

Shakespeare's Language

Abass Horri Ph. D. (English Literature)

The National Institute of English

Shakespeare for an Iranian student is a foreign language
within a foreign language

This writing is not about the grammar of Shakespeare's language; nor is it meant to offer a new interpretation of his plays. It is a quick short look at some aspects of his language for the benefit, especially, of novice translators.

Shakespeare is difficult. It is doubly difficult for an Iranian student or a translator of inadequate experience. In order for a translator to arrive at a reasonable comprehension of a play, he/she will have to penetrate some unfamiliar layers of linguistic, cultural and situational ambiguity. For him/her it is not unlike climbing an unusually steep mountain. For native

speakers of English studying Shakespeare, the phrase "patience on a monument" is not likely to present too much of a comprehension problem. Chances are that they get to know it long before coming across it in *Twelfth Night* (II iv 117). Whereas for an ordinary Iranian student of English or translation it does present a problem. 21 male students of a group of 23, and

learners will be enhanced. With regard to the two standard varieties (i.e. British and American English) more consistency is suggested to English teachers and students alike. Teachers are also advised against prejudice since both varieties are equally acceptable. Concerning the choice of medium, although in most EFL situations emphasis is given to the written language oral fluency should not be overlooked owing to the ever-increasing role of English as an international language. As far as errors are concerned, it is suggested here that those errors which may impede the smooth flow of communication, either written or oral, should be given priority and less significant errors should be treated as secondary and be dealt with only if time allows. Teachers are encouraged to practice more tolerance towards learners' errors.

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skills (oral or written), and at the same time accommodate for other skills in the syllabus. As far as errors are concerned, it is suggested here that those errors which may impede the smooth flow of communication, either written or oral, should be given priority and less significant errors should be treated as secondary and be dealt with only if time allows.

Written materials can be, as have always been in the majority of cases, based on Standard English; however, provision should be made for the teaching of informal writing styles such as informal and friendly correspondence.

The choice of spoken materials for language laboratories and conversation classes is not without its problems. On the one hand, basing the oral material on standard accents such as RP, in the case of British English, has the advantage of approximating the speech of foreign learners to that of educated English speakers and enabling the students to benefit from radio and television programmes in English received in their countries of origin. On the other hand, restricting the oral material to the standard accent has the disadvantage that the learners would not be able to follow informal speech of native speakers. Thus, a compromise should be reached in this respect, i.e. the most functional and widely-accepted variety should be emphasized and recommended to foreign learners of English for their general use and at the same time informal and colloquial forms and non-standard features, which are likely to be encountered by the learners, should be

introduced for recognition purposes. Furthermore, it is proposed that advanced students should be made familiar with stylistic variation of spoken English. Simply presenting the learner with linguistic input would not guarantee that he would be able to express himself appropriately in different situations; he should be taught *when* to say *what* to *whom* and *how*. In other words, he should be made aware of the varying nature of language according to the formality of the context, the relationship between the interlocutors and other sociolinguistic parameters involved in a speech event.

Conclusion

In this article, an attempt has been made to relate the notions of correctness to the teaching of English as a second or foreign language and the treatment of learners' errors. It can be concluded that the existence of a set of norms and standards of grammar and pronunciation seems inevitable in EFL situations since the performance of EFL students is assessed against certain norms of target language usage. Whereas establishing norms of correctness in native-speaking contexts is highly controversial it is a fairly straightforward task in EFL situations since the only norm that exists in the latter case is that of Standard English. However, although conformity to the norms of Standard English seems inevitable in EFL situations familiarity with authentic speech and informal English is recommended at least as part of the passive knowledge of the learners. This way the communicative ability of the

such as Iran there is no clear-cut distinction between British and American English as the standard target language variety. Some textbooks and audio-visual materials are based on British English while some others are based on American English. This is mainly due to difficulties involved in obtaining all the teaching materials in either variety alone. This lack of consistency will undoubtedly cause a great deal of confusion and problems for students and teachers alike. One cannot afford not to sympathize with a group of students who have to listen to one variety of English (e.g. RP Accent) in the language laboratory and another (American English) in the classroom. Of course, it would be ideal if students were familiarized with both varieties, in which case they would increase their linguistic awareness; however, this is by no means an easy task and requires the teachers to have a working command of both varieties. The real problem arises when some teachers insist on one variety only and regard the features of the other as unacceptable or incorrect. This may be due to prejudice or inadequate language awareness on the part of the teacher, but whatever the reason might be it will create serious pedagogical problems such as undue correction of students' linguistic performance. Teachers and students should be advised that features of both standard varieties are equally acceptable, though some may not be as appropriate as others in certain situations.

2.3 The Choice of Medium in Materials Development and Teaching

The criteria for the selection or preparation of instructional materials are highly controversial, indeed. On the one hand, if decisions regarding materials development are to be based on the specific needs and objectives of the learners, it would seem legitimate to suppose that the objective of the majority of foreign learners of English, particularly in the developing countries of the world, is to gain access to western technology and benefit from the vast body of literature available in English in different fields of study. In such cases, it would seem futile to lay emphasis on the colloquial features of spoken English which may hardly be of any use to the learners; rather, emphasis should be given to the written language whose mastery is the ultimate goal of the learner. On the other hand, if we are to accept that English is increasingly becoming recognized as an international language and consequently of great importance in world-wide communication, then it has to be agreed that more emphasis should be given to oral fluency. In this case, grammatical correctness would no longer be the supreme objective of EFL instruction, and learners' errors which do not hamper communication should be tolerated.

A way out of this dilemma seems to be a balance between the two extremes; that is to say, to concentrate on the needs of the learners and take this as the main criterion in the selection or preparation of instructional materials and put more emphasis on the desired

These are briefly discussed below.

2.1 Conformity to the Norms of Correctness

With respect to the first question, two opposing views exist: (a) some scholars recommend prescriptive teaching grammars to foreign learners of English and see little value in teaching the authentic language; and (b) some others advocate the authentic speech of native speakers. As a classic example of the first group, Quirk (1968: 109) maintains that "... the teaching grammars of English, particularly those directed at foreign students, must be-and the best have always been- rather solidly prescriptive". Quirk continues that "there is little value to the learner" in being presented with a collection of features observed from the lips (or pens) of natives" (P.109). And as an example of the second group, Moulton (1962:89) advises students of foreign languages to "copy what the native speaker says because he is always right". However, these two extreme views are rejected here and a compromise position is proposed, instead. This position is based on the notions of productive and receptive language controls on the part of the learner. Accordingly, standard English is recommended for productive control and use, while colloquial English and authentic speech is suggested for receptive knowledge (listening comprehension). Considering the limited time allocated to the teaching of English in most EFL situations it would be impossible to teach the whole of the target language; rather, the TL should be carefully selected and graded

for teaching purposes taking into consideration the pedagogical criteria involved. This selection and gradation should be based on standard English; however, learners should also become familiarized with what Quirk (op cit) refers to as collection of features from the lips and pens of natives'. i.e. the 'authentic language'. In fact, it has been observed that foreign learners of English who have been exposed to only one variety of this language, which is normally Standard English, will find themselves at a great disadvantage when faced with real communicative situations in the target language where authentic speech is used. It is obvious that the learners' communicative ability will be enhanced if they become familiarized with authentic speech. In this respect, encouraging the students to listen to live radio programs in English at home followed by classroom discussions would increase their linguistic awareness and communicative ability.

2.3 The Choice of a Standard Model

The second question at issue is the decision regarding the choice of a standard model. In general, a variety should be selected for teaching purposes which provides maximum usability for the learners. The two main standard varieties of English employed for teaching to foreign learners are British and American English. The choice of one of these standard varieties at the cost of the other will undoubtedly affect teacher training programmes as well as the selection of instructional materials. In some EFL situations

It appears that much of the controversy surrounding the notion of correctness comes from the older generation that by nature are more conservative and respect the traditional values highly. As Holmes (1992) concludes "... as people get older their speech simply becomes less dialectal and more standard" (p.184). Holmes further adds that "... there is general agreement that in their 'middle years' people are most likely to recognize the society's speech norms and use the fewest vernacular forms. They are most likely to use more standard forms" (p.186). (For more age-related sociolin-guistic studies, see Chambers and Trudgill, 1980; **Romanie** 1984; Downes 1984; and Trudgill, 1988).

In short, such controversies are likely to persist unless public awareness of the nature of language is raised and realistic and favorable attitudes towards non-standard varieties are encouraged.

II. Norms of Correctness and the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language

In the previous section, the question of language variation and norms of correctness in general (i.e. in the context of native speaker usage) was briefly discussed and the controversies involved were highlighted in order to view these issues in EFL contexts in the right perspective. In this section, an attempt will be made to relate the notions of correctness to the teaching of English as a foreign language and particularly the treatment of second-language learners' errors.

In describing the language learner's

language, Corder (1982:32) suggests that "... every utterance of the learner must be regarded as an acceptable utterance in his transitional dialect... thus we come to the conclusion that the concept of ungrammaticality or deviance from the norms is not applicable to the learner". This argument, however, is justifiable only if we consider learner's utterances according to the rules of his 'transitional grammar'. In other words, such a treatment of learner's utterances makes sense only when we try to describe his language for theoretical purposes in order to find out about his language learning processes and strategies. This is the domain of theoretical error analysis. However, from a pragmatic and pedagogical point of view, Corder's proposition does not seem convincing since in the latter case learner's utterances should be assessed against certain norms of target language usage. Unlike native speaking context, in an EFL situation establishing norms of correctness seems fairly straightforward. In fact, the only norm that exists in EFL situations is that of Standard English and it would not be unsafe to claim that the majority of EFL teachers are even unaware of different varieties in English. Thus, as can be seen, the existence of a set of norms and standards of grammar and pronunciation seems inevitable in the teaching of English as a foreign language. However, a number of questions arise from this issue, notably (i) to what extent conformity to these norms and standards should be observed, (ii) which standard model should be selected, and (iii) which medium should be emphasized in EFL materials development and instruction.

mmatrical' in language. (cf. Andersson and Trudgill, 1990).

However, no matter what the attitudes of modern linguists are, public concern and debate for standards of usage seem to ensue. Even today, the earlier forms of language are regarded as better, and language change is resented by some members of the public. This is reflected in the correspondence columns of the press where complaints against innovations in pronunciation or usage can frequently be found. In fact, language specialists, particularly lexicographers and handbook writers, are under pressure from the public with respect to correct usage. Milroy and Milroy (1985) note that if, for example, lexicographers attempt to remove all traces of value-judgement from their work and refuse to label particular usages (such as 'ain't) as 'colloquial' and others as 'slang', there is likely to be a public outcry. This was notoriously the case when **Webster's Third New International Dictionary** appeared in America in 1961. Its failure to provide such evaluations of usage was described by one critic as 'a scandal and disaster.' (For further examples of letters to the press see Trudgill, 1979; and for opinions of BBC listeners and viewers on language usage see Burchfield 1981). However, it needs to be pointed out that in recent years favorable attitudes towards language variation have developed to a considerable extent. In BBC, for instance, where for years applicants with some degree of regional accent were denied of any broadcasting job, one can now notice regional flavor in the speech of some commentators,

though this may not escape criticisms from listeners and/or viewers, owing to the controversial nature of the issue at hand. In some linguistic circles, the non-standard speech is referred to, in popular term, as 'authentic' and 'closer-to-life' language, probably because it is through this speech form that the daily interaction of most people is carried out.

With respect to children's attitudes to non-standard speech, Eric Hawkins (1983) has launched a quite stimulating series entitled **Awareness of Language**. The objective of this series appears to be raising the awareness of children about the nature of language variation so that they can develop a sense of appreciation for other languages and dialects. However, with regard to the views of the public as a whole, no major steps appear to have taken place. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to assume that factors such as accelerated developments in communication and modern transport systems- which result in greater mobility and ideally more understanding amongst different strata of society and the world at large-ought to have had some effects on the opinions of people towards non-standard varieties. Interestingly enough, it has been observed (Cheshire 1982; Wolfson 1976) that in some situations standard speakers monitor their speech carefully to insure that they use more non-standard features in order to produce an appropriately informal speech style. Thus, it is not surprising to find that some politicians deliberately attempt to include non-standard features in their speech to gain the favor of the public.

I. Norms of Native Speaker Usage

The controversial issue of establishing the norms of native speaker usage has been the subject of fierce and ongoing debate between the proponents of linguistic purity and the advocates of innovation in language usage for several hundred years. This battle reached its peak in the eighteenth century. Greenbaum (1985) notes that in the eighteenth century new concerns developed about the English language. Most of the learned argued that English had reached a near-perfect stage in its progress, having been purified of its inconsistencies; they then feared that unless changes were prevented it would deteriorate and become corrupted by the uneducated and half educated.

Along these lines, the opponents of language change attempted to set up prescriptive rules of grammar and usage whose job it was to keep the language in its pure form and to prevent it from corruption. In some countries of Europe, such as France and Italy, language academies were established to decide what was 'correct' and what was 'incorrect' and to guard the language against corruption. However, in Britain, or in any other English-speaking country, for that matter, such an academy did not exist. Authority was here found in the works of the so-called 'self-appointed experts' and prestigious writers.

Traditional grammarians chose Latin as a model for describing the English language and prescribing the rules of correctness. The reason for this choice was that Latin enjoyed high prestige during the Middle Ages and for some

centuries afterwards. It was widely believed, quite unreasonably, of course, that Latin was the most logical and perfect of languages, and should therefore serve as a model for the description of all other languages irrespective of their dissimilarities with Latin. Consequently, as Haas (1982) asserts, other languages were, to a considerable extent, misdescribed. An example of such prescriptive misapplication is the normative rule that one should not use a 'split infinitive' (e.g. to clearly understand) regardless of the fact that this rule is based on the principles and categories established in the first place for the description of Latin and Greek, and not for English.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, these rigid and unsound notions of correctness and undue admiration for Latin began to decrease. On the turn of the century, Otto Jespersen (1922:15) boldly asserted that "English is free from the narrow-minded pedantry which in most languages makes people shy of saying or writing things which are not strictly grammatical". The strongest reaction against the prescriptive attitudes, however, came from the American Structuralist school of linguistics, founded by Leonard Bloomfield who denounced the suggestion that the standard dialect taught in schools was more correct than non-standard dialects (Bloomfield 1993). One of Bloomfield's associates, Robert Hall (1950), in his strongly-worded book **Leave your Language Alone**, went so far as to claim that there is no such thing as 'good' or 'bad', 'correct' or 'incorrect', 'grammatical' or 'ungra-