My View on ELT in Korea and Some Practical Suggestions

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Ⅰ. Introduction

This essay is my views on ELT with a special reference to the Korean teaching/learning situation. Throughout this essay I bear in mind a conviction that ELT in Korea needs improving and can be improved. To put it another way, we can find a better and more effective way of teaching/learning than now whatever it is at the level of method or technique in Edward Anthony's terms.[1] Accordingly, this essay requests that the government, experts and teachers of English should make every effort in finding some better and more effective way of teaching/learning. With a hope that this essay will contribute to the finding of some such way, firstly, I will describe some specifics of ELT in Korea to give a general idea of the Korean teaching/learning sitution. Then, I will show my views on the nature and function of language, and the nature of language learning process in order. Then, I will make some practical suggestions for ELT in Korea as a conclusion.

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1) According to Edward Anthony, "An *approach* is axiomatic, a *method* is procedural. A *technique* is implemental―that which actually takes place in a classroom."(1963:63―67)

Ⅱ. Some specifics of ELT in Korea

When we discuss education, we generally mention three participants of it, i.e., society (country or government concerned), teacher and student. Without the overall knowledge of the three participants we can not set up any suitable educational policy, nor can we decide any appropriate approaches, methods and techniques. In other words, the three participants have a decisive role in the educational policy-making and the decision of approaches, methods and techniques. Here we need to mention some specifics of the three in Korea.

The Korean society is perfectly homogeneous in terms of the people, language and culture. There is no ethnic conflict in Korea as in some ELS countries. In short, the Korean society provides a typical EFL environment. Naturally, almost all the teachers of English don't have any meaningful amount of experience in the English-speaking countries. The number of teachers who have a little experience is still very small enough to ignore considering the enormous whole though it becomes larger and larger. Accordingly,their knowledge of English is chiefly acquired from books, classes and lectures. That is why they often misunderstand the English-speaking people and countries, and their ways of living and thinking. As for the students, they HAVE TO learn English from middle school starting at an age of 12 until they leave school. English has long been a compulsory subject in school curriculum, so they have no choice but to take it regardless of their willing, aptitude, motivation, etc.

Fortunately, almost all the students recognize the necessity and importance of English. From government point of view, English is essential to produce capable persons in every field, e.g., politics, diplomacy, business, scholarship and military, etc. In Korea man-power has been thought as a main resource to cope with the difficulties in the modern world. The teachers and students also have a common recognition that English is one of the most important subjects in order to pass the examinations for a higher school, a college and a higher educational institute. Especially, proficiency in English has become a major factor affecting pass or fail in job-interviewing after undergraduate

coursework.

In short, the utilitarian aspect of English language learning becomes more and more dominating over the heuristic aspect of English language learning in Korea. In the long run this tendency will probably cause a problem from motivation point of view.[2]

Ⅲ. The nature and function of language.

The nature and function of language can be captured simply through the definition of language. Of course, language would be very difficult to define in a few words or even in a few sentences. Let's look at some definitions of language in books and dictionaries.

Language is a system of arbitrary, vocal symbols which permit all poeple in a given culture or orther poeple who have learned the system of that culture, to communicate or to interact(Finocchiaro 1964:8).

Language is any set or system of linguistic symbols as used in a more or less uniform fashion by a number of people who are thus enabled to communicate intelligibly with one another(*Random House Dictionary of the English Language* 1966 : 806).

Language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication (Wardhaugh 1972:3).

[Language is] a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of the conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meanings(*Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language* 1961:1270).

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2) Lambert and gardner(1959) point out there are two classes of motivation for language learning, instrumental and integrative, and that the presence of the latter is necessary to successful mastery of the higher levels of proficiency, signalled by the development of a native-like accent and the ability to think like a native speaker.

A language is a system of communication which consists of a set of sounds and written symbols which are used by the people of a particular country for talking or writing(*Collins Cobuild Essential Enqlish Dictionary* 1988:439).

Brown(1980:5) summarizes the definition of language as follows :
  (1) Language is systematic-possibly a generative-system.
  (2) Language is a set of arbitrary symbols.
  (3) Those symbols are primarily vocal, but may also be visual.
  (4) The symbols have conventionalized meanings to which they refer.
  (5) language is used for communication.
  (6) Language operates in a speech community or culture.
  (7) Language is essentially human, although possibly not limited to humans.
  (8) Language is acquired by all people in much the same way - language and language learning both have universal characteristics.

For discussion I will pick up four words as the definition of language such as system, speech, human and communication, which I think are enough to represent the nature and function of language adequately.

(1) Language as human
  Language is human proper. All human beings can acquire language. Only human beings can acquire language in the real sense. His acquisition of mother tongue is almost perfect, and it is mastered with rapidity. If and only if he is exposed to a language, he can acquire the language. Once he acquires a language, he can tell the grammatical sentences from ungrammatical ones according to the rules of the language. Once he acquires the limited number of rules of a language he can create an infinite number of sentences he has never heard before.

(2) Language as speech
  Linguistic behavior of human beings is chiefly done by aural means and speech is uttered by human articulatory organs. Linguistic signs for human

communication are mainly based on the oral-aural aspect through mouth and ear. And, all normal children learn to speak before they learn to write. And a little reflection leads us to the fact that a majority of the human beings who have lived in this world have been illiterate ; yet virtually all of them knew a spoken language.

(3) Languag as system

Language is **system** – sound system and grammatical system. An utterence of language is meaningful only when phonemes and morphemes are arranged appropriately. Therefore, language is systematic, that is, it is rule-governed. The rules are finite, but the utterences by the rules are infinite. Therefore, language system is generative. The knowledge of language presupposes the knowledge of sound system and grammatical system. That is why FORM of language has been so much emphasized and so many grammatical syllabuses have been developed.

(4) Language as communication

Chomsky's theory of grammar has been criticized because of its abstractiveness. The generative rules are abstract, formal, explicit and especially logical, but they only deal with FORM of language. Actually, language is not so far from us and from our daily lives. It is always around us and with us. Here we need to know the FUNCTION of language, which is for communication. The rules of FORM are of no use explaining the FUNCTION of language. Therefore, we need to consider speech act theory, sociolinguistics and discourse-level analysis rather than sentence-level analysis. Communicative language teaching/learning has been advocated against the fact that the tradition that grammatical FORM was overemphasized at the expense of communicative FUNCTION of language.

Ⅳ. The nature of language learning process

(1) The first language acquisition

As far as the first language acquisition is concerned, I agree with the generative theories rather than the behavioristic theories. There are two types of generative theories – the nativist approach and the cognitive approach. The term "nativist" is derived from the fundamental assertion that language acquisition is innately determined, that we are born with a built-in device of some kind that predisposes us to language acquistion – to a systematic perception of language around us, resulting in the construction of an internalized system of language. In other words, born with Language Acquisition Device(LAD) every child can acquire a language only if he is exposed to a language. When a child is exposed to adults' utterances as input, his innate LAD operates in the brain so as to find rules, which lead to comprehension and production fo infinite sentences of the language. This is shown in the following figure :

First Language Acquisition Process

Adults'utterances	→	LAC	→	Finding of rules	→	Comprehersion and production of infinite sentences
Input		Brain		Output		
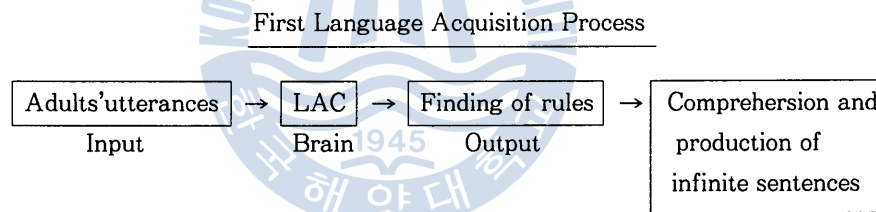
Brown(1980:24) points out two important contributions of nativistic approaches to the understanding of the first language learning process: (1) freedom from the restrictions of the "scientific method" to explore the unseen, unobservable, invisible, abstract linguistic structures being developed in the child ; (2) description of the child's language as a legitimate, rule-governed, consistent system.

The generative rules that were proposed under the nativistic framework were abstract, formal, explicit, and quite logical, yet they dealt specifically with FORMS of language and not with the very deepest level of language, that level where memory, perception, thought, meaning, and emotion are all interdependently organized in the superstructure of the human mind. Linguists

began to see that language was one manifestation of general development, one aspect of the cognitive and affective ability to deal with the world and with self. Moreover, the generative rules of nativists were failing to account for the FUNCTIONS of language. So child language reserachers began to tackle to the formulation of the rules of the FUNCTIONS of language.

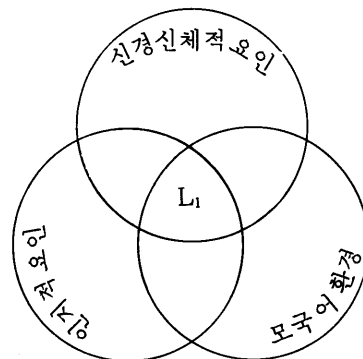(2) The second language acquistition/learning

When it comes to the second language acquistition/learning, another important factor involves, i.e., environment factor. Stern(1983:391-2) points out that "Educational treatment may offer opportunities *Mainly* for learning, and the supportive target language setting opportunities *mainly* for acquisition." This is shown in the following figure :

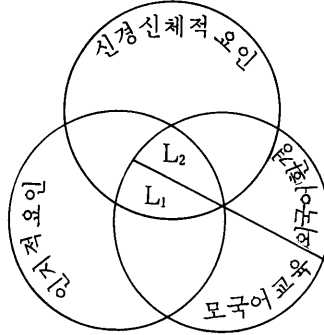|	Classroom	Target language environment
'Learning'	More likely	Less likely
'Acquisition'	Less likely	More likely

Jeong(1987:464) illustrates three language acquisition/learning models as follows, which also show the importance of the environment factor affecting acquisition/learning :
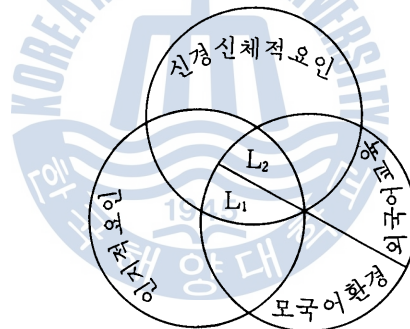
언어 습득 모형

a. 모국어 습득 모형

b. 외국어 습득 모형

c. 외국어 학습 모형

(3) Even though behavioristic learning theory of "Stimulus-Response" does not explain the first language acquisition adequitely, we can get a lot of implications from that theory when we think of second/foreign language learning. Some indispensable conceptions include imitation, practice, reinforcement and repetition.

Ⅴ. Some practical suggestions for ELT in Korea

After discussing two approaches to vatieties of English, Peter Strevens suggests "a TEFL approach" for teachers of English as a foreign language and

explains why such special approach is needed.

> Teachers of English as a foreign language have two special reasons for needing a framework within which the varieties of English can be understood and described, a framework moreover which is adapted to their own conditions. The first reason arises from the fact that the teachers of English, above any other group of people, are continually made aware of the existence of many different kinds of English……. The second reason is that the great majority of teachers of English as a foreign language receive an education and a professional training which contain no sociolinguistics and no deep study of the English language.(1977:129)

Given the above explanation, the difference between learning and acquisition, the difference between second language acquisition and second language learning, and some specifics of ELT in Korea(cf. section II), we can make some useful suggestions for the improvement of ELT in Korea as follows:

(1) Balance of form and function

"The relative importance of form and function depends heavily on the goals of a given language program"(Major, 1988:84). But if we think of the fact that the initial program of English teaching in Korea does not go beyond orientation before special goals, form should be necessarily stressed. This is shown in the following figure:

                          Orientation

    General(Survival)   Pre-Vocational   Academic
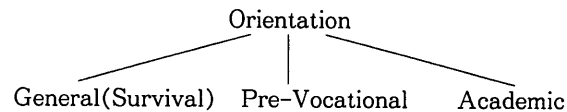
Of course, the ways to focus on form should be more effectively practised as Celce-Murcia(1985:4) suggests as follows:

Less Effective	Ways to Foeus on Form	More Effective
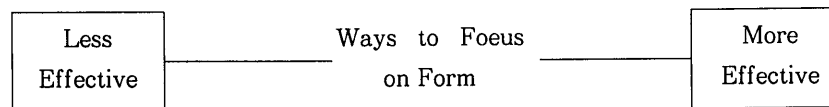
manipulative drills ···communicative activities

context-free practice··context-embedded practice

sentence-based exercises ···text-based exercises

cognitively undemanding activities ···············cognitively demanding activities

contrived materials ··authentic materials

dull or neutral content ·······························interesting and motivating comment

(2) Listening prior to speaking

Nord(1980) stresses the importance of listening comprehension, especially at early stage of language learning. He sees "listening comprehension as the MEANS(primary linguistic data) to achieve language acquisition." According to him, "listening CANNOT be considered a PASSIVE skill. It can be considered as a receptive skill, but not a passive skill"(1980: 10).

Gary and Gary(1981) also point out many reasons that comprehension precedes production(1981:3). Then they list up many advantages of teaching listening first and delaying speaking(1981:4-7).[3]

(3) Using of classroom English

The teachers of English have to try communicative activities IN ENGLISH. The easiest way may be to make use of as many classroom English as possible. Here are some from Hans-Eberhard Piepho(1981:17).

I don't understand.

Once more.

Repeat it please.

Could you speak a little slower?

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3) cf. Kim, Y.C.(1983:234-237)

Write it on the board.

I don't know how to spell/pronunce the word/say that in English

Have a look at my worksheet.

May I say something?

That's not very interesting.

A silly text.

How do you want me to act?

Are we supposed to answer all those questions?

I forgot to leave a margin there.

May I draw it on the board?

What's the meaning of ⋯ in English?

etc.

By daily use of these expressions and many others in a specific classroom situation the students learn English, they will be much more motivated students in learning, and later on, they will try to speak English in different situations outside of the classroom.

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