Language in Context: Text-based Language Learning

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要　　約

本指導ユニットは、「話す」、「書く」ことに関わる二つのテキストをベースとしている。本ユニットは言語学習とわれわれが行う言語選択におけるコンテクストの影響への体系的機能文法的アプローチを探求できるように作成されている。両テキストの領域は基本的に言語学習と二カ国語使用をベースとしている。本論文では、第一に、このユニットのコンテクスト、つまり、学習者のタイプと彼らの必要とすること、この独特な一連の授業の脈絡、作業とその継続の目的について論ずる。第二に、筆者のテキスト選択の根拠、文法的側面を含むテキストの主要な特徴について説明する。最後に、ユニット全体の目的・目標を達成するための一連の教室での活動について述べる。

This paper is based around two texts: one spoken and one written. The texts have been selected in order to construct a final teaching unit for use in the language classroom. The paper and final teaching unit are designed to explore a Systemic Functional Grammatical approach to language learning and the impact of contexts in the language choices we make, and in this case, for a specific EFL classroom. The field of both texts discussed here is based primarily around language learning and bilingualism. Firstly, I will discuss the context of the teaching unit: the types of learners and their needs; the context of this particular set of lessons; the aim of the work and its duration. Secondly, will be an explanation of the rationale behind my choice of texts and their main features, including grammatical aspects. Finally, there is an outline of a sequence of classroom activities that could be used to fulfill the aims and objectives of the teaching unit as a whole.

In designing the teaching unit and selecting my texts, I focused upon a typical class within my current place of work: Nagasaki University of Foreign Studies. My classes at the university attempt to encapsulate not only language study, but cultural studies too. This has important consequences for the "desired learning outcomes" (Feez 1998) when I am designing elements of my student's syllabus. The type of learners I had in mind for this unit, were second-year, British Culture Course students. These students have an particular interest in British culture as well as the English language. Many of these students will also spend a year or more in Britain studying as exchange students after the summer of their first semester and will therefore benefit greatly from a cultural contextualization of English. This helps define many of the aspects of appropriate textual field during my lesson planning.

The students are also studying the English language. The broad aims of the classroom in this respect are to "equip all students for the world in which they will live and work - a world which places a high premium on the written and spoken word, where reading and writing permeate every aspect of life, and where pleasures often derive from good discussion, excellent books and the power of writing." This particular second year British culture class therefore requires two aspects of curriculum framework: topics are largely defined by

some attachment, to British culture and secondly by specific outcomes based around four key areas of Reading, Writing and Speaking and Listening. Aims and objectives in writing for example, might outline an ability to write in different styles and genres such as formal or informal letters, newspaper reports, descriptive writing etc. So, it is within this rather broad curriculum that this unit of work is based.

When deciding this unit of work it was first important to consider the background of my students: their educational background; their previous language learning; their social circumstances and their needs and goals (Joyce 1999). Firstly, the students are young adults; they have been studying English for around 6 years or more. The students have a particular interest in languages and had to pass an entrance exam to enter the university, it is therefore safe to assume that they have a relatively high competence in English skills, in writing, reading and speaking and listening. As such, more complex genres of language are within their grasp; indeed they need these more complex genres, such as the expository, for their skills in English to progress further. I have taught this class myself for one year and am very familiar with their abilities and their expected rate of learning. They have experience of my style of teaching and are often confident in undertaking tasks that require a fairly high rate of learning. Based on my knowledge and experience of the Japanese state school system, I can also assume that in juniour and senior high school the students would probably have encountered a large degree of traditional grammatical teaching (Martin and Rothery). The syllabus they followed was likely to have been a mix of structural and situational styles based on dialogues including lexical items and grammatical structures practised in follow-up activities (Joyce). Vocabulary and structures would have been sequenced according to their perceived complexity, based on the idea that the learner accumulates all the building blocks of the language one by one (Feez). The structural nature of the syllabi would have been based around specific grammatical structures being selected and situations built around them (Joyce). In designing a text-based unit of work, according to Joyce, their previous learning is a useful factor to acknowledge, in that students will already have experienced a wide range of vocabulary and grammar activities from a structural syllabus type and also the acquisition of formulaic elements of simple exchanges in certain settings from the situational type. Together with my one year of experience with the students themselves I am therefore fairly confident in being able to predict student's rate of learning and what type of grammar they are likely to expect.

The social circumstances of these students are also important. Outside of the classroom there is a high probability that students will engage in the second language. As a foreign studies university we also have a high number of overseas students from the US, China, Korea, Britain and various other European countries. English and Japanese are generally the modes of communication as they meet and socialise. Students also have conversation partners with whom they can practice the target language and sometimes attend English camps or activities on weekends. Coupled with this is the fact that a large number of the students will study abroad in the UK where they will soon be immersed in a completely English environment. These factors have significant implications on student's needs. Particularly in the case of students who will study overseas, it is highly likely that a lot of learning will also take place outside of the classroom, based around homework activities or self-motivated study. The needs and goals of these students therefore are quite complex. They have the very real need of being able to use English in practical situations, above and beyond that of simple survival. Also, as students of English, they need to display the competence in English outlined by the aims and objectives in

Speaking and Listening, Reading and Writing as stated by the classroom, syllabus and school curriculum. Basically: "a (English speaking) world which places a high premium on the written and spoken word, where reading and writing permeate every aspect of life". In order to define these rather broad and somewhat intangible needs and goals, it is now therefore necessary to focus more specifically on a particular unit of work and the texts based around it.

The aim of this particular unit of work is partly to explore the English of expressing and asking for opinions. Within the broad curriculum of the university, it addresses such attainment targets as "conveying opinions clearly", "adapting what they say to the needs of the listener" and "asking questions that are responsive to others' ideas and views" in Speaking and Listening. Reading targets such as "students show understanding of a range of texts", "understanding of the ways in which meaning and information are conveyed" etc. and targets such as "writing in a range of forms" for writing. More specifically, it is hoped that students will develop reading and writing skills as appropriate to Butt's (1995) "exposition" genre and that of the newspaper report. They should also be able to identify the differences between written and spoken texts. Finally, they should be able to identify field, tenor and mode so that appropriate structural, lexical and grammatical choices are made in the context of this genre in its spoken and written form, as well as general strategies on the context of opinions and what is appropriate within a cultural context. In the background of these aims are secondary topic learning objectives that tie in with the "British Culture Course" and studying about British culture. The links between this topic based approach and language learning will be made explicit to the learners so as to avoid what Feez describes as "confusion on the part of the learners". All aims and objective will be explained clearly to the students at each stage of the unit of work so that students know what they are doing and why they are doing it. It is hoped that these aims and objectives will be pursued throughout a semester and that the unit is a part of a continuous process of a text-based course, though the units here will focus specifically on two lessons of ninety minutes each.

The texts themselves are available in the appendix, for the purpose of this assignment, texts are labeled both Text A and Text B. Text A is a transcribed dialogue between a colleague and I. I constructed this text myself to compliment the second text and to exemplify the differences between spoken and written texts as well as providing some instances of how to get opinions from others effectively. Text B is an extract from the newspaper 'The Daily Yomiuri', entitled "Welsh experiences of bilingualism". The field of both texts is that of bilingualism. There were a number of factors that influenced my choice of texts. Firstly, it is therefore important here to discuss aspects of design for the whole syllabus in which these units lay. The starting point for the course design on my classes and therefore this unit of work, is centered around a mixture of "Starting with topics" and "Starting with contexts" and "Starting with Texts" (Joyce). The topics of both texts in this particular unit of work are bilingualism, although this is based on the course topic outlined by the university curriculum, i.e. "Britain". Text B addresses the topic of bilingualism in Wales. In this way, students will question the positives and any potential negatives of their own bilingualism; why they are studying English and also give an insight into how bilingualism is approached in an area of Britain. This text is therefore perhaps a good choice for the beginning of the British course, where students begin to think about why they are studying and using the texts to form the answers to this important question. At the same time they learn about Britain and

perhaps the surprising fact that Britain is not a solely English speaking country. Text A addresses the topic of bilingualism in regards to Japanese learners so that students may draw similarities between the Japanese context and the Welsh context. The general topic of Britain will be used over an extended period of time, the sub-topic of bilingualism will also reach further than the units outlined here, this will provide students with an opportunity to recycle vocabulary and provide a common thread in the choice of materials and activities. In Text B, for example we have vocabulary that could commonly be practiced throughout the course, "Welsh", "British", "bilingualism", "BBC", "Celtic" etc that they will meet at various times.

Apart from the cultural context of the texts, there are also the social contexts. In this particular unit the social context of giving and expressing opinions is focused upon. The way in which language is used in this social context is an important part of participating in an English-speaking community that many of my students will face. Giving an opinion has important structural and grammatical consequences, as outlined by Butt. Attaining an opinion from another person also requires a range of grammatical and vocabulary strategies that are defined by the context of situation. These types of texts are influenced somewhat by the classroom attainment targets, but it may also be helpful to do as Joyce suggests and brainstorm a variety of social contexts with students at the beginning of the course where this particular context may be raised to give students a feeling of ownership in their work. The attainment target nature of the classroom curriculum also hints at a syllabus that "starts with texts" in that they often focus directly on spoken and written texts that students need to learn, in this case: expository writing and giving and asking opinions. The ability of these two texts to satisfy each of these criteria strongly influenced my choices as a starting point for this particular unit and also in regards to the course as a whole.

It is also important to consider how these texts fit into the goals and aims of the course as a whole in influencing my choice of texts. In a course that aims to encapsulate language learning in a way that equips students for an English speaking world, these units address the aforementioned strategies of giving and asking for opinion. In this way the texts fit into a sequence of units across the entire course. Students are told that the general topics of the course are based around British culture. Text B and its comparison to Text A satisfy this direction of study. If these units appear at the start of a course then they address Joyce's factors in effectively sequencing content: bilingualism is of interest to the students, students need to be able to express their opinions as the course progresses and as they meet the need in social contexts. Students are familiar with language learning and bilingualism as they are experiencing it everyday and they may also be asking themselves why they are studying another language. The texts are also not particularly complex in regards to the abilities of these particular students. In regards to text A there is a clear language event sequence. As will be explained in more detail later, part of the unit will finally lead on to activities involving students reconstructing their own text based around the initial study of Text A. Firstly, students will *read* my text, they will then *write* questions they can ask themselves, they will then *speak* to construct their own text and again *write* to transcribe the text. The two classes within this unit will focus upon the early aspects of this language sequence. This will, as Joyce suggests, "enable students to understand how spoken and written texts are related in social contexts".

Finally, the two texts allow an analysis of the different features of spoken and written texts as part of the whole course sequence. A grammatical analysis of these two texts allows a focus upon discourse features,

vocabulary and sociocultural knowledge, such as audience and social purpose when looking at a newspaper report or expository writing that gives opinions and requesting such opinions from others. These two texts were selected for their ability to display each of these important criteria and therefore provide firm examples for the students to base their knowledge upon. This discussion of the main features of the texts, including grammar aspects will be discussed in more detail later. Now that we have discussed the course as a whole in determining my choice of texts it is now necessary to discuss in more detail the units of work themselves.

As identified earlier, these particular texts hope to fulfill an objective based around the discussion of giving and asking for opinions. These objectives are based around an analysis of language skills, strategies and grammatical structures within this social context. These texts have been chosen because they provide knowledge about the roles of opinions in the broader culture; the social situations in which they are likely to occur – newspapers and interviews; the topic area of bilingualism and also Britain; they provide interesting insights in tenor and mode and contain some essential grammatical examples in making meaning in different texts. Students can then use this knowledge to respond to and create other texts of this type using appropriate grammar, vocabulary and discourse strategies. The discussion so far has outlined the following steps suggested by Joyce in an effective planning process: how the texts mirror the starting point for the course; how the texts develop the goals and aims of the course; how the texts compliment a sequence of content, including a language sequence; how the texts assist an analysis of spoken and written features and finally how these texts fit into a distinct unit of work within this course.

Before we begin a description of the sequence of classroom events it is first necessary to discuss the main features of both of these texts, including grammatical aspects, so that we may exemplify their effectiveness and ability to fulfill the stated aims and objectives. This analysis will be approached in a level of complexity that I regard most useful for this particular unit of work, i.e. an analysis of the texts that I shall later include in my two lesson plans. Firstly, is an analysis of the differences between spoken and written language in the two texts. It is important not only to highlight these differences so that appropriate grammatical and lexical choices are made in the construction and use of these texts, but also so that students can begin to feel equally comfortable using both of the skills. Aspects of Mode are useful in defining between spoken and written texts. One of the defining factors between spoken and written texts is the role of language as action or reflection and the spatial or interpersonal distances between the interactants. What Eggins (1994) describes as experiential distance and spatial or interpersonal distance. Interpersonal distance ranges on Eggin's continuum according to the possibilities of immediate feedback between the interactants. On one end this is where immediate visual and aural feedback is possible (Text A) and the other end where there is no visual or aural feedback between interactants (Text B). Experiential distance illustrates a continuum of situations between language as a language of action, or as a language of reflection. In Text A we see that language is very much a language of action – i.e. gaining an opinion from an interviewee. This is most easily exemplified by the question and answer sequence between two human participants with the questions used to initiate a further discussion of the topic. The questions begin with simple "do you", "how much" questions to establish certain facts and orientation, later they change into more exploratory "why" and "do you think" questions that seek opinion. Later a contrary position is set up to illicit further response. In Text B, the newspaper article, the discourse is monologue in contrast to the

dialogue of A. The single question in the text is "[what are the] dangers of bilingualism?" a rhetorical question simply serving the same function as the contrary position set up in Text A to make the exposition more thorough. In Text B language is very much a process of reflection, it is concerned with ideas and reasons and linked by relational processes in condensed sentences (Eggins 1994), "bilingualism is celebrated", or "The situations in Japan and Wales are different". To further use Eggin's ideas about the differences between spoken and written language we notice that text A has a low lexical density, while Text B has a high lexical density. This is perhaps best illustrated through the nominalization of words: "learning" or "speaking languages" in Text A become "bilingualism" in Text B. In Text B conjunctions are also nominalised, with "because" being replaced with the reason. There is a lower frequency of content-carrying words in Text A whereas words such as "bilingualism" and "language" are very frequent in Text B. Halliday's ideas about grammatical intricacy are also evident, Text A, particularly where Jeff talks at length have very high number of clauses per sentence as opposed to the few clauses per sentence in Text B. Finally, we see a number of lexical differences between the two texts. In Text A we see slang and dialect lexical items: "leg up" and "no worries", unlike Text B. There are also a number of false starts and hesitations that reveal to us that text A hasn't gone through the drafting, redrafting and editing that Text B has gone through in its highly organised expository form. We also see examples of Collerson's "continuatives" in text A, "regardless" and "I mean", conjunctions that are "particularly appropriate in spoken English – especially in conversation, where it is often necessary to signal that you intend to continue speaking. All these differences would hopefully highlight to students the differences between spoken and written texts.

Next is a discussion of field and tenor. The two texts have the same field, that of bilingualism and language learning. To measure the field of the texts it is very useful to look at the transivity of the two texts. The three components of this transivity are the participants, the process type and the circumstances. In Texts A and B we can identify the participants through the nominal groups of the clause. In Text A these participants are Jeff, Simon and Japanese. In Text B these are primarily the Welsh, the Japanese and bilingualism. We can identify the process type through the verbal parts of the clauses, for example in text A learning or speaking Japanese, or in Text B "experiences of bilingualism" in its nominalised form. Finally we can identify the circumstances through prepositions or adverbs, in Text B "In Britain", or "flaws in Saer's study were not widely noted". And in Text A, "on Japanese study", or "chat with people".

The social roles the texts take up are also important in these texts, namely the tenor. I later want the students to construct their own Text A by interviewing one of the international students about their opinions on bilingualism. In selecting a participant for Text A I therefore chose a person that would exhibit a similar level of interaction that the students would experience with fellow students. Expository pieces often require a more informal role due to the nature of sharing sensitive information such as opinions. If we break the tenor of discourse in each of the texts into three different continua we see the power, contact and affective involvement of the interactants. These continua have a large influence on language use, I therefore wanted to make Text A as similar as possible to the text the students would finally produce: the relationship between the interactants is equal; contact is frequent, colleagues or schoolmates; and affective involvement is rather high. This is important; as with expository texts it is necessary that we express emotions or attitudes freely with our interactant. This has an affect in grammar that we can also see in Text B – as a piece of expository writing it

needs to engage in high affective involvement to get its point across.

This leads us on to further considerations of genre and grammatical features of the texts. The purpose of a text influences grammatical as well as structural choices. The purpose of texts A and B is that of an expository text – what Butt describes as one that is used to justify an argument or put forward a point of view. According to Butt this genre exhibits very specific structural and grammatical features. In studying this aspect of the texts we can allow students a basic framework for text construction by following recommended formula. Firstly, we can identify stages in the text, particularly that of Text B which will be the main impetus for students constructing a final written expository piece that gives opinions in contrast to Text A that aims to get opinions. Structurally we see a position statement, "In Britain the general understanding is that the bad old days of discouraging bilingualism are now finished". The use of the word "bad" immediately sets up the writer's point of view; that conversely bilingualism should be encouraged. This declarative form will be discussed later. Secondly we get a series of arguments supported by evidence, that bilingualism is beneficial, "The BBC lists nine advantages of bilingualism". Until we reach the final summary "Japan might well ponder the Welsh change in attitude to bilingualism. This column aims to harmonize the views of language teachers". The use of the word "harmonise" in contrast to the word "bad" illustrates the position further.

There are grammatical features essential to this text that help justify an argument or allow a point of view to be expressed effectively in an exposition text. Firstly, participants are human or non-human as identified through the nominal groups. The exposition piece takes place in the present tense, much like that of a spoken narrative, "the general understanding is", "the land that echoes". This brings the text and therefore the argument to life; it is real and important. The conjunctions used in the text show reasons and conditions. There are adversative conjunctions used to present a contrasting or opposing idea to the one being justified, "we should recognize, however, that even the most respected researchers have a tendency to interpret their data in line with popular prejudices". Clauses that support the argument have conjunctions that are nominalised, "Now, it (English) is becoming less of a substitute and more of a supplement. With in English in this role, many Welsh parents treasure the opportunity for their children to become bilingual". These are essential components of an exposition text. We also see examples of modality in the exposition text, "Japan might well ponder", or "we should recognize". These terms of modality are an integral part of the exposition text, the classifications of this modality as low, median or high will reflect the roles and relations of the people in the interaction – in this case the equal status of interactants is likely to ensure modality is low or median. Finally, exposition texts show material, mental and relational processes: celebrated, speak (material), ponder, thinking (material) and "bilingualism is celebrated, is encouraged, is growing" (relational). These are perhaps the most significant grammatical features in the exposition text as identified by Butt and is a firm basis for introducing the text to students as a model for their own writing.

Having justified and discussed aspects of the texts it is now possible to detail a unit of work consisting of two ninety minute lessons, for my second-year British Culture Course students. This unit draws on the "cycle of teaching and learning" by Butt et al (2000).

Context exploration: (10 mins)

1. Class discussion would begin with a question sequence that elicits opinions from members of the class. A good starting point would be a movie or TV show that was on last night and a simple question asking if a student enjoyed it or not. Leading from there questions could range in topic, from everyday to something more controversial such as a political question coming from a news programme. This could lead on to a discussion and brainstorming of what kinds of questions (mode) and what kinds of topics (field) are appropriate when asking for people's opinions, also what kind of people certain questions are appropriate for (tenor). Thus building the context of situation.

2. In the previous questioning and brainstorming the teacher should hint at the topic of "language study". For example, "Do you think students should be forced to learn English at school as a compulsory part of the curriculum?" or such like. This introduces the topic of the texts more directly. The teacher will then outline the aims and objectives of the current unit of work: "how to express and obtain opinions".

Explicit instruction:

1. Students will listen to my interview with Jeff about his Japanese study and the importance of learning English and being bilingual. Students will be told that I structured my interview carefully to get as much information as possible. Students will then be given a transcribed copy of the interview and asked to highlight the key opinions of Jeff and his attitude to bilingualism. (10 minutes)

2. Students are also given Text B that we read as a class, again highlighting what they think are the main opinions in the piece. Both sets of opinions are written on the board to check whole class understanding of some of the key points at this early stage. (20 minutes)

3. We will look at the organisation of text A: what opinions did Jeff give? How did I get him to share these opinions with me? What relationship is there between me and Jeff? The teacher will highlight the easy nature of the opening sequence of questions. Next, the "why?" and "do you think?" questions, and finally, the contrary position I set up in order to get him to speak in more detail about his opinions. (10 minutes)

4. Next will be a short analysis of vocabulary terms that are useful in this particular field, words such as "bilingualism", that would then link with the second text.

5. Next we will look at the structure of Text B, the opening statement, the justification and the final summary. Discuss any comparisons between the two texts: the writer's use of a contrary position in the middle of Text B and answers to "why" and "do you think?" questions within the text. Lexical items. (10 minutes)

6. Students are asked to imagine that if they interviewed this writer with the same questions I asked Jeff, what answers would he provide? They then use the text to provide these answers. (10 minutes)

7. A comparison is made between Text A as a language in action and Text B as a language of reflection. Eggin's continuum are introduced and we discuss a range of possibilities. Finally, students are asked what other lexiogrammatical differences are there between the two pieces that define one as a spoken piece and one as a written piece. Much of the answers are explicitly instructed – though they are at a

level where they should be able to identify some of the idioms such as "leg up" as being unusual and the repeated use of words such as "ummm" and "I don't know". Which of the pieces is more formal? Ensure that students understand the differences between spoken and written texts and that they will later produce an example of both for themselves. (20 minutes)

Lesson 2:

8. After a recap of the previous lesson and as a brief warm-up at the start of the next lesson a list of sentences are given to students. Each sentence comes from a different genre of writing. The names of the different genre are written underneath and are to be matched with the sentences: for example, the first line of a poem, the first sentence of a recipe, the opening of a fairytale. An in-depth discussion of genre is not required, but the exercise highlights that it is often possible to identify genre when you have experienced it before and that grammatical, lexical and structural features are what contribute to this. (10 minutes)

9. The purpose of the texts A and B is discussed: the texts give opinions. How are these opinions shared? Who are the texts interacting with? How do they perform this interaction in terms of grammar and vocabulary? I would outline what an "exposition text" is and focus on Text B to reveal some of the more common grammatical features of the piece as well as vocabulary choices. Students then identify for themselves examples in text B of the vocabulary and grammatical features I outlined. Students are given a range of short paragraphs with clearly identifiable grammatical features based around the tense of verbs, conjunctions and modality whereby they can tick off whether they think these are exposition texts or otherwise. A further discussion of grammatical features is undertaken. Hopefully this unit as a sequence of a longer course will allow students to identify other types of genre they have previously studied. (20 minutes).

Guided practice and joint construction:

1. During a brainstorming session we come up with a list of questions that could be used during an interview with another student about their opinions on learning another language. Structures of questioning and strategies for getting more developed answers from the interviewee. (10 minutes).

2. Students can interview me as a class with a number of questions and then interview each other in pairs, selecting from our brainstorming questions the ones that they feel are most useful. (10 minutes).

3. Students share the ideas they had in the pair discussion and any difficulties or good practice they found. Finally a set of questions are prepared in preparation for an interview with an international student in their own time. (15 minutes)

4. Students are told that the ideas that have been discussed to date and the results of their interview will be used in their own exposition piece in the following lessons. The results of interview can be used to justify their arguments or to set up contrary positions to be refuted. Students are asked to prepare in groups a checklist of the "ingredients" they need to construct their exposition piece: grammatical

features, structural features, vocabulary, and audience – the ideas of previous activities are recapped once more, but students should now be formulising the ideas for themselves. (20 minutes)

The unit relies heavily upon a sequence of language events in previous and future units. The texts should be related to previous and future classroom texts as far as possible in order to internalize the structures of the different genres discussed.

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Appendix

Text A

Simon: Do you study Japanese?

Jeff: Yes

Simon: How much time in one week do you spend on Japanese study?

Jeff: Uhhh. . . probably . . .3 or 4 hours

Simon: Why do you study Japanese?

Jeff: So I can get along, so I can, so I can, know where I'm going . . .so I can, chat with people.

Simon: OK, what is the most difficult aspect of learning Japanese?

Jeff: Ummm, the writing system, because the kanji is ridiculously hard to remember . . .stroke order . . .radicals.

Simon: Ok, do you think learning Japanese is important?

Jeff: Very important! I should study more. I should be studying at least an hour . . .maybe two hours a day, but I don't have time to do that right now.

Simon: You are an English teacher yes?

Jeff: Yes.

Simon: Do you think your students learning English is important?

Jeff: Yeah

Simon: Why? What are the advantages of learning English for them?

Jeff: . . . .mmmmm, well in Japan it is a high status language and it gives them a leg up if they're trying to get a job, ummm, a lot of them want to be teachers so, if you want to be an English teacher you need to learn English, ummm, I don't know, right now English is the language of business, everywhere you go in the world it's kind of a default language, you have to . . .if you go to Europe, if you go to south America, if you go to most places that's kind of the second language for most people, that's how they communicate.

Simon: Do you think there are disadvantages in learning a second language?

Jeff: Disadavantages of learning a second language?! I don't think there is any.

Simon: It has been suggested that bilingualism confuses a person's thinking and works against gaining a high level in any one language...or that the predominance of English in the world puts many at a disadvantage... culturally...for example.

Jeff: You have two cultural identities! Parents speaking to their children...I mean, some, some...well, I refute that. I'm marrying a Japanese woman and I'm actually kind of excited about having my kids as bilingual people because, I don't know, it's like living having two different worlds and identities and uh, I think the idea that it holds you up in school is probably, uh, for people who are weak, weak academically anyway. I don't think it really matters, I think that would just be something, something that would happen regardless. Regardless if you were learning one language or two languages, um...in terms of communicating with your kids, I mean that's like umm, that's, you have two different ways of communicating... Was there another argument? Cultural identity, weakness at school...

Simon: No, that's fine. Thank you!

Jeff: No worries.

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Welsh experiences of bilingualism

In Britain, the general understanding is that the bad old days of discouraging bilingualism are now finished. The BBC Web site regarding schooling states: "For much of the 20th century, bilingualism was seen as a potential deficit: in thinking, character formation and not least in schooling. But in recent decades, the dominant international view is that bilingualism has definite benefits for all children."

The BBC lists nine advantages of bilingualism, drawn from "international research from the 1960s to today." The advantages include access to two cultures, tolerance of other languages and cultures, educational advantages, employment advantages, making it easier to learn a third language, increased self-esteem, and "benefits for the brain." Four brain benefits are described: creative thinking, sensitivity, IQ and reading.

In present-day Wales, Welsh-English bilingualism is celebrated, is encouraged, and is growing. In the 2001 census, the overall percentage of people able to speak Welsh had increased to 20.8 percent. It is especially important that the proportion of children ages 3 to 15 who are able to speak Welsh increased to 37.7 percent.

Today, I would like to describe how bilingualism in Wales was first discouraged as a matter of policy supported by research, and how policy and research then underwent a 180-degree reversal, with resulting significant effects on the population.

Wales occupies the western peninsula of the island of Great Britain. Since before written history, the language has been a variety of Celtic. Welsh people resisted the Roman and Anglo-Saxon occupations of Great Britain but yielded in 1282 to the superior power of England. Since that time, the eldest son of the British monarch has been titled "Prince of Wales." In 1536, Welsh representatives entered the English Parliament and English became the official language of legal proceedings.

Two hundred years ago, about 80 percent of the population of Wales spoke Welsh. But English was gaining strength in concert with industrialization, movement to cities and migration.

One hundred years ago, 50 percent of the population spoke Welsh. This was at the height of colonial expansion by powerful nations, a time when control of language was considered to be part of territorial control. After all, colonial powers could hardly allow subjugated peoples to speak languages they themselves could not understand and did not want to learn. The Welsh language was set on a path to extinction. Changes of this sort take generations to show their effects, but by

the time of the 1981 census, Welsh speakers had declined to 19 percent of the population.

Wales, the land that echoes with the voices of poet Dylan Thomas (1914-53) and actor Richard Burton (1925-84), might feel just pride in the beauty and power of its native Welsh language. Instead, it has endured centuries of doubt about the value of Welsh, considered in opposition to English. Throughout centuries of English rule, Englishmen persuaded themselves as well as some Welsh people that the Welsh language was inferior, perhaps fit for managing a sheepfold or a barnyard, but inelegant and incapable of expressing what is beautiful and noble.

In the 1920s, the young Thomas heard his parents speak Welsh as well as English, but they did not seem to regard Welsh as anything to give an educated lad, and he never spoke it. Nevertheless, he felt it in his bones. Charles Fisher, a lifelong friend since their grammar school days in Swansea, said, "I never heard Dylan talk about Welsh sensitivities. But Welsh was part of his very persona, he could never abandon it for a moment. The speech, the rotundity, the eloquence, the passion, were Celtic."

Dangers of bilingualism?

Research into language learning is not as innocent as it seems. We like to think it produces objective truth, free from bias. We should recognize, however, that even the most respected researchers have a tendency to interpret their data in line with popular prejudices.

Consistent with colonialist thinking, in 1923 Welsh researcher D.J. Saer, gave IQ tests to 1,400 children, both monolinguals and those who were described as Welsh-English bilinguals. His data convinced him that, in rural areas, the IQ's of bilingual children were 10 points lower than those of monolinguals. He concluded that bilingualism confuses a person's thinking and works against achieving a high level in either language.

Saer's conclusions were accepted as fact in many parts of the world for much of the 20th century. Most educators and parents believed that bilingualism was harmful to mental health, and steps were taken to prevent it. An effective measure in Japan and the United States was to delay the start of second-language study until secondary school.

The flaws in Saer's study were not widely noted until much later. From our modern viewpoint, we can see that, among other failings, he failed to take into account socioeconomic status, failed to test statistical significance, and gave IQ tests in English, which was not the dominant language of all of his subjects. Now Saer's study would probably not be accepted by an academic journal. His methods would be regarded as crude and his conclusions unsupported.

Resurgence of Welsh

In the 1930s, even before researchers could revisit the situation in Wales, Welsh enthusiasts began the long task of restoring the reputation of bilingualism. Societies to preserve the Welsh language and culture were formed and legislators began to feel pressure to reverse the decline of Welsh and save it from extinction.

Like turning a ship around, the effort to reverse the decline of Welsh seemed at first to have little effect, but it was powered by a growing respect for the Welsh language. Children in Wales found increasing opportunities to be schooled in Welsh.

Burton, born just 11 years after Thomas in a nearby town, seems to have picked up the resurgent spirit of Welsh. He spoke Welsh, and his first movie was in that language. In all of his movies, his rich, strong voice seemed to echo the language of his ancestors.

In 1962, Elizabeth Peal and Wallace Lambert of McGill University in Montreal published a study of bilingual children in Canada. This study found that children who were bilingual in French and English performed significantly better than monolinguals on both verbal and non-verbal tests of intelligence. These researchers concluded that bilingual children show greater cognitive flexibility, creativity and divergent thought.

Japan has not yet reached the point of rejecting the notion that bilingualism is harmful. Some researchers in Japan, especially those with good understanding of international academic literature, support bilingualism without reservations. Others, perhaps remembering linguistic imperialism, contend that bilingualism, and especially bilingualism in children, is harmful.

The situations in Wales and Japan are different. In Wales, the Welsh language is a heritage from time immemorial, and is bound up with pride and national feeling. English was imposed and became viewed as a substitute for Welsh. Now, it is becoming less of a substitute and more of a supplement. With English in this role, many Welsh parents treasure the opportunity for their children to become bilingual.

In Japan, Japanese is the heritage language, and English was not imposed by colonial rulers. English can be a window on the world and a supplement to the Japanese experience, not to mention a benefit to the brain.

With a population of just 2.9 million, Wales is a small nation. Yet Japan might well ponder the Welsh change in attitude toward bilingualism.

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This column aims to harmonize views of language teachers, theorists, parents and bureaucrats. Send e-mail to childs@uj.ac.jp. The column will return on Sept. 17.

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