Where Is English

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This lecture is aiming at clarifying the meaning of English education in our country: how English should be taught and learned as a Foreign Language, and where English as a Foreign Language (EFL) should be posited in the English teaching curriculum.

My conclusion is simple, but twofold: English should be grasped as the discipline of skills rather than that of thought or culture; and EFL should not be regarded the same as English taught and learned as the mother tongue.

As for the grasp of EFL, “sesqui-lingualism” should be recommended instead of perfect bilingualism, in terms of a more practicable goal of the discipline of English in Japan.

On these assumptions, our English education is discussed from the five aspects.

Where is English? Is it in vocabulary? No, it isn’t.

Where is English? Is it in Linguistics? No, linguists cannot do nothing to help us grasping it.

Where is English? Is it in literature? Without a language we are incapable of thinking. In that sense, English is in English literature. It is in poetry, novels and dramas as well as essays. However, appreciation of the genius of English literature is not the whole goal of the discipline of EFL. The English literary nisus (Leavis) or the triad of age, will and idea (D. H. Lawrence) is beyond the pale of the discipline of EFL.

Where is English? Is English in culture? From the ecological point of view, yes. Cultural, social or behavioural approaches to English Language are being emphasized nowadays. However, cultural theories are not the discipline of EFL. Recent interdisciplinary studies or paracommunicational researches help us learning English but are not the discipline of English.
English is in a living organism. It is in the whole of the organism, not in its parts. The English discipline is to be dynamic and holistic.

Where is English, in the long run? English is in communication. "It is there in the criss-cross of utterance between us." (Leavis) It is in its oral skill of communication. The oral skill is the root of English skills. In addition to the four skills of English, one other skill of skimming should be trained. Summarizing, epitomizing, outlining, recapitulating, precis-writing, or what not is what I here by the skimming skill. EFL is a discipline of skills.

Our EFL education aims at too big a goal. Perfection is an ideal in whatever we do in life. We unconsciously pursue bilingualism in the perfect or strictest sense of the word. In the case of our English language education, bilingualism is a visionary goal. Our practical or practicable goal should be sesqui-lingualism as Dr Twaddell suggested in his address. Sesqui-lingualism, which means one-and-a-half competence of Japanese and English, is high enough as our goal of English education. "If we can come close to attaining it for many of our pupils, we have reflected credit on our profession, and we have performed a great service to our nation." (Twaddell)

To conclude, English is in communication skills. Through the five stages of recognition, imitation, repetition, variation and selection, let us strengthen the five skills, so that our goal of sesqui-lingualism may be achieved to the full.

Books for Reference:
W. Freeman Twaddell, "Recent Trends in Foreign Language Teaching", English Education in Japan, pp. 15-41, ELEC, 1977
Einar Haugen, The Ecology of Language, Stanford U.P., 1972
F. R. Leavis, The Living Principle. Chatto & Windus, 1975

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