

## CIFLE REPORT No.44

# *English and Multiculturalism— from the Language User’s Perspective*

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**Abstract** ■ This paper aims to reconsider the status of ‘English as an international language’ from the language user’s perspective. Accepting a shift in focus from ‘English’ to ‘Englishes’, we argue that the concept of ‘Englishes’, which assumes the pluralization of linguistic and cultural norms, still remains a collective concept, and to discuss English from the language user’s point of view, the notion of ‘my English’ a notion motivated by the distinction between ‘English one learns’ and ‘English one uses’ should be introduced. We also argue that if a personal perspective of ‘my English’ is taken, then, we must also draw a distinction between ‘culture out there’ and ‘culture one encounters’ to discuss the context in which English is used. In this paper, we introduce the perspective of ‘living multiculturalism’, and discuss some of the major cultural issues from that perspective. All in all, this paper is an attempt at advancing a theory of world Englishes from the perspective of the user of the language, suggesting pedagogical implications for understanding the notion of communicative competence.

**Keywords** ■ Englishes, functionality, international language, living multiculturalism, metaphor, my English.

### *Introduction*

No exact statistics exist concerning the number of people using English worldwide. However, as a rough approximation, it is said that more than one billion people—according to some, nearly two billion people—use

billion people' itself is not particularly surprising with Chinese and Arabic taken into consideration. However, the fact that of three thousand languages supposedly existing on the earth, English is the only language labeled 'an international language' is worth mentioning; at present, the positioning of English in the map of world languages is surprisingly unique (Ammon 2001; Crystal 2003; Kingsley and Kachru 2004).

The concept of English as an international language—or 'English as a global language' (Crystal 2003)—assumes a situation in which English is used by people virtually all over the world, and this assumption implies that the 'English as an international language' situation surpasses a line of demarcation between the 'English as a second language' situation and the 'English as a foreign language' situation. In other words, the concept of English as an international language naturally brings us to consider possible changes in our way of thinking about the English language and English language education, changes due to situational changes.

There is a tendency among us to consider a language within the schema of 'the nation, the national people, and the national language' (Talbot *et al.* 2003). It is, indeed, a naïve idea entertained by most of us that people belong to a nation as the national people, and speak the national language officially used in the nation-state. This view takes it for granted that if you are, for example, a Japanese, you naturally speak Japanese, the national language in Japan. If a policy of linguistic purification is promoted within this schema, the idea of 'standard language' emerges, and the superiority of it tends to be assumed as a social fact, and educational systems and mass communication spur the spread of this tendency across the nation. In educational contexts, most teachers of English feel obliged to teach 'correct English', and most learners are obsessed by 'correct English' as well.

The psychology of both teachers and learners here is primarily a product of linguistic standardization. However, the 'English as an international language' situation urges us to reconsider the schema of 'the nation, the national people, and the national language' and, eventually, the norms of Standard English—the source of correct English.

For example, in Japan, one unconsciously acquires Japanese and naturally uses it on a daily basis, whether one likes it or not. Yet, the sense of being a Japanese is hard to surface as long as one is communicating with another Japanese, because for them, the nationality is too obvious to think about. The same goes for the concept of Japanese culture. One simply

takes it for granted that Japanese culture is a way of life. When one is, however, in a situation where one uses English as a means of international communication, the concept of ‘the national language’ is discarded first, and conversely, the sense of being a Japanese comes to one’s consciousness through the practice of labeling one’s partner ‘a Thai’, ‘an Indonesian’, ‘a Canadian’, and so forth.

In correspondence to the relationship between a Japanese and a Thai, for instance, the concept of Japanese culture emerges within one’s mind, being placed in a comparative and contrastive position with Thai culture. That is a situation in which you use English not as a national language, but as an international language, becoming aware of being a Japanese—a situation in which the nation and the national language do not match. In such cases, the question of how to define the norms of English becomes a big issue.

Quite obviously, the ‘English as an international language’ situation requires us to be tolerant of the norms of English. To be more precise, English can function as ‘an international language’ in the true sense of the term, if and only if nobody possesses the right to decide on the norms. With this point in mind, the term ‘world Englishes’ has been introduced in the literature of English language education (Kachru 1976, 1987; Smith 1987; for a comprehensive review, see Kingsley and Kachru 2004).

It is worth mentioning that the proper noun ‘English’ receives a plural –s, thus being ‘Englishes’. Semantically, uniqueness or singleness is a distinctive feature of a proper noun, which tends to induce a connection of certain norms with a linguistic entity, called ‘English’ or ‘Standard English’. The term ‘world Englishes’ functions as a collective noun such as animals and vegetables. The set of world Englishes includes Japanese English, American English, Spanish English, Korean English, and so forth, as its members. The basic tenet of world Englishes is that English is no longer the property of native speakers, but a global property of people all over the world, and that the English norms must be pluralized, thus permitting linguistic diversities (Smith 1987).

However, we must note that Japanese English or American English, as a member of world Englishes, is still an idealized, abstract concept. Thus, in principle, no one can use either ‘Japanese English’ or ‘American English’. It is our claim in this paper that in order to make the argument about English as an international language more realistic and

authentic, we should move further on to the concept of ‘my English’, a common noun which can refer to an individual object.

As we discuss later, ‘my English’ is a language which belongs to an individual; thus, it is a personalized language serving as the medium of communication in interpersonal interactions. An English user uses his or her own English, without exceptions. Global communication in English assumes interactions with people with different national and ethnic backgrounds such as Thai, Brazil, and Turkish; communication of any kind, however, reduces to person-to-person interaction, and the perspective of ‘my English’ becomes imperative in discussing the nature of English in practical use.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is (1) to examine the relationship between ‘my English’ and ‘English’ in more detail, and (2) to discuss the context in which ‘my English’ is used—the context of multiculturalism—with respect to some of the major cultural problems inherent in using English as an international language.

### *What Is ‘English’?: Its Referential Object*

An individual teaching English has a professional obligation to know about the English language, and hence, to study the language itself. A discipline dealing with the English language is called ‘English linguistics’, and most teacher training programs in universities require trainees to take courses in English linguistics.

English linguistics, needless to say, assumes English as the target of investigation. However, in reality, English does not exist anywhere in the world as tangible objects such as ‘cars’ and ‘bananas’ exist. There is no way of pointing at the bounded object called ‘English’. We can observe a flow of English sounds, a chain of English letters, a cluster of English words, or English texts of different kinds. A text is but a sample product spoken or written in English, but it is not English per se, or English in general (cf. Rorty 1979).

In order to pursue studies in English linguistics, however, it is prerequisite to stop the flow of English and ‘recover’ the whole English language as a bounded concept, or the static object of investigation. There is no point of investigating unless there is the object to investigate. If the object is static and bounded, it becomes possible to analyze it to ‘discover’ structures and patterns. In fact, most people think that the task of

English linguistics lies in analyzing the English language, and yet, in fact, researchers are not ‘discovering’ structures underlying English, but ‘assigning’ structures to the target of analysis. In order to give structures to the target object, we need to select a theory or a way of talking about the object. This selection results in producing different theories or theoretical discourses in English linguistics.

In English linguistics, English is treated as a proper noun of which the referent is a single object. In other words, ‘Language’ in linguistics and ‘English’ in English linguistics are both equally proper names, and their referential object is called *la langue* or an idealized entity.

In standard textbooks of linguistics, *la langue* provides a set of norms or rules governing language in use (i.e. *la parole*), and it is a social entity people in the same speech community inter-subjectively share in common. *La langue* as a whole is a self-sufficient system, which is subject to structural analyses by linguists. Linguistics teaches us—wrongly, of course—that a language as an idealized entity is recoverable when structural analyses ‘detect’ a set of elements constituting *la langue* and identify a set of rules of combining elements, which generate utterances or sentences (*la parole*). A language (*la langue*) is, for example, described as a composite of phonological rules, lexical inventories, and syntactic rules.

Now, how is the target of ‘English’ being understood in the field of English language teaching? We find it quite natural to say, ‘We teach English’ and ‘We learn English’. These phrases reveal that both language teachers and learners take it quite naturally that English is the target object of learning and teaching, thus being a tacit understanding among them that the object named ‘English’ exists.

In other words, in the field of English teaching as well, ‘English’ is perceived to be a proper name of which the referential object is an idealized entity. This perception leads teachers and learners to believe that there is a single set of English norms ‘out there’—norms they must abide by. We can even consider this perception about English ‘a root metaphor’ underlying English language education.

This root metaphor is operating even in the field of second language acquisition, of which the goal is to construct a theory of second language acquisition [learning] on empirical grounds. The basic design of second language acquisition research assumes a developmental process from the native language (i.e. the initial stage [state]) to the target language (i.e. the final stage [state]); researchers are concerned with tracing the process of a

learner(s) by means of empirical research. A learner's language is called 'interlanguage' (Selinker 1972), a language somewhere in between the initial stage and the final stage [state], and a learner's language remains to be an interlanguage, which intrinsically contain some deviations from the norms of the target language (TL), until it comes to match the TL systems.

We must admit that *la langue* as an idealized entity has been 'a common thread' guiding a way of practicing English language education. The whole object of English as *la langue* has been broken down into parts, and the parts, which are called 'teaching materials', are *linearly* presented in such a way as to produce pedagogical effects. Just like the task of building blocks, teaching materials are presented incrementally step by step until learners have 'complete whole English'.

It is common knowledge among language teachers and learners that language learning is a developmental process towards the final stage (i.e. acquisition of the TL norms), and language teaching facilitates the process. However, we point out that this common view has two possible problems, if the goal of teaching English is facilitating learners to develop the ability to use English functionally.

First, a learner finds it difficult to escape from a feeling of inadequacy or a sense of incompleteness until he or she reaches the final stage. The final stage here is simply a 'mirage', never to be attainable, because we are assuming an idealized entity there. A learner continues to be a learner, his/her interlanguage remains an interlanguage, and a feeling of inadequacy always stay there. Secondly, English as the target language must be strict in its norms; since it is an idealized language, it must be all correct English, and it must be perfectly appropriate English. Attention to such English can foster oversensitivity to the norms within the learner's psychology. As a result, a learner becomes overtly conscious of the norms, feeling that he or she must speak good English. This feeling often constrains a learner's willingness to use English autonomously and adventurously.

In other words, we must notice that even the legitimate view of learning and using good English has negative effects on language learners, who label their own English 'incorrect English' or 'poor English', and keep affective and linguistic handicap when it comes to using English for practical purposes.

*English in Use: 'My English'*

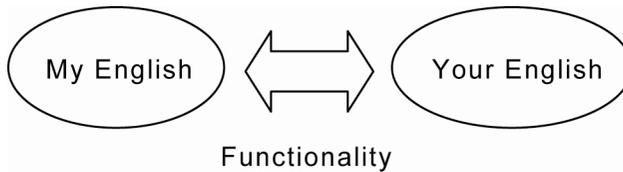
It is worth questioning whether 'English' as in 'I learn English' and 'English' as in 'I use English' refer to the same referential object. The answer is undoubtedly no. Simply put, 'English one learns' is English in general, and yet, 'English one uses' is necessarily a kind of English which belongs to the user of the language. Nobody, in principle, can use English in general. English lacking a possessive pronoun—either *my*, *your*, *his*, or *her*—can be the target of learning, but never be the English to be used in the context of 'here and now'. Thus we introduce the notion of 'my English', as contrasted with 'English'. Here let us note that 'my English' is a term chosen from a speaker's/user's perspective in relation to 'your English'; depending on a perspective one takes, it can be 'his English' or 'her English'.

A failure in distinguishing 'English I learn/teach' and 'English I use' can be considered a case of 'category mistake' (Ryle 1949). 'English I learn/teach' must be 'a language out there', and 'English I use' must be 'a language in my mind', thus these two Englishes representing different things.

Terminological confusion of 'my English' and 'English' is not simply the matter of terminology, but can cause psychological burden on the part of a language user. The greater the distance between the two Englishes is perceived to be, the greater a learner's feeling of inadequacy becomes. It is a form of alienation, alienation between idealized English and 'my English'. In order to use English (i.e. my English) naturally and casually, a user needs to get over the feeling of inadequacy, brushing aside the self-critical labeling of 'incorrect or poor English'. For that, one should consciously make a clear distinction between 'English to learn' and 'English to use'. And on the basis of this distinction, one should accept one's English as 'a fully-functioning person' (Rogers 1961), and manage—that is, start, maintain, and change—on-going communication as a joint action. Otherwise, in the very act of using one's English, the norms of 'English' capture the user's concern, with a sense of inferiority being induced. As a result, a language user can end up with experiencing alienation between the critical me and the performing me (Stevick 1976).

'My English' is a personalized, internal English; it is also a language of dialogue with the other. The personal possessive pronoun 'my' makes sense, only in the context where a person interacts with 'the other', who

can be called by the pronoun ‘you’. In other words, ‘my English’, a concept which takes a perspective of the language user, is a language which works only in relation to ‘your English’—or another ‘my English’ from the partner’s point of view.



Both ‘my English’ and ‘your English’ are Englishes as a medium of communication. The point to be emphasized here is that given cultural norms are not assumed in the interaction between ‘my English’ and ‘your English’. This means that sociolinguistic norms that determine the appropriateness of a linguistic behavior do not work, and hence, ‘functionality’—whether one’s English is functional or not—becomes the criterion that overrides all the other criteria for assessing a given interaction intersubjectively.

If certain cultural norms do not work, no cultural norms predominate over the others. Under these circumstances, it becomes quite natural to accept the view that people are all different, and it also becomes necessary to try to understand each other empathically. Here, an accommodation strategy is required to make semantic adjustments in the process of negotiating meaning. We call the ability to effectively employ the accommodation strategy ‘adjustability’, and claim that adjustability is the foundation of functionality (to be discussed later).

The relation between ‘my English’ and ‘your English’ is typically observable in verbal interaction (i.e. dialogue); the same relation applies even to literacy in that the writer using his own English—‘my English’ from the writer’s perspective—assumes the reader using his or her own English—‘your English’ from the readers’ perspective.

We suggest that what is required in the verbal interaction between ‘my English’ and ‘your English’ is a communication strategy called ‘negotiation of meaning’, suggesting that the models of linguistic norms should vary between the case of learning English and the case of using my English (cf. Faerch and Kasper [1983] for communication strategies). In the case of learning English, the adaptation model seems reasonable; learners attempt to adapt their English to the norms of idealized

English or Standard English. On the other hand, in the case of using ‘my English’, the accommodation model for mutual understanding is more realistic; language users go through negotiations of meaning for successful communication.

It is our claim here that ‘communicative competence’, the commonly stated goal of English language education, should be operationally defined within a theoretical framework admitting the difference between ‘English’ and ‘my English’, if the definition has practical and functional implications. In the following discussion, we will turn to the context in which a person uses his or her English for communicative purposes, and discuss some of the cultural issues, and then consider the pedagogical issue of communicative competence in English.

### *The Perspective of ‘Living Multiculturalism’*

In recent years, the concept of ‘cultural awareness’—understanding of different cultures—has been emphasized as an essential part of English learning and teaching. In fact, the phrase ‘cross-cultural communication’ is on the lips of English teachers. No one will question the proposition that learning a second language necessarily accompanies understanding a different culture (cf. Nieto 2002; Goldstein 2003). However, to make this proposition substantial and pedagogically significant, we must ask what is meant by ‘culture’ or ‘cultural differences’ and give our own answers. If the phrase ‘understanding different cultures’ is used without qualifying the term, it can follow the usual cycle of fashion—spreading out and soon disappearing as a hackneyed expression.

The perspective of ‘living multiculturalism’ here accords with the notion of ‘culture one encounters’ and assumes transactions between the self and the other in the context of ‘here and now’; I, as a person living here and now, face the other, or what I call ‘you’, who is not reachable to the full, and yet somehow attempts to establish interpersonal relations—amicable or hostile—through verbal interaction. In other words, ‘culture’ in ‘living multiculturalism’ is not something out there (i.e. ‘culture out there’), but something one faces (i.e. ‘culture one encounters’). As a natural consequence, the general concept of ‘culture’ has to be defined in terms of ‘the otherness of the other’. We will next discuss some problems related to the perspective of ‘living multiculturalism’, or the problems one faces when one tries to interact with culturally different others.

### *Differences in Value*

Interpersonal interaction in the context of multiculturalism requires one to abide by two practical lessons: ‘Don’t take anything for granted’ and ‘Accept the differences’. These two lessons are easy to agree with in theory and difficult to put into practice. The lesson ‘Don’t take anything for granted’ implies that you forsake your common sense that guides your daily life; as a result, it is possible that you get disoriented. Indeed, it sounds comfortable to say, ‘People are different, and you have to accept them’. But the lesson ‘Accept the differences’ demands that you should not only understand differences, but also change your frame of reference. Otherwise, the statement ‘I accept differences’ can be no more than lip service because accepting differences inevitably leads to restructuring one’s conventional semantic world.

For instance, according to a study on Japanese perceptions of Thai people (Iwaki 1986), Japanese subjects are prone to give the following responses as their negative opinions about Thai people’s behaviors: ‘they are loose in terms of time’ and ‘they easily give up and do not show perseverance’. Semantically, these are extremely negative statements, and on the basis of these statements, people might label Thai people as ‘loose and undisciplined’. But if you read these statements with the concept of value into consideration, you will have different interpretations. In other words, these seemingly negative statements about Thai people come from values entertained by Japanese, which claim to the effect that ‘time is money and you should abide by it’, and ‘you should do your best and stick to your goal; don’t give up easily’. This is, however, just one way of interpreting Thai people’s behaviors. There is a possibility that their behaviors are reflections of their own values, which, for example, stress that ‘you should enjoy your life’ (what is called *sanuk* and *sabai* in Thai), and ‘it is absurd to be a slave of your time’.

If you value the statement ‘you should do your best and stick to your goal; don’t give up easily’ highly, then you may consider that Thai people have a tendency to give up so easily lacking perseverance. However, if you understand that their behaviors are guided by a fundamental principle of transcending uncomfortable things flexibly rather than sticking to them (i.e. the spirit of *mai pen rai* in Thai), you will be willing to take back your former interpretation.

This example suggests that we tend to judge each other on the basis of our own frame of reference, with that of the other being brushed aside. However, what does it mean by taking into consideration the other's frame of reference? 'A sense of values', though among daily vocabulary, is an abstract concept, which challenges a straightforward comprehension. One often says, 'My sense of values differs from yours' as an explanation of why one cannot get along with the other. But the point here is that we should ask the meaning of 'the differences in value' and find a way of handling the differences. Quite often, 'my sense of values differs from yours' ends up as a mere statement that often functions as an excuse for avoiding further negotiation of meaning, yet their substantial differences are unlikely to be identified. In other words, we use the term 'differences' and yet we are still unable to explain the differences.

In this regard, we would like to suggest that metaphor is a powerful tool for understanding the content of a value (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1987; Johnson 1987; Boers and Littlemore 2003; Colston and Katz 2003). 'Metaphor' is defined here not simply as a rhetorical device, but as a cognitive device—the process of regarding A as B. Unconsciously, we employ metaphors in describing intangible entities as in 'love is (regarded as) a journey', 'a theory is a building', and 'argument is a war'. Take the metaphor 'argument is a war', for example. It provides not only a set of expressions (i.e. a discourse) to talk about argument, but also a conventional way of doing argument (Lakoff and Johnson 1980); we talk about effective 'strategies' in argument, the way of 'attacking' our opponent's opinions, and 'winning and losing', thus employing terms commonly used to describe war, and we actually argue in such a way as we talk about argument.

As another example, we naturally accept the view that time is something moving like an arrow. And we have conventional expressions such as 'time is up', 'ahead of [behind] time', 'time goes by', and 'time and tide wait for no man'. These expressions give us evidence to claim that time is conceptualized as something moving linearly; this is a metaphor. Time can be conceptualized in different metaphors: time is something that cycles and recycles; time does not move, but humans move within it, and so on.

Thus, metaphor can be an effective tool for 'understanding cultural differences' or 'differences in the value system' (Boers and Littlemore 2003). Saying 'cultural differences' or 'differences in the value system'

does not tell much about the differences themselves. The hypothesis ‘A sense of values can be translated into a metaphor(s)’ becomes significant here. This working hypothesis helps us understand the substantial content of a value. More importantly, the notion of ‘metaphorical differences’ can easily turn into an issue of discussion. One introduces the term ‘differences in the value system’ as the last resort when one finds it impossible to attain mutual understanding. ‘Values’ are something you never give up easily; sometimes, you fight for your value, or you even give your life to your value. In other words, differences in the value system do not open the door for constructive dialogue. But if you find that differences here, in fact, reduce to differences in metaphor, you will be more open-minded and willing to discuss the differences and possible ways of overcoming differences, thus inviting constructive dialogues.

‘The difference in value’ is not the end point; if you use the concept of ‘the difference in metaphor’, you can go beyond that. This has significant implications for anyone who faces difficulty in intercultural communication settings. As a premise, one should avoid saying ‘my sense of values differs from yours’ as an excuse for not being able to communicate. Interpersonal problems can be solved only through communication. For that, one should understand that differences in the value system can be made explicit through metaphorical interpretations. In other words, if we understand metaphors behind the differences in value, we are able to identify the points of differences [disputes], and start creating a new value (i.e. a new metaphor) jointly that can be shared between the parties concerned.

Metaphor gives a perspective of organizing our frame of reference; a new metaphor gives a new way of looking at things. Metaphorical shift has big potentials of restructuring one’s semantic space even drastically; this restructuring is, as mentioned earlier, a prerequisite to ‘accept differences’ in the true sense of the term.

### *The Problem of Stereotyping*

The problem of stereotyping is a big issue when we consider interactions across cultures (Goffman 1963; Berry 1970; Brislin 1981). A stereotype, the product of stereotyping, is an oversimplified and yet relatively fixed view or statement of a social group—‘Americans are casual and friendly’ is an example. It is often called ‘a cultural stereotype’; it can be positive or negative in its content. Cultural stereotypes are not intrinsically prob-

lematic, because some can be considered apt and valid generalizations about a given culture, explaining the people's presuppositions and expectations. Stereotyping becomes problematic when it works in a way to efface the uniqueness of an individual person, view members of a group similarly, and as a result, cause prejudice and discrimination on the part of the viewer.

It is very unlikely among Japanese to say that he or she is such and such because he or she is Japanese. In a situation of cross-cultural encounters, you tend to describe your partners in terms of their nationality, and see them through the lens of national and cultural backgrounds. It happens that when a misunderstanding occurs between you and your interlocutor, you introduce the notion of 'cultural differences' in order to interpret the situation in your own way. In this case, you are, in fact, using cultural stereotypes about the social group in which your partner is a member.

Cultural stereotypes are always perceived to be problems to communication across cultures, but one cannot escape from them, in that stereotypes are outcomes of learning. 'Overgeneralization' is an often cited cognitive process that accounts for the formation of stereotypes (Brislin 1981; Hamilton 1981). To be more accurate, however, it is not so much a single operation of overgeneralization as the interactive operation of 'differentiating', 'generalizing' and 'typicalizing' that should account for the formation of stereotypes.

Suppose person A meets person B and they have a conversation. B introduces himself as a NA [the name of a nationality]. Also suppose that A hears the word 'NA' for the first time. The word 'NA' has a differentiating function, differentiating NAs from non-NAs. That is why NA serves to be a distinctive feature of a person B. Some days later, A sees her friend, R, and reports that she met person B, who is a NA. Notice that at this moment, the word 'NA' does not carry a connotation of cultural stereotypes. However, the word 'NA' can be used for any member of the NA. As the number of NAs the person A meets increases, the cognitive process of generalizing operates, which enables the speaker to use the same word to refer to different persons. On the basis of generalized uses of the word, person A picks on typical features that characterize the concept 'NA', thus the cognitive process of typicalization is in operation. Simply put, typicalization is the principle of concept formation; however, it operates not singly, but jointly along with differentiating and generaliz-

ing. The concept thus formed is called ‘prototype’, which includes a set of prototypical features about NAs. The concept, which emerges within an individual, is a collective concept, but when it comes to applying it to a given individual, it turns out to be a stereotype, which inevitably breaks down—failing to capture the person’s uniqueness.

A note should be made here that not all prototypes are stereotypes, and that not all stereotypes are problematic. We are concerned here with stereotypes, that is, the prototypes that describe a social group. As a description of a group, nothing is intrinsically wrong with those stereotypes. Communication problems take place when one is trying to use a stereotype to describe an individual.

Positive stereotypes can be a problem, in that a positive one is likely to produce certain expectations on the part of a stereotype-holder, and the induced expectations can be readily betrayed in real-life interaction between people. On the other hand, negative stereotypes present more obvious and serious problems when applied to an individual, because they can induce prejudice at the attitudinal level and discrimination at the behavioral level (Hofstede 1980). As mentioned above, a stereotype is a collective concept; thus, by nature, it always has the possibility of eliciting problems when applied to an individual. In principle, a collective concept never refers to an individual entity. It may describe ‘an average’, but the average is an abstraction of individual differences, thus essentially being a fiction. This is why stereotypes become stumbling blocks to mutual understanding between people.

On the basis of the discussion above, we suggest that maintaining the attitude of seeing an individual as an individual is an effective measure of minimizing the negative effects of stereotypes upon interpersonal communication. However, a stereotype is the output of learning, as stated above, and hence, there is no way of escaping from *stereotyping* (Hamilton 1981). If so, the only way of minimizing the effect of stereotyping is to consciously keep stereotypes indeterminate, temporary concepts about groups, not individuals. In dialogic interactions, one should treat the otherness of the other as ‘bare differences’—differences without judgment—and practice flexible attitudes of enjoying the differences.

### *Shareable Value Creation*

Understanding of the other’s sense of values and sharing common values is the key to human communication in general, and this is particularly so

when participating in dialogues between people of different backgrounds. In order to establish human relations through communication, it is not just adequate to understand the other's sense of values, while maintaining one's own. What is required is to share common values to be created by a collaborative joint action. In other words, one is required to see one's sense of values from a different perspective, and try to create mutually shareable values through a joint action of constant dialoging. What, then, are the conditions that make it feasible to carry out this challenging collaboration?

Humans are sense-making animals. Anything within and around us becomes the target of sense-making, through which an action is taken. Sense-making often entails value-making; in the making of sense, we make a value judgment. The critical criterion for a value judgment would be the principle of relevance. If an action is perceived to be relevant in a certain context, it will be taken; otherwise, no action will be taken. We should, however, go further beyond the general concept of relevance, and propose a sense of 'individual expectations' that is responsible for a person's judgment to determine if an action is relevant or irrelevant. If we get to the level of 'individual expectations', we are able to discard a general concept of cultural differences, in that each individual has different expectations.

If such is the case, we can claim that the principle of relevance is not a principle based on the demands of universal truth, but rather on something highly individual, and thus adjustable interactively. This gives us a hint to answer the above question. That is, the challenging collaboration becomes feasible depending on the extent to which the principle of relevance is adjustable in human interactions. To put it differently, the extent to which you accept the other's behavior, or the degree of tolerance, is the key. The other's behavior may appear deviated from your norms, yet the notion of deviation should be discarded, and a new notion of 'stretching' should be introduced in its stead. 'Stretching the norm' implies a flexible application of the principle of relevance.

Behind the concept of deviation always lies the concept of norm; thus, it is a widely accepted view that something normative is good, and something non-normative is wrong. 'Deviation' always carries a negative connotation, while 'stretching' carries a positive one. This is why we use the word 'stretch'.

In cross-cultural encounters, we experience stretches of different kinds in various situations with respect to religion, marriage, toileting, exple-

tives, eating, and greetings. To some, people can show a high degree of tolerance; to others, however, their level of tolerance becomes very low. We can be tolerant of different ways of greeting, and easily accept them. We, however, experience cross-cultural conflicts, when stretching goes beyond our capacity of tolerance.

We suggest that cross-cultural dialogues can be constructive and productive, when the different senses of values find a point of compromise, and newly created values are shared by the participants. For that, one should flexibly stretch the range of relevance, without insisting on one's own criteria for relevance—criteria coming from one's personal expectations, which are used to evaluate behaviors. As long as one is conscious of 'stretching', one's tolerance maintains a high level, and as a consequence, possibilities increase for sharing newly created values as common ground.

To sum up, what has been discussed in this section reduces to an obvious and common but 'difficult-to-practice' proposition: one should not take your sense of values for granted. If you confine yourself to a set of values in the form of 'you should', you will be labeled as 'stubborn'. A debate-like position game, in which each stands for his or her own position, does not foster co-creation of mutually shareable values. What we need is a 'collaboration game', in which the participants present their ideas on the table of discussion, and search for a new way of looking at things, and produce a context of situation in which they can play the game.

Within the context of using English as a *lingua franca*, the interaction of 'my English' and 'your English' takes place on the assumption that mutual understanding is indeed possible. Intuitively, however, we all know that communication for mutual understanding always accompanies some form of anxiety. Surely, we believe in mutual understanding; at the same time, we wonder whether or not our intended meaning is interpreted correctly. This is an anxiety coming from semantic indeterminacy, or a sense of uncertainty (Cheng 2003). This problem of anxiety becomes acute in the context of multiculturalism because we cannot naively assume that our basic assumptions work. In other words, a sense of losing common ground for mutual understanding fosters a sense of semantic uncertainty, which causes aggravated anxiety for mutual understanding.

When we encounter an event which is not properly interpretable within our frame of reference, we convince ourselves by bringing in conceptual devices such as cultural differences and cross-cultural barriers. However, from the perspective of living multiculturalism, the introduction of the

concept ‘cross-cultural barriers’ has an effect of psyching ourselves into believing that a different culture is an insurmountable barrier, which diverts one’s attention from the target individual person. For this reason, we suggest that a distinction should be made between ‘culture out there’ and ‘culture one faces’, and that a different culture in interpersonal communication should be reinterpreted as part of the uniqueness (or otherness) of the other.

*Communicative Language Competence:  
Functionality of Language Use*

Above, we placed ‘functionality’ as the first priority in our attempt at characterizing the interaction between my English and your English. In this last section, we briefly discuss the implications of the preceding discussion for the definition of communicative language competence.

In order to be functional in language use, ‘mutual intelligibility’ becomes the key criterion; unless you make your utterance intelligible, verbal communication is hard to be functional. With intelligibility being the foundation of functionality, we should also consider two important criteria: ‘well-formedness’ and ‘appropriateness’. However, these three criteria do not determine functionality because in real-life communication, semantic accommodation or negotiation of meaning is a requirement. This motivates us to introduce the criterion of ‘adjustability’, which schematically governs the three criteria of intelligibility, well-formedness, and appropriateness.

We admit that well-formedness and appropriateness are two major criteria to be considered here. The term ‘well-formedness’ basically refers to grammatical accuracy, plus acceptable written forms/formats in the case of writing. On the other hand, the criterion of appropriateness here is concerned with both ‘pragmatic appropriateness’ of choosing a language and ‘organizational appropriateness’ of structuring information. The former is related to style and register, while the latter to logic and coherence. For example, stylistic sensitivity to the choice of words is a language user’s competence that influences pragmatic appropriateness. Organizational appropriateness, particularly important in the case of writing, becomes a relevant criterion for functionality even in speaking—for example, when one is making a formal presentation.

The point to be emphasized here is this: one cannot determine on a priori grounds what is appropriate when one is using English as an inter-

national language within the context of multiculturalism. Appropriateness is determined situationally, not by certain cultural norms. Certainly there are some ground rules which apply regardless of cultural differences, such as ‘Try to avoid using casual expressions in formal situations’ and ‘Try to be polite when you ask someone to do something’. Be that as it may, however, in an actual communication situation, one interprets the given situation in her or his own way and behaves in an appropriate way—a way as perceived to be ‘appropriate’.

One will make adjustments to the subjectively perceived appropriateness, whenever necessary. To put it differently, one cannot generally rely on a given rule of appropriateness, because it can always happen that a pragmatic rule which may work, for example, in a given situation in the US does not work in another situation in Thailand.

It is always important to behave appropriately in a situation, but appropriate behavior is a consequence of being functional in that situation. Functionality cannot be reduced to a set of pre-determined rules of well-formedness and appropriateness. The condition of adjustability has to intervene, with well-formedness and appropriateness being the targets of adjustments. In other words, functionality always overrides other criteria. For example, in a natural discourse of casual conversation, the degree of grammaticality can be even reduced in order to obtain higher functionality.

It is a widely accepted view that grammatical accuracy should be a condition for functionality of language use. However, orality and literacy follow different grammatical constraints (Ong 1982). The basic unit of written discourse may be a sentence; thus, sentences to be produced in writing should be well-formed grammatically. However, if you insist on grammatically correct sentences when you casually interact with others, you may sound too rigid and unnatural. This suggests that the unit of grammar in interaction is not a sentence, but a fragmentary chunk. In oral communication, chunks are chained in the process of chunking, permitting false starts, repairs, repetitions, changes, avoidance, and the like, within flexible grammatical limits (Schiffrin 1987). Turn-takings and interruptions can always occur because a conversation is but a joint action; conversational discourse is produced jointly. What is suggested here is that even a seemingly robust criterion of well-formedness can be subject to adjustment or accommodation to increase functionality.

Finally, functionality of language use is determined by the context in question. Thus, the demand for functionality varies according to the

situation in question; for example, the functionality demands for making a presentation at an international conference and for bargaining the price at a Thai shop can be different, even if using the same language, that is, English. In the case of oral communication, the degree of goal-orientation, and the presence of expected procedures in carrying out communication are among the factors that influence the demands for functionality. If one is expected to conduct a formal negotiation, one has to be careful about both pragmatic appropriateness (e.g. choice of words) and organizational appropriateness (e.g. accepted procedures of negotiation) in order for the interaction to be functional.

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