Earlier this year a group of Nagasaki Prefecture junior and senior high school teachers of English invited me to Unzen to discuss with them the subject (which they assigned to me) "Linguistics and Foreign Language Teaching-Another Look."

My presentation was based upon "another look"--my current reading in the history of the English language, structural linguistics, transformational grammar, psycho-linguistics, socio-linguistics, semantics, foreign language pedagogy--and upon my experience as a teacher of English language and literature in English-speaking, Spanish-speaking, and Japanese-speaking university communities.

The aim of the presentation was to stimulate discussion (which it did.) among the 30 members of this particular group of teachers of English by reporting to them what linguistics, a science, suggests is important for successful foreign language teaching and learning, an art.

The presentation was not organized as a lecture. It was divided into numbered topics whose order of presentation was roughly as follows. Speaking simply (over-simply?), at the time I used only brief notes, expanded here.

1. Human beings are not physiologically designed to learn specific languages. A Japanese child who grows up in Spain with Spanish-speaking classmates and playmates will learn Spanish.

2. There is no inborn biological problem in learning one's own
language. There is no inborn problem in learning the language of another language community, a foreign language. It is not correct to say, as if it were a biological truth, "Japanese people cannot learn foreign languages." Professional teachers of foreign languages in Japan and elsewhere should reject this mistaken, self-defensive and professionally self-defeating idea, and avoid and oppose the negative attitude toward learning foreign languages it expresses.

3. The ability to learn foreign languages does not depend upon high IQ. IQ signifies ability to manipulate one's native language, but people with average IQ can learn foreign languages as well as people with high IQ. Motivation is more important than IQ in learning foreign languages.

4. Yes, children can learn foreign languages more easily than adults, but their learning does not necessarily take place only in classrooms, and more often than not does not. Children usually learn foreign languages by association with other children whose native languages they learn by using them, by having to use them, in real-life situations.

5. Classroom instruction in foreign languages is usually systematic, especially at the beginning of instruction. However, learning foreign languages is not necessarily systematic. Many people learn foreign languages without formal training. The value of classroom instruction should not be over-emphasized. (Note: In foreign language teaching and learning, classroom instruction is not an end in itself, is it?)

6. Some optimal conditions for learning foreign languages are:
   a) youth (getting an early start)
   b) experience (using a foreign language)
   c) rate of experience (using it often)
d) motivation (wanting to use it)

e) proper instruction (learning from someone, not necessarily a native speaker, who knows how to use the language).

Re: rate of experience, frequency: it is better at first to study 50 hours in one week than one hour a week for 50 weeks.

Re: motivation, desire: it is better to want to learn than to be forced to learn, but there are different kinds and degrees of compulsion: (Note: Compulsion is not the same as discipline: compulsion comes from the outside, discipline from the inside.)

7. a) There are individual differences in the ability to learn foreign languages. It is not necessary for teachers to compare one student’s ability with another student’s ability. Learning a foreign language is not, should not be, engaging in competition.

b) There are individual differences in time of learning. Some students learn foreign languages fast; some students learn them slowly. A fast learner does not necessarily learn more or better than a slow learner. A slow careful learner with high motivation can learn more and better than a fast careless learner with little motivation or none. All students do not have to be required to do the same thing at the same time.

c) There are cultural differences in ways of learning. In Japan memorizing is a traditional way of learning. Memorizing may hinder more than help foreign language learning. It is possible to memorize words or phrases or sentences in a foreign language, but language is not "words" or "phrases" or "sentences." Language is activity, physiological and mental activity, an interactional process in a non-linguistic environment, a real-life situation. (Note: Many perhaps most of the problems Japanese students have in learning foreign languages derive from traditional Japanese
ways of doing things conflicting with foreign ways of doing things, e. g., there is a conflict between secondary school administration and applied linguistics.)

8. a) Linguistics is considered a science, but there is no scientific way of teaching foreign languages. Teachers of foreign languages can learn about language from linguistics (there are several branches of linguistics), but they do not need to be linguists, scientists.

b) Teaching foreign languages is considered an art. As "artists" teachers are not equal in performance, nor do they have to be. Teacher A can do better than Teacher B in this, Teacher B can do better than Teacher A in that.

c) A good teaching program (coordinated instruction) in foreign languages will not require every teacher to do "everything," but will assign teachers according to their respective abilities.

d) Learning foreign languages may also be considered an art. Only a few students of foreign languages are artists. (Note: In my opinion, these "artists" should get special intensive instruction.)

(Story: Here I remembered the greatest student artist in foreign languages I have met, and could not resist telling her story. A young Puerto Rican woman whose native language was Spanish attended a private four-year high school where the principal language of instruction in all subjects except Spanish and Spanish literature was English. As an 18 year old freshwoman at the University of Puerto Rico she already spoke and wrote English fluently. In four years at UPR she studied (besides all required subjects in science and social science, etc.) Honors English, Honors Spanish, Latin, Russian and French language and literature. When she was a senior she was employable as a Russian-Spanish interpreter
at an international conference of architects. When she graduated from UPR she went to France, where she was taken for a French woman from the provinces, not Paris, who spoke a rather too formal French. When she was sent by the government of Puerto Rico to graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania, she was the only student in a 40-member class in Medieval French to get an "A." (Her knowledge of Latin!) When she received her Master’s degree, she was employed as an instructor of French at UPR. Then she began to study Greek. No “secret” to her success in foreign languages. She was deeply interested in them. She had teachers who could read and write and speak the languages they taught and who knew from personal experience the cultures those languages expressed. She had teachers who made true demands on her, not false ones. And besides attending classes regularly she studied languages at home by herself at least six hours a day. End of story.)

9. A few questions:

a) In teaching a foreign language, isn’t it better to teach the language itself more and about the language less?

b) In teaching grammar, should the teaching be for the sake of the grammar, a description of language, or for the sake of the language?

c) In teaching “rules,” should it be for the sake of the rules or for the sake of the language?

10. In my opinion, in junior high schools and senior high schools in Japan English should be taught as a foreign language (EFL), not as a second language (ESL). Immigrants to English-speaking countries need ESL, a different register of English from the register of English (EFL) needed by most short-or long-term
Japanese visitors to English-speaking countries. (Question: After they graduate from secondary school how many Japanese students of English will visit English-speaking countries? How many will often or ever read English or write it or speak it?)

11. a) It is not necessary for Japanese teachers of foreign languages to use them as native-speakers of those languages do.

b) It is not necessary to try to teach Japanese students to use foreign languages, e.g., English, as native-speakers do, "naturally."

c) Native-speaker models and informants should not so much be "imitated", not so much be "used," as be communicated with.

12. a) In Japan, "literature" (teaching and studying foreign "literature") has high prestige. Language has low prestige. (Note: Many people think conversation in a foreign language means only "How much does it cost?")

b) Students who later will teach English in secondary schools get too much (not altogether adequate) training in "literature" and too little (altogether inadequate) training in language.

(Note: "Literature"--because the concept of literature is questionable where "literature" is taught in bits and pieces: in one class one or two essays a year, in another class one or two short stories a year, in another one novel a year, all or mostly all translated by the teachers--is that literature?)

c) Literature is a highly special use of language, demanding readers who are keenly attuned to nuances of language and nuances of social behavior.

d) Studying literature is a special skill. (Native speakers of languages often have numerous problems in understanding their
native literatures.

e) In Japan secondary and college and university students study literature too soon -- before they acquire basic, elementary, fundamental skills in language without which they cannot understand literature very well if at all.

13. a) It is not possible to teach a whole foreign language, "everything." No grammar book can contain all the "grammar," no dictionary all the words. Selection is necessary. What is your principle of selection?

b) It is possible to teach only parts of a language, some varieties. Selection is necessary. What is your principle of selection?

c) It is possible to teach the difference between prescription (describing how people use language) and proscription (telling people how to use language.)

Re: prescription: Many native and non-native speakers of English say "He don't."

Re: proscription: Most native and non-native teachers of English teach "Don't say 'He don't,' say 'He doesn't'."

(Note: Languages change in part according to "majority rule." "Correct" here, "incorrect" there. "Correct" now, "incorrect" later, and vice versa.)

(Note: I speak standard English. I say "He doesn’t." and I teach "He doesn’t." However, if students of English or teachers of English or professors of English say "He don’t," I do not say to them, "Say 'He doesn’t.'" The artists among them will "correct" themselves. Fortunately, I do not have to wear the straitjacket of teaching only for examinations.)

d) Many, maybe most, teachers of English and other for-
eign languages have proscriptive attitudes toward language, over-emphasize the value of "correctness" (here, largely because of the examination system), and discourage many of their students and even themselves from using or trying to use the languages they study and/or teach.

14. To speak a foreign language it is convenient but not necessary to use a large active vocabulary. Active vocabulary: the words we can write and speak. Passive vocabulary: the words we can read and understand without looking them up in a dictionary. In Basic English Ogden and Richards provide the few hundred words sufficient for adequate everyday conversation in English, e.g., Latinate ascertain, obtain, retain are learn, get, keep. (Note: Instead of translating Latinate, multi-syllabic English words into Japanese for their students, perhaps teachers of English should also translate them into "Basic.")

15. a) In Japan teachers of English concentrate on teaching passive vocabulary for translating. (Note: Translating is not reading.)

b) Teachers of English do not give enough attention to teaching active vocabulary for writing and speaking. (Note: Translating is not writing, and writing skills are different from speaking skills.)

c) Most of the training in the practical use of foreign languages is done by private enterprises ("conversation schools") in a multi-million dollar business centered in Kobe-Osaka-Tokyo. Many firms, especially those in international trade, hire native speakers to teach foreign languages to their employees who need to use them. NHK foreign language programs supplement the secondary school language programs.
(Note: In Moscow, U. S. S. R., there are numerous secondary schools teaching all subjects except Russian language and literature in foreign languages: School A. English, School B. German, etc. By the time they are 14 or 15 many of the students of these schools are fluent in writing and speaking the languages they study.)

16. IDEALLY (nowhere is the world of foreign language teaching and learning ideal), teachers of foreign languages should be able to use the languages they teach.

a) Ideally, teachers of a foreign language should be able to understand it when it is spoken to them, and they should be able to speak it in real-life situations outside the classroom. (Note: Even the classroom is real-life, isn't it?)

b) Ideally, they should be able to read it to get information. (Note: Reading is not translating.)

c) Ideally, they should be able to write it to transmit information to others. (Note: Writing is not translating.)

(WARNING: In a), b) and c) above, it, it, it, but a language is not an it, cannot be summed up in it.)

17. a) In most countries of the world most teachers of foreign languages cannot write or speak them very well. Most native speakers of English cannot write it well or speak it well, either. (Question: What does "well" mean? Who decides?)

b) Most teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) and most teachers of English as a second language (ESL), native speakers as well as non-native speakers, need regular in-training in language skills, including the skill of translating, and in teaching methods.

(Note: The University of Puerto Rico, a state university, gives in-training courses in language and teaching methods every Saturday
and every summer for teachers of English in public and private secondary schools.)

(Note: IDEALLY (not taking into account political and social and administrative considerations), Nagasaki Prefecture would have one central adequately-staffed English Language Institute where teacher-trainees and practicing teachers would discipline themselves through intensive instruction to professionalize their art of teaching the English language.)

18. Everywhere administrators and teachers need to cooperate to formulate clear aims for foreign language instruction.

a) What is the purpose of teaching English to over 90% of all secondary school students in Japan? (Note: The official stated purpose is: help students understand foreign ways of thinking, foreign culture. The actual unstated over-riding purpose is: help student's pass entrance examinations.)

b) Do all teachers of English in secondary schools here have the same purpose? Must all teachers have the same purpose?

c) Do all students of English have the same purpose? Must all students have the same purpose?

d) What kind of English should be taught here? Must all students study the same kind of English?

e) How much English should be taught? Must all students have the same amount of instruction?

f) What do most secondary school students of English do with English after they graduate from school? How often will they speak English or read it or write it?

g) After they "pass" university entrance examinations in English how many students read English (not translate) or write or speak English?
19. In Japan, teachers teach mostly translating English, not reading, not writing, not speaking.

   Reading: reading a foreign language without translating.
   Writing: writing a foreign language without translating.

   (Note: Translating is not interpreting.)

20. One method of teaching is not useful for all purposes. If teachers teach mainly one skill (translating), they are not teaching mainly another skill (reading or writing or speaking.)

21. IDEALLY, teachers who teach translation should know how to translate. Translating is a highly skilled profession in itself.

22. There is very little transfer of skill from translating to writing a foreign language.

   a) Teaching translation for the sake of other skills is possible, but it is different from teaching translation for the sake of translating.

23. Teaching translation from English to Japanese tends to teach Japanese more than English.

24. Teaching translation from Japanese to English tends to teach English more.

25. Teachers of translation should teach students how to translate current English in which writing is less formal than it used to be.

26. Translating isolated sentences is not as good for teaching translation as translating sentences in context, e.g., in paragraphs.

27. The unit of composition in English is not the sentence, it is the paragraph. Grammar studies sentences. Composition studies paragraphs.

   (Note: Students and teachers and professors of English often show me an isolated sentence and ask what it means. My answer:
"Show me the context, the paragraph, the page." The meaning of an out-of-context sentence is often not clear, and its meaning may change from context to context. Repeat: The unit of composition in English is the paragraph.

Aside: A few months before this seminar in Unzen, members of Nagasaki English Speaking Society had asked me to participate with them in a discussion about "The Teaching of English in Japan." (They chose the subject.)

Because of lack of time in Unzen, I did not mention this earlier discussion on a similar subject, but should have done so. Why? Because young E.S.S. men and women, students of various colleges in Nagasaki Prefecture, represent a small but articulate minority among Japanese students, a minority expressing dissatisfaction with the present system of teaching English in the secondary schools they graduated from, a minority asking these and other questions:

1. Why were we not taught "practical English?"
2. Why were we trained for "examination English" but not for communication?
3. Why were our teachers not trained to teach how to communicate practically in English?

My stress is on "minority," that is what they are, and that is what I told them they are, a small minority whose fellow students do not share their interest in the English language. They should not expect the educational system of a nation to be organized for them alone, I told them.

On the other hand, it is these students--this minority interested in English--that interest me as a teacher. These are the students I want to help most and can help most, for they want to help, themselves.
Anyway, on the behalf of these students, I emphasized in Unzen the following topics for discussion.

28. IDEALLY, if--if school administrators and teachers of English in secondary schools want to teach this minority of students to use the English language, that is, to use language skills other than translating, e.g., reading (using English-Japanese dictionaries minimally and English-English dictionaries maximally), writing (producing written language, not translating), speaking (communicating ideas), IF--

Then in teaching this minority of students English they will among other things:

a) Assign teachers according to their particular skills. See 17 Notes.)

b) Group students homogeneously according to motivation and ability.

c) Reduce the number of students in a class.

d) Stop using katakana in English classes. Katakana distorts the phonology, the sounds, of English, interferes with pronunciation, intonation and stress, and interferes with the communication of meaning.

e) De-emphasize uncontextualized memorization and emphasize creative production of the language. (Note: Memory is not memorization. Memorizing is a specialized skill depending upon what is to be memorized and upon individual differences. What students memorize for classroom needs to be effective in the real world outside the classroom, that is, has to change in particular circumstances for particular purposes, anyway.)

f) Permit students to experience English in as many meaningful contextual situations as possible.

g) Get students to be as self-reliant as possible, to build up
their confidence in using English.

h) Minimize disconnected structure exercises and maximize connected situational dialogues, preferably acted out, preferably composed by the students themselves.

i) Have students link speaking with seeing and doing.

j) Concentrate teaching on the features of English that are different from those of Japanese, e.g., relative clauses.

k) Teach in clusters, e.g., teach colors as parts of a system, the color spectrum.

l) Teach phonetic contrasts not only in isolation but also in phrases, clauses, sentences.

m) Teach lexical contrasts not only in isolation but also in phrases, clauses, sentences.

n) Avoid artificial patterns, e.g., This is a book.

o) Show common mistakes based upon interference from Japanese.

p) Consider communication more important than correctness. Consider what a student says more important than how he says it. (Question: What is the most serious "error"? Answer: The one that prevents communication of meaning.) Be more strict with writing than with speaking skills, as Standard English tends to be.

29 In short, step by step, teach this minority of motivated, talented students:

a) how to make small talk.

b) how to make requests

c) how to follow orders

d) how to express opinions

e) how to report information

f) how to express feelings.
30. To speak a foreign language, to understand it when it is spoken, it is necessary to know more than words, phrases, sentences. Meaning is expressed by gestures, tone of voice, volume and speed, eye movements, body movements, etc.

31. Teachers and students of foreign languages need to know how language expresses culture, how differences in age, status, sex and situation affect language users.

32. Teachers of English need to know, among other things, something about:
   a) the history of the (changing) English language
   b) semantics
   c) psycho-linguistics
   d) socio-linguistics
   e) cultural anthropology.

In the lively discussions that followed the above presentation, some teachers expressed alarm at the suggestion "correctness" was not the most important goal for teachers of foreign languages. After all, if they did not teach "correct" English, their students would fail entrance examinations. Of course, there is Standard English, but native speakers of English, of any language, allow relative degrees of deviation from their "standard" language, primarily a written form. Many native speakers of foreign languages do not speak "correctly" according to formal rules. Correctness is not a purely linguistic concept, anyway; it is largely a social concept, largely prescriptive: Do it this way, don't do it that way. In short, often: Do it my way. Many teachers of foreign languages are over-preoccupied with "correct" pronunciation, "correct" grammar,
"correct" this, "correct" that. (Correctness, too, depends on context, acceptable in some cases, not in others.) Besides, why do teachers insist so much on students doing what the teachers themselves, many of them, cannot do?

We discussed entrance examinations. My point: The administrators and professors who require them seem to believe in an outdated conception, transfer of learning, e.g., "Teach mathematics for logical thinking," but outside mathematics mathematicians do not necessarily think logically. The people who require entrance examinations think ability to pass entrance examinations is a sign of general intelligence, but perhaps it is only a sign of ability to pass examinations. In any case, even though they "pass" entrance examinations in English, many students have minimal skills in reading or writing or speaking English.

Too much time and too much money and too much energy is spent, in my opinion, in trying to teach too many students English -- for a too limited purpose and with too limited results.

And yet -- yet -- there are thousands of people in Japan who have come out of the present school system, who speak foreign languages, especially English, with, lesser or greater skills, who manage to communicate more or less with non-Japanese in business and in social life.

So maybe it is not that the present system of teaching foreign languages is so bad. It is that it could be better.