Communicative Competence and English as an International Language

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Language is used for self-expression, verbal thinking, problem-solving, and creative writing, but it is used essentially for communication. What makes it difficult to grasp the language user's systems of representation for communication with others is the fact that the capability of individuals to interact with others through language is a unique quality and at the same time a universal human quality.

In Yano (1999), I mentioned that successful language use for communication presupposes the development of communicative competence in the users of that language and that the use of language is constrained by the socio-cultural norms of the society where the language is used. The use of English in Britain is influenced by the British socio-cultural norms which underlie individual differences. So are American English, Indian English, Nigerian English, Singaporean English. That holds true in areas where English is used daily either as a native language or as a second language.

In the use of English for international communication, however, what society's or societies' socio-cultural norms should be observed? Should they be the Anglo-American norms because speakers use American or British English as the model? Or would they be the socio-cultural norms of speakers' native societies, which are not conspicuous nevertheless inevitably ooze out? Or is there what might be called pan-human or universal socio-cultural norm(s) overarching individual societies and cultures?

In this paper, I would first review communicative competence briefly, then discuss what English as an International Language (EIL) is, and lastly argue that communicative competence, especially socio-cultural competence, of EIL speakers does not necessarily need to be that of native English speakers.

Communicative Competence

Chomsky (1965) made a distinction between 'grammatical competence' and 'performance.' The former is the linguistic knowledge of the idealized native speaker, an innate biological function of the mind that allows individuals to generate the infinite set of grammatical sentences that constitutes their language, and the latter is

the actual use of language in concrete situations.

Hymes (1972) was among the first anthropologists/ethnographers to point out that Chomsky's linguistic competence lacks consideration of the most important linguistic ability of being able to produce and comprehend utterances which are appropriate to the context in which they are made. It is part of that ability to know when to use, "Would you like to start now, sir/ma'am?" and when to use, "Hey, you wanna start now, pal?" The competence that all the adult native speakers of a language possess must include their ability to handle linguistic variation and the various uses of language in the context. It should encompass a much wider range of abilities than homogeneous linguistic competence of the Chomskyan tradition.

Hymes considered Chomsky's monolithic, idealized notion of linguistic competence inadequate and he introduced the broader, more elaborated and extensive concept of communicative competence, which includes both linguistic competence or implicit and explicit knowledge of the rules of grammar, and contextual or sociolinguistic knowledge of the rules of language use in context. Hymes viewed communicative competence as having the following four types: what is formally possible, what is feasible, what is the social meaning or value of a given utterance, and what actually occurs.

It was Canale and Swain (1980) who defined communicative competence in the context of second language teaching. Their view of communicative competence is: "a synthesis of knowledge of basic grammatical principles, knowledge of how language is used in social settings to perform communicative functions, and knowledge of how utterances and communicative functions can be combined according to the principles of discourse (20)." Accordingly they explained the above-mentioned Hymes' four types of communicative competence in the following way.

The first type, 'what is formally possible' is the interaction of grammatical system of competence. Hence the utterance, "the was cheese green" is not grammatical (4). The second type, 'what is feasible' is the psycholinguistic system of competence. The utterance, "the cheese the rat the cat the dog saw chased ate was green" is grammatical but not acceptable in that its multiple center-embedded clause is difficult to comprehend in terms of human information processing. To make it feasible, the utterance must be changed to the right branching structure common in English as in "the dog saw the cat that chased the rat that ate the cheese that was green." The third type, 'what is the social meaning or value of a given utterance' is the socio-cultural system of competence. For example, if one says *good-bye* in

greeting someone, it is inappropriate in a particular social context. And the last type, 'what actually occurs' is the probabilistic rules of occurrence that something is in fact done, actually performed.

Canale and Swain classify communicative competence into grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, which they soon divided into sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence, and strategic competence.

Grammatical competence means the acquisition of phonological rules, morphological rules, syntactic rules, semantic rules and lexical items. Today it is usually called linguistic competence.

Sociolinguistic competence refers to the learning of pragmatic aspect of various speech acts, namely, the cultural values, norms, and other socio-cultural conventions in social contexts. They are the context and topic of discourse, the participants' social status, sex, and age, and other factors which influence styles and registers of speech. Since different situations call for different types of expressions as well as different beliefs, views, values, and attitudes, the development of sociolinguistic competence is essential for communicative social action.

Discourse competence is the knowledge of rules regarding the cohesion (grammatical links) and coherence (appropriate combination of communicative functions) of various types of discourse. Canale and Swain emphasize that sociolinguistic rules of use and rules of discourse are crucial in interpreting utterances for social meaning, particularly when the literal meaning of an utterance does not lead to the speaker's intention easily.

Strategic competence is to do with the knowledge of verbal and nonverbal strategies to compensate for breakdowns such as self-correction and at the same time to enhance the effectiveness of communication such as recognizing discourse structure, activating background knowledge, contextual guessing, and tolerating ambiguity.

English as an International Language

With the globalization of human activities and societies world at large, English has spread to become one of the most widely used languages because of the political, military, scientific and technological, and cultural power that the Anglo-American nations have had. In its globalizing process, it has transformed itself into varieties of 'Englishes' and in fact communication between non-native speakers of English is far greater in frequency, amount, and significance as well as the number of speakers today (Crystal 1997, Graddol 1997). This necessitates models of English and norms

of its use being modified or altered in new circumstances. Having pointed out that language is not transmitted without being transformed according to circumstances while a disease spreads from one country to another and wherever it is it is the same disease, Widdowson (1997, 139-140) characterizes EIL:

> English as an international language is not distributed as a set of established encoded forms, unchanged into different domains of use, but it is spread as a virtual language….It is not a matter of the actual language being distributed but of the virtual language being spread and in the process being variously actualized. The distribution of the actual language implies adoption and con-formity. The spread of virtual language implies adaptation and nonconformity. ….It spreads, and as it does, it gets adapted as the virtual language gets actualized in diverse ways, becomes subject to local constraints and controls.

Kachru (1985) divided the use of English into three categories: the Inner Circle, where English is spoken as a native (first) language (ENL); the Outer Circle, where it is spoken as a second or additional language (ESL); and the Expanding Circle, where it is used as a foreign language (EFL). Indian English, Nigerian English, Singaporean English and others that are categorized in the Outer Circle are Englishes which are in daily use in government, education and commerce as one of the official languages. They incline to produce their own forms and norms different from those of the Anglo-American conventions in order to express the identity and serve the needs of the respective communities. In the course of time, the forms of English and norms of language use have changed to meet the needs of the communities, which is called as "nativization," "localization," "indigenization," "domestication," and even "colonization."

However, our concern is not the intra-national use of English but the use of English as an international language for global communication, where various forms of Englishes and norms of their use must be considered. If, in such use of English, the communicative competence does not presuppose the model of English of the educated native English speakers and the socio-cultural conventions of the Anglo-American communities, what would the communicative competence of EIL users be like?

The concept of EIL was first proposed by Smith (1976) and, as the use of English for international communication increased, has developed as a research field and gained recognition in English language, English education, and related research

fields. In my view (Yano, 2001), EIL has as its characteristics three features—common standards among varieties, mutual intelligibility and de-Anglo-Americanization, that is, movement away from the Anglo-American norms of linguistic and socio-cultural thought and behavioral patterns toward socio-culturally more neutral and universal interactional norms. I would argue that EIL is comprehensive or pan-human in that it takes in elements of other languages and cultures as it develops. But it should be noted that it is the concept of English as "an" (not "the") international language. There are other international languages such as Spanish, Arabic, Swahili and so on.

Jenkins (2002, 85) makes a distinction between EFL and EIL. EFL is to use English as a 'foreigner' to communicate with native speakers and the purpose of learning EFL is to gain the near-native competence. EIL, on the other hand, is to use English for international communication and the speakers are not 'foreign' speakers, but 'international' speakers of the language. Their models of English and norms of its use are not necessarily those of British English and culture nor those of American English and culture alone.

In my perspective, EIL consists of a variety of Englishes—English by both native speakers and non-native speakers—in all three Circles. Its use for international communication can be described by bi-directional arrows that go across all the three Circles as in Figure 1, whose thickness indicates the degree of frequency, volume, and functional significance of international communication.
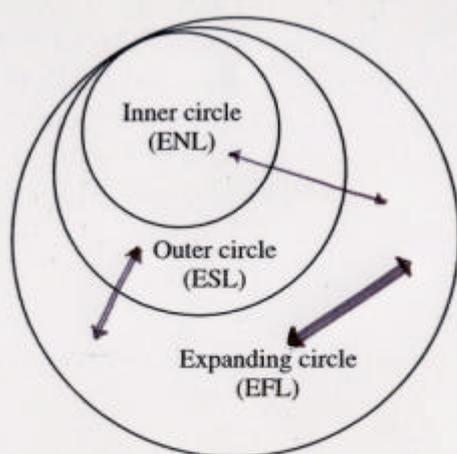

Figure 1

EIL is a means of international interactions of professionals such as diplomats, business people, medical doctors, computer engineers, educators, musicians and artists as well as academics such as scientists, linguists, sociologists, psychologists and so on. EIL's function is more information-transactional and culturally neutral than communal involving local community identity, shared socio-cultural norms and experiences and so forth which are seen in the domestic use of the language in the Inner and Outer Circles. EIL is used, with specific purposes, for international business negotiations, collaborative researches, academic discussions, and not for everyday life nor for socializing events.

Communicative Competence in the Use of EIL

In Yano (2001), I suggested that the English language for international communication will be simple, plain, and regular in their linguistic forms and structures, and socio-culturally neutral in their interactional strategies. According to Honna (2002), textbooks used at Business Schools for MBA students in the United States suggest the students to use such English, avoiding two-word verbs and difficult structures in doing business with non-native English speakers, its purpose being to get the speaker's meaning across to the interlocutor. This English, I would argue, would accommodate any varieties as far as they are comprehensible to the educated users of any varieties, native or not. It will contribute to create, maintain, and develop the international standards of English in response to the growing demand for a means of international communication.

That the use of EIL is different from everyday social use of English in communities leads logically on to an argument that communicative competence for EIL is not the same as that for communal use of the language in Anglo-American communities or in the Outer Circle communities.

First of all, the communicative competence of the EIL users would presuppose two kinds of knowledge—knowledge of the world in general and knowledge in their fields of specialization—professional or academic that are acquired through education and professional or academic development. They will upgrade EIL users' linguistic, discoursal, sociolinguistic and strategic competencies. EIL users are assumed to have sufficient knowledge of the structure of the language and to have sufficient profession-related vocabulary items; they are expected to have good knowledge of organization of discourse in terms of cohesion and coherence; they should have enough strategic knowledge to enhance communication; and they need

to have broad and denominator-like basic commonsense assumptions (universal or pan-human socio-cultural knowledge) which they share with other people. These assumptions are acquired through education and experience, but education and experience of individuals are varied and so is the knowledge. What makes it difficult is the fact that these assumptions are heterogeneous, inconsistent, and even contradictory. Nevertheless we need and do communicate internationally as well as intra-nationally.

Second, the use of EIL among professionals and academics presupposes the users' knowledge of the chosen field of specialization for successful communication. This professional and/or academic knowledge is by nature international and crosses the boundary between native speakers and non-native speakers. As Widdowson (1997, 143) refers to, these communities consist of professionals and academics who have become members through special education and professional development and are different from local ones which we belong to by upbringing and the shared socio-cultural experience of everyday life. Is the term socio-cultural competence appropriate for these specialists? Professional or academic competence, perhaps? These people learn English to use it for specific purposes, not for general purposes nor for mere socialization. While the unfair reality of having native speakers and non-native speakers of English for international communication may be reduced in these global communities of professionals and specialists, it may create the similar distinction of specialists and laymen, thus not helping increase more general intelligibility. However, since the use of EIL makes the extensive use of writing and writing works toward the standardization of grammar, vocabulary, and orthography, EIL would contribute to increase the shared forms and norms which underlie various Englishes and norms of their use.

Finally, it must be mentioned that 'nearly a quarter of the world's population is already fluent or competent in English, and this figure is steadily growing—in the late 1990s, that means between 1.2 and 1.5 billion people' (Crystal 1997, 4-5). When a language reaches the state of a global language, it may follow that its speaker's communicative competence becomes too diversified to conform to that of native speakers. What norms of which society and which culture we should follow will no longer relevant. In the use of EIL, we should not interpret people from the Islamic culture evasive or indecisive because they say that it all depends on Allah when they are supposed to make a promise. Nor Japanese should be taken uncooperative or unpleasant when they say nothing for a longer period of time. Taking in these non-Anglo-American norms of EIL use is natural adaptation of English use in the

process of its internationalization. As a matter of fact, even in countries such as Britain and the United States, where English is the mother tongue, the socio-cultural norms are not totally shared between them and within each country due to the internationalization of societies.

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