

My Viewpoints on Medical School Education

Kei SHIBATA

*Linguistic Department, Kawasaki Medical School
577 Matsushima, Kurashiki, Okayama, 701-0192, Japan
(Received on September 28, 2012)*

Abstract

English is becoming an international language, but many medical students in Japan have difficulty acquiring English for professional purposes. This may be due to be a homogeneous society where people don't have to conduct English in their daily lives. However, we are faced with a rapidly changing society where annihilation of distance takes place and we must use English as a tool of communication. Medical students will encounter the situation to read, write, speak and hear English in their daily activities. It is time for Kawasaki Medical School to launch the program to cultivate these four skills. I will detail the need for this program to improve it further.

Key words: English, medical students, changing world

1 . What language is an international language?

Many languages are spoken in the world but what is the exact number of speakers using those languages. Table 1. 2. and 3. show those using each language.

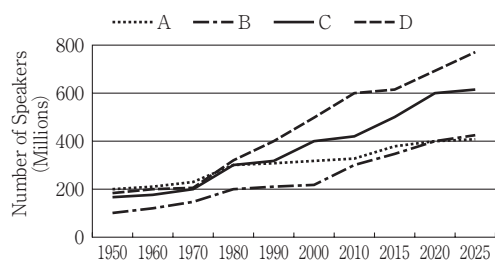
Table 1. Top Ten Languages

• Mandarin	873,000,000
• Urdu / Hindi	497,000,000
• Spanish	438,300,000
• English	308,350,000
• Arabic	280,000,000
• Portuguese	235,500,000
• Bengali	215,000,000
• Russian	145,000,000
• French	130,000,000
• Japanese	122,400,000
(Source: Ethnologue, 2005 estimate)	

Table 2. Number of Second Language Speakers of English

• 375 million L1 speakers
• 375 million L2 speakers
• 750 million EFL speakers
• Total: Approximately 1.5 billion speakers
(Infoplease. com)

Table 3. The Decline of Native Speakers



- Estimates of speakers of English as a second language worldwide
- A L1 speakers
- B L2 estimates based on Crystal (1997)
- C Further allowances made for Latin America and Africa
- D Assumptions of higher usage in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh

Table 1. shows the number of speakers of EFL (English as a first language) and Mandarin is spoken by a highest number of people. This is true, but the problem lies in Table 2 and Table 3. Judging from them, we will have a large number of people who will speak ESL (English as a second language) a few decades later. If we consider the definition of an international language under this condition, English should be listed as a number one international language. English becomes denationalized and tends to establish itself alongside with other local languages. English is not confined to the economic elite, but to people in general.

In 2011, Kawasaki Medical College started SEP (Small Class Program) and LEP (Large Class Program) to teach the four basic language skills, reading, writing, speaking and listening. as an alternative to communication-based ELT (English Language Teaching) classes. The rationale was based on the following criteria:

- (a) Medical professions require students to acquire authentic medical English in reading and writing. (LEP)
- (b) Students have an interest to interact with each other in English under medical situations. (SEP)

- (c) Students need to have opportunities to have culture-based English from teachers of different nationalities. (SEP)

2 . Kawasaki Medical College's Curriculum

At Kawasaki Medical College, two courses of English classes, SEP (Small English Program) and LEP (Large English Program) are offered in the 1st, the 2nd and 3rd years. The 4th year has only LEP. The main goals are to strengthen the students' communicative abilities as well as their authentic English. From the 1st year through the 3rd year, the students learn authentic medical English in LEP and communicative one in SEP. Each class of the 1st, the 2nd and 3rd years has 90 minutes per week. In this paper, I will mainly elaborate on LEP, not SEP because Mr. Alan Cooper, the head teacher of SEP, will analyse what he is performing in his paper. I have implemented LEP lessons. The following chart is the outline of the allotment of LEP and SEP teachers:

3 . The History of LEP & SEP

Before starting LEP and SEP program, a EFL program was conducted by two NES (native English-speaking) full-time teachers and six part-

The Allotment of LEP & SEP teachers from the 1st year through 4th year

	M1 (Small + Large Class)	M2 (Small + Large Class)	M3 (Small + Large Class)	M4 (Large Class)
Canada			1	
England	1	2	2	
America	3	2	2	
Sweden	2	2	2	
Egypt	2	2	2	1
New Zealand	1	1	1	
Australia		1	1	
Japan	4	3	2	1

time teachers. Each teacher used different textbooks. The students complained that they couldn't get an equal and fair evaluation because they used different textbooks in each class. Those classes gave medical doctors the impression that the students didn't master basic reading and writing skills as future doctors. Medical doctors discussed this situation and came to the conclusion that a revised program should be started.

In April 2011, the number of NES teachers was expanded to 13 from the 1st year through the 4th year and the EFL program was restructured. The teachers of LEP conducted reading and writing lessons on the basis of authentic medical English and those of SEP focused on communicative medical English. LEP class consists of about 110 students and SEP of about 12 or 13. In addition to this, SEP classes are classified in accordance with students' linguistic abilities. Teachers used the same teaching materials in each grade.

4 . LEP Class ·

LEP class consists of reading and writing lessons and each part is allotted 45 minutes for its activity during 90 minute-lesson. A Japanese teacher is mainly in charge of reading and a foreign doctor from Egypt teaches medical writing skills, using only English. The Japanese and foreign teachers help each other during the lesson.

LEP reading from the 1st year through the 4th year involves the following four activities.

- Grammar Translation
- Comprehension Questions and Language Work (Analysis)
- Skills and Strategies
- Extensive Reading

These activities are best understood through the following three principles:

- The reading materials are about current medical or scientific topics.
- The purpose of reading is usually related to information and understanding.
- The teacher orients and guides the students.

The benefits of LEP reading should be as follows:

- increased vocabulary knowledge of medical and scientific fields
- consolidated grammar knowledge
- improved writing skills
- improved listening & speaking skills
- improved motivation

In 2012, we have a proficient foreign doctor from Egypt who teaches students how to write medical documents.

The following is her way of teaching in her writing lessons.

- (a) Give students the medical or scientific topic they are to write on.
- (b) Pick up the ideas before writing a paragraph.
- (c) Explain logical structures to make a paragraph.
- (d) Have students write a paragraph.
- (e) Have students make their presentation in English.

The topics for writing in the 2nd term of 2012 are as follows:

(M1)

Of all the forms of media, television has the strongest influence on public opinion.
The benefits of a healthy diet.
A good movie usually teaches a moral lesson.
Advances in communication have led to a loss of personal privacy.
Describe yourself, your hobbies and your dreams for the future.
Many People object to the use of nuclear power. State your opinion of this issue in Japan and describe possible alternatives.
A disadvantage you have overcome.
If time went back one year, would you make the choice of joining medical school again or not? What would you join instead, and why?
Writing Assessment.
Health hazards of mobiles and laptops.
Popular dishes in Japan and how healthy they are.

(M2)

Of all the forms of media, television has the strongest influence on public opinion.
The benefits of a healthy diet.
A good movie usually teaches a moral lesson.
Advances in communication have led to a loss of personal privacy.
Many People object to the use of nuclear power. State your opinion of this issue in Japan and describe possible alternatives.
Symptoms and diseases associated with vitamin deficiency.
Anemia is a silent killer. Write about the causes and ways of prevention.
Give a short account on the average age of onset and early symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. Describe methods of protection.
Writing Assessment.
Write an essay on leukemia. Describe the magnitude of the problem in Japan, risk factors in Japanese population and therapy options.
Case study.

(M3)

Write an essay on leukemia. Describe the magnitude of the problem in Japan, risk factors in Japanese population and therapy options.
Give a short account on the average age of onset and early symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. Describe methods of protection.
Describe the risk factors and the epidemiology of myocardial infarction.
Write about popular Japanese dishes from a medical point of view; health benefits versus the risks.
Write about the 3 leading causes of death in Japan.
What satisfactions do you expect to receive from your activities as a physician?
Writing Assessment.
Causes and health hazards of environmental pollution.
Advances in medical technology in Japan.
Case study.

(M4)

Write about common diseases of children with special reference to Japan.
What field of medicine is most appealing to you at this time and why?
Write about diabetes mellitus (DM). Describe types, clinical picture and long term complications.
Write about the stresses medical students face and your own ideas to improve the study of medicine in Japan.
Write about popular Japanese dishes from a medical point of view; health benefits versus the risks.
Write about the 3 leading causes of death in Japan.
Writing Assessment.
What do you see as the most significant issue the medical profession will face in the next forty years?
Advances in medical technology in Japan.
Case study.

5 . Issues raised about the LEP class**(1) Lack of conscious learning**

In 2012, I participated in lessons of Richard Schmidt of Hawaii University who conveyed me an important message: “Learning without attention and the accompanying subjective experience of noticing surface structure is impossible.” These words may be applied to some students of mine. Incidental learning may be possible in other courses, but medical ones have so heavy curriculums that language learning is sometimes regarded as a heavy burden by medical students with a busy schedule. The more language materials are conveyed, the less attention is paid to it. I am struggling under these circumstances. My idea to cope with this situation is that I should give them quite current medical reading materials to make them interested, stimulating their academic abilities.

(2) Bigger difference in academic abilities of the 4th graders

The English course of the 4th graders was launched to meet the trend of internationalization two years ago. The followings are the teaching materials of the first term in 2012:

- Detoxing thorough exercise
- Gene Hunters
- Tackling Prostate Cancer
- Lobotomy
- Heading the ball
- Bilingual Brains
- Escalating the War on Hypertension

Each teaching material of one lesson was from the newspaper, “Herald Tribune” and has about 400~500 words. The main reason why I selected these topics is that they may interest the 4th graders and activate their reading skills. It took me a great amount of time to select interesting topics in order to collect appealing reading materials. However, the result is meager. Only two-third of students seemed to be interested in reading these topics and the rest of one-thirds showed no interest. This may be the case because their linguistic abilities are developed only a little during the four years of training at Kawasaki Medical School. How to cope with this situation is a great challenge. One solution may be to divide about 110students into 10 or 11 groups and teach them medical English individually. I will need to collect more data about this issue.

- What happens to muscles during a rubdown

(3) Transfer from receptive to productive skills

We have a four-year-program at Kawasaki English Education. What I feel about present situations is that students build up more solid linguistic basis at the first stage. Many students regard memorizing and accumulating information as what they have to do to become doctors. This may be true, but doctors also need a logically firm foundation of thinking, heartfelt minds to understand their patients, philosophical ideas to understand human beings, a strong spiritual power to endure hardship and so forth. Language education can offer students a foundation to acquire these abilities. My viewpoint is that they should acquire these abilities through reading in the first year and produce their opinions in English as their grade gets higher. This transfer from receptive to productive skills enables us to have excellent doctors.

6 . Conclusion

I have an Egyptian doctor as my co-worker in team teaching class this year. She teaches my students how to write medical reports in excellent English. She studied medicine at an Egyptian medical university and mastered English there. I met many foreign professors from Southeast Asian nations this summer overseas. They told me that English is an indispensable means of communication in their ways of teaching, particularly in medical or scientific courses. Why is English used in medical departments of each university? This is because there are no national borders in the medical world and English is used as a means of communication. However, we still use Japanese when we teach students medical science in Japan. This is because medical science is too difficult for them

to understand in English. I hope this weakness will be solved in order to have our becoming doctors work smoothly in international environments.

References

- 1) Richard R. Day.: *New ways in teaching reading*. Alexandria VA: TESOL, 1993
- 2) Richard Schmidt. *Attention and Awareness: Implications for language teaching and learning*. Cape
- 3) Bamford, J. & Day, R. R.: *Extensive reading activities for teaching language*. Cambridge University Press, 2004
- 4) Gibson, Robert.: *The Strip Story*. TESOL Quarterly, 1975
- 5) Sandra McKay.: *Culture and English as an International Language*. Cape, 2012