual. Among other human capacities an infant has to gain, with or without help from others, acquisition of language is no doubt most essential and indispensable. Language has been symbolically and now almost literally considered as the human intellect itself and since the intellect is what distinguishes humanity from other forms of animal life, language teaching has been one of the major aspects of education as humanization. Though innate, the linguistic faculty, different from other forms of instinct, requires an influence, natural or purposive, from outside for its normal maturity, i. e., an infant is to be brought up to be a linguistic adult.

It is all but natural that a child grows up linguistically in a natural environment, i. e., in his native language community. The process concludes as he attains a normal level of competence in the performance of an average life as a member of the community. The natural, i. e., meaningful, environment is supposed to be essential for the formation of his basic linguistic competence. The size of the competence may vary from individual to individual and from age to age, but each mentality is complete in itself once it is closed up. Nobody suspects any individual to be incomplete in his humanity if he is not versed in more than one language. A man is normal with his own language alone.

For centuries, bilinguality was more often the object of suspicion and of unnecessary prejudice than a boon, and only a few unfortunates had to acquire more than one language or struggle between the languages. The bilinguality was often a stigma betraying a doubtful spiritual allegiance or insincerity of expression, or even a split personality. Unless we can present a good argument that some basic training or experience in a language other than one's own is essential to a normal human adult for his intellectual wholeness, at least in the world he is going to live in, we should refrain from asserting too positively that we are educating our children by teaching them foreign languages, and perhaps we might reconsider forcing the ordeal of foreign language learning upon the virgin brains of our young people. Is it worth the passion of doing when the time and effort could have been spent on something more pleasant and immediately useful? Is it indispensable for the new type of human personality?.

**2. Education as civilization:** In its secondary sense, the word 'education' implies equipping of individuals with necessary skills and knowledge in anticipation of the kind of life the learners are to lead. The adult life with its world is not at all 'natural', but is man-made in essence with an age-old accumulation of convention and of cultural values; in a word, it is a civilization. Human instinct, though complete in itself once attained, may not be sufficient to insure individuals to survive or live successfully and harmoniously in the structured life of the community. So, beside helping develop human qualities fully in an individual, we have to provide the prospective citizen with artificial skills, including the abstract tool called knowledge and with mental and physical habits in the name of culture and if possible these should be incorporated and integrated into the elements of his intellect and personality. Since civilization is man-made, its access has to be taught in advance, hence teaching any skill becomes a major part of education

in its broader sense of the word.

Language education likewise includes teaching of cultural properties and the latter becomes so well incorporated into the latent competence of an individual that the distinction is often difficult to make. The very basic linguistic competence is believed to be attained before one reaches school age and all the training thereafter may be considered to be the imparting of and the conformity to the pre-existing cultural convention. In schools, children are brought into contact with the linguistic adult culture, namely, reading and writing, as a necessary skill and refinement, and as they advance in the course called 'national language' (国語), not 'Japanese' (日本語), the learners are encouraged to participate even in the aesthetic performance after the fashion of the adult literature. To what stage of progress in the native language training should the teaching of a foreign language be related?

In our schools English is being introduced at the seventh grade with material obviously suited to the first grade native children. Should we understand this as the formal expression of a principle the editors approve and accept? Teaching of foreign language is an additional school subject imposed with a load of pieces of knowledge and of operational drills in preparation for possible future uses and confrontation. If it is all for such a pragmatic goal, we certainly are too optimistic. We can really do very little unless this is a necessary step to send the learners into the next stage of education eventually leading to a reasonable level of mastery, through, of course, the well-known examinations between school levels up to graduate school entrance. Obviously this alone cannot justify the all-out compulsory teaching of English at the crucial age for character building of those docile personalities. For some children English registers as a language, their mim-meme faculty being still active, while for many others it is too late for that type of absorption. For the majority English is a subject where only memorization works; every item has to be prescribed, understood, acknowledged, memorized and operated accordingly.

No doubt, the teaching of foreign language has earned its place in education as equipping the children with useful knowledge and skill, though not immediately but with some eventuality in its prospect. There is a plausible basis for doing this as children possess diverse potentialities and a variety of prospects, and any smattering of knowledge in a foreign language obtained at that early age will persist and prove to be useful in

their later days; but who knows?

**3. Language education:** The education of the young in language, in the native tongue as a matter of necessity and inevitability, and in the environment where the language is meaningfully exercised, is essential for any purpose, especially for making an individual intellectually articulate and self-sufficient. Only articulate or explicit thinking in terms of language makes an individual self-conscious of his own thinking and makes him independent of the immediate environment in which animals are believed to be confined. It is by dint of communal language that discontinuity between and among self-contained mental beings can be overcome. Language communicates as music does, but even more as mathematical formulae do. The extended use of language as culture enables us to institute a whole system of values in symbolic expressions commonly upheld and enjoyed by the whole present community and that to come. Language education is essential both as a part of the humanization process and as a part of civilization. We have every evidence that language is almost the essence of humanity itself, the vessel for its emotion, the bridge to and from the society and the fibre of the culture and civilization, while above all it is elemental to the identity and to the personality of each individual. Linguistic education begins as soon as a child is born and goes on to the age when he is ready to launch himself into adult life.

Scientific studies have become so advanced that we now know fairly well how human infants develop their linguistic competence aided by help from the outside. We know what is best in helping them to attain the level of competence in due time and in due procedure and how to assist them in gaining the necessary skills and arts of adult culture. The problem is how the teaching of foreign language should get into the picture. Should a foreign language be taught along with the acquisition of the native language for the sake of efficiency, or should it be taught in analogy with the native language after a few years' delay, or still yet, should it be taught as entirely separated and divorced from the native language? These questions have not been fully answered even though we have plenty of cases of each method, both successful and unsuccessful as evidence. Before we go into the teaching of a foreign language, as educational or otherwise, we must confirm the fact that language is a mental phenomenon, a rule-governed conscious and intellectual performance, before it is something physical, social or even cultural. Even though we cannot anatomically observe its process in the live

brain, we have come to grasp indirectly how it works. The natural cybanetic structure is now being revealed both in confirmation and in correction of what has been surmised in the past studies while the recent developments in theoretical linguistics are helping us to simulate latent procedures in explicit terms and charts, so that we are several degrees advanced beyond the classic understanding of the surface phenomena of language.

The teaching of language, native or otherwise, can no longer remain indifferent to these discoveries and to this new point of view towards language. Foreign language teaching can be objectively studied, i. e., some scientists might be ready to tell us how a human brain completed in one language can learn another and how other sectors of the brain that have undergone the learning have been affected. We have been abusing, if not damaging, our computer without knowing how it works and what it can really do, to use a raw metaphor. More and more knowledge will be made available, but we need not, and must not, wait until we are given the ultimate facts.

The main problem we have now seems to be that all these new discoveries about language, both native and foreign, are not brought into educational quarters. Whole echelons of the language teaching profession seem to remain in the old-fashioned muddles of rote-teaching in the belief that since something is being taught in some way or other it is doing some good, rather than harm at least, in a word, educating. It is a sad fact to know that while we are broadly losing the battle on a national scale, scholars of linguistic science are concentrating their attention on sensitive subjects of their own and find no time to advise those in the field of teaching foreign language. They should realize that before their eyes is evolving an immensity of an unprecedented linguistic event, a historic case of imposed linguistic interference. The Japanese professors of English and American Literature should not only know but also do something about the cold fact that their students, classified as 'English majors', numbering fifty times those in Great Britain, are no longer the type of students that the professors themselves were decades ago and that their noble lectures are being dissipated upon a very indifferent audience, and that it is their profession that is in danger. The students do not mind their time being so spent, but there will be less and less serious aspirants coming to their lectures. The fact is that the students have no teeth to chew the material nor tongue to taste the text themselves.

**4. Foreign language teaching:** We might tentatively define the term 'foreign

language' as any natural language, dead or alive, that an individual confronts and acknowledges as different to a decisive degree from his own, and to master it intentionally and consciously, if he must for any reason at all after the so-called critical age. We can imagine a variety of linguistic situations surrounding people if we look around the world, but fortunately or unfortunately for the majority of Japanese juveniles, the environment is overwhelmingly mono-lingual and any foreign language is entirely foreign to them in concept and in reality. English, for that matter, as typical of the foreign languages to which they are exposed in the seventh grade, has been established as a universal school subject just as are mathematics, music and so on, rather than as a language at odd with their native language, with a vague anticipation of its real use in the future and with no immediate need for communication.

There is an age-old dispute between two camps in English teaching quarters: one, the idealists say that foreign language learning is a purpose in itself—it is for the broadening of personality and for the enlightening of the mind of the learners to make them language-worthy, but in no sense to be taught or learned for any menial values; while the other, the realists assert that it is to be learned as an additional culture of utilitarian values, evidently indispensable for any individual who is to live in the internationalized world to come, and that unless a language is learned precisely as the language, the learning of it is not going to give a person the proper experience necessary for the achievement of the full humanity the other side advocates. The basic issue here is again whether foreign language teaching should be administered as a part of a process of humanization or as a way of equipping individuals with a useful art of a kind to live in a civilization.

Since the purpose of teaching is thus polarized between the radical and pragmatist principles, the only improvement commonly applicable between them seems at least to be to make teaching as efficient as possible in terms of a balance between the diligence put into it and the result coming out of it, though how to measure that will be another matter to settle between them. The optimum procedures should be derived separately from each purpose. What has been accepted as efficient and successful as humanization may not prove effective in the practical type of teaching and vice versa, and we do not think it too optimistic a view to believe that a procedure may be established as efficient for both types, in spite of the differences asserted, because of the intrinsic nature of

language itself. If we know how a foreign language affects a normal linguistic individual at a certain age under certain environments, we may be able to figure out what would be the inevitable set of prescriptions satisfactory for either type of teaching.

Obviously teaching of foreign languages scientifically and efficiently will be the minimum necessity for making the teaching educational, no matter which type of principle, so under whatever type of regime a teacher of foreign language may be teaching one, he can, if he knows how, very well make it educational, with the type of pupils he is assigned to, the material he is supplied with, and within the hours he is allocated. Even if his duty is to drill students for the worst kind of entrance examination, perhaps he can do it in the most human and educational way with satisfactory success. How to insure that foreign language teaching, under whatever situation, be educational, either for a humanization or for a utilitarian purpose, is the question we have to answer.

**5. The purpose of foreign language teaching:** If we are to administer foreign language teaching as educational, we must determine what is involved in it for an individual mentality, self-sufficient with its own language, and then we must single out what features are to be accomplished by learning a foreign language and particularly by that particular language we selected. We may do well in recalling how foreign language courses were pushed aside in American colleges during the years of the university riots some fifteen years ago. The students asked the faculty what the basis was for imposing foreign language courses as a requirement. The students had the answers before getting a reply. If it was for international understanding, cultural or otherwise, the language was not the only means, history and geography might be substituted for the language courses, and besides there were plenty of translated texts available. If it was for the purpose of mental discipline for abstract operation in symbolic formula, algebra of some kind, free from the inconsistency and redundancy of a natural language, would serve the purpose far better. Unless we can give an honest answer to this challenge, we are not substantially establishing the basis of teaching foreign language as education. What is the virtue of learning a foreign language if the native language is sufficient to make an individual a linguistic adult?

We have come to believe that the real merit of learning a foreign language, especially for the type of people like us, the Japanese, who have been bred and born in a tight

mono-lingual community, is to outgrow the self-contained and self-centred mentality of mother tongue limitations, a 'closure'. At every stage of learning, the learner should not only confront the difference and difficulty of somebody else's language as such, but also every one, in his own measure, must overcome the difficulty and yet experience himself, no matter how little, the use of means of communication other than his own. This will awaken the learner to a linguistic reality one distance removed from that of his own mother-tongue consistency. Unless such a process should take place in the learner's mentality, the learning is a mere substitute or guise of the mother-tongue operation and the learners only fail to detach themselves from the mono-lingual personality. We should consider that language education is not complete unless it opens the mono-lingual person to such an experience and enlightenment. Thus language education is not accomplished with the acquisition of linguistic competence in the mother tongue alone but with the acquisition of at least one foreign language.

The two phases of language education are complementary to each other and definable against each other and together they should make up a new type of individual human character. If a man learns a foreign language for sheer utilitarian purpose alone and if he does it well, the above said enlightenment will accompany him as a matter of inevitability, whereas another who undergoes the education with intrinsic objectives will gain a skill in the language with no less, if not more, efficiency. If foreign language teaching can claim any virtue of its own, this certainty should be it. If teaching a native tongue is essential, then the teaching of a foreign language is no less essential for humanization of an individual and for equipping him for the life in the new world. All the technicality, the pedagogy of it should be derived from this basis, whether for the humanitarian or for the utilitarian principles. Unless learning of foreign language or languages is itself the experience of the language, it is not doing what it should do and is idle, and how to put linguistic life into every minute of the learning process is the whole pedagogy we have to develop. International understanding is being advocated abroad as a popular slogan, but is not foreign language learning its basic practice at home? It is very much like school subjects as fundamental as music or arithmetic; unless you do it yourself, you are not learning it. Then only teaching it becomes educational.

**6. Foreign language education:** Once we set the virtue of foreign language

education as breaking the 'mother-tongue-self' of a young adult by exposing him to an anti language, or what we have been calling 'non-native'\* language, the whole procedure will be derivable according to each educational situation. Thus we shall no longer teach a foreign language as such but as the representation of foreign languages in general, i. e., if English is chosen, as is often the case, what the learner is to gain is not the portion of the language so called to be stored away for future use, but the live experience in it for each moment undergone. The validity of the experience does not lie in the fact that it is directly true to the actual language but in the fact that the experience is itself linguistic to the learner himself, no matter how limited or remote.

This will insure our keeping the two basic phases of education earlier referred to, i. e., education as humanization and as civilization, to be effective. Every feature or property of the language we prescribe is not given as a digit of the whole to be eventually learned, but as a fresh addition to the learner's life history, no matter how stilted or wrought. The experience so gained will not only serve him as ready knowledge and as a skill but will also support him as a potential to cope with the unknown. The chronic ambiguity of policy for the initial stages of school English, i. e., whether the curriculum should represent English as a whole in analogue or be the first set of digits of an endless sequence toward the eventual mastery of the language, will no longer matter. The experience undergone is always valid and sufficient in itself at every stage and insures the learner to be ready for the next stage.

Of course language does not take place unless it is overtly expressed, while the expression is the only physical reality we can observe and operate upon, but we have come to know that language is the whole process, the dynamics that takes place inside our mentality until it registers at the surface. It is no doubt simpler to teach by good explicit examples, the final products, either as the goal or as the starting point in the teaching situation, native and natural, but being outside of that natural environment, one has to learn himself how best he can do with whatever he has at hand to deal with the situation imposed. Language learning, especially foreign language learning, is a creative rather than imitative activity, rational rather than empirical so long as language is a rule-governed mental performance. In this sense, the Western tradition

---

\* Cf. Katayanagi, K., *Analytical Syntax for Teaching English—a non-native approach* (1)-(12), Nos. 21-32 of the present publication since 1971.

of a realistic approach to a foreign language with its stress on performance is better founded and justifiable in the modern view of language than our traditional approach—a false scholasticism developed and upheld through centuries of expertise in Chinese literature—even though the conventional ‘conversation’ lessons by native teachers may not always be linguistic or educational, while if so intended and so administered, any indigenous teacher can make his English lessons as valid and effective as education of language. The general lack of training in the productive phases of language, i. e., drills in the so-called ‘composition’, oral or written alike, is understandable. The lessons are hard to conduct because the product will vary and grading and correction are another burden. There is a haunting fear of inadequacy and uncertainty on the part of teachers who, non-native and incomplete as bilingual, try to be secure against the real and imagined challenge to their judgement and usage from the native—often stigmatized as Japanese false perfectionism. They should know that learners gain more by making two half-done, i. e., ‘shallow- or ‘mid- structure’ products than by struggling to reach one final string.

If teachers stop worrying about the ultimate correctness of their own performative competence and its product measured against the absolute standard of the native propriety in its home environment and become free from their own auto-censorship, the pupils will have no fear of being judged by an absolute standard hidden from them by the teachers and will enjoy spontaneous creativity and adventure in the performance of the new language, as limited as it may be. Unless the learners enjoy the learning, no teaching is educational.

**7. Foreign language teaching reinstated:** After all what is being said, what we propose is to shift the focus of the whole teaching from the acquisition of the surface register of the language to the gaining of live experience in the generative mode of language as mental performance. There is again that age-old tacit understanding here that by tracing the surface of linguistic phenomena, the dynamics therein is automatically retraced and eventually formed. But does not every teacher know that his pupils produce all kinds of non-sentences the teachers never taught nor exposed them to, and only those, to his perplexity and consternation? The learners seem to conceive a language entirely *foreign* from the authentic material they are supposed to have been fed. The pedagogy seems to rest on the principle that by feeding a child exclusively

with exemplary meals, we can make him a good cook,—under a natural environment, yes, but in a foreign class-room, no.

We must re-establish our pedagogy of foreign language teaching on the basis that it is not the product but the process that has to be prescribed. The reform does not require a drastic event, nor an abrupt evolution. We need not deplore or condemn the present situation. Foreign language teaching as an institutionalized national culture and civilization is itself a plausible industry unprecedented in the history of civilized countries, that is, as long as we can afford it, and we cannot very well afford to abolish it now anyway. We must begin by reconsidering the procedure according to the new point of view. Some practices may be retained if they conform to the new principle while some others may be relegated as not fit. Perhaps the only positive sin is translation, the act of prostituting make-shift native language parallel to the sincere original expression. This deprives the text of its linguistic reality, written or spoken, imaginary or real, as language full of its own proper emotion and implication. The translated version stands in the way of direct contact, killing the situation as a linguistic theatre where a new language is being operated sentence by sentence. There is no candid pleasure in gaining experience through translating a surface product to another surface. We should not, at least, kill the live experience of a foreign language by underselling it in second-rate native language paraphrases.

If we succeed in converting the teaching situation into a living occasion for the foreign language to be at work, the pupils will grow up to be people with a real understanding of language, both native and foreign. There will be less frustration due to the naivety of the information carried by the text, or due to the lack of a real situation in which native speakers participate. There will be less fear that the language so far acquired may not be practically applicable in a real contact elsewhere with real natives. If such occasions arise the learners will be encouraged by success no matter how little they had, and will not fall prey to a sense of defeat out of fear that they did not perform as they should.

Selecting and structuring the material into the curriculum will be easier than imagined as it does not require an exact and actual conformity to the raw source language in preference to the consistency and convenience for the learning process fit to the learners' inner state of affairs. It could be organized to best suit the purpose and

objective of each teaching situation and there will be no qualm about the material being not immediately useful or relevant as speech of the natives. If every item given is practically experienced and acted upon in the class-room situation attended by the relevant mental participation of the learning party, that is enough justification for every minute so spent.

We must develop a curriculum by which to teach and by which to teach teachers of foreign language on the new principle in order to make the foreign language teaching an independent branch of science and an honest profession with a definite procedure, explicit, simple and sufficient.

### Conclusion

Unless the foreign language teaching does definitely improve the attitude of the learners to the linguistic reality surrounding them, it cannot be called educational. We should re-institute the whole concept of foreign language teaching so that those who undergo and those who have undergone the learning will be so much the more qualified and equipped in the matter of language, domestic or international. We must formulate a program to teach foreign language with a definite purpose and procedure to insure the desired merit of enforcing it upon our young people.

Through strict and live experience the learners will come to see the non-native language, the language of strangers, without prejudice but with respect and attachment and gain an objective and a tolerant view of the differences of language and other features among peoples. Above all it will wean them off, at least for once (and once is enough,) from their own mother tongue and they will look as the others look at it. It must lead to the linguistic, i. e., intellectual coming-of-age for the young learners with whatever subsequent benefit or good life it might promise.

To find English, for instance, strange and difficult, is at the same time to know that for somebody, Japanese is just as much unnatural and exotic to learn. This cannot be gained by somebody explaining it, but only by doing it oneself. What we advocate here is thus a re-institution of 'foreign language teaching' as an essential part of language education upon an intellectual rather than an empirical or cultural basis. If that is the kind of 'foreign language learning' they are to undergo, future members of our society, here as elsewhere no doubt, will not only require but also demand the learning. It can begin at each teaching situation.