

## **Evolving or merely changing?**

Jiro Numano

Chairman

Chugoku-Shikoku chapter

Are we, as an organization or individual language teachers or whatever, evolving or merely changing? I suppose this is an ever on-going question.

But first, words of greetings. Four years, or two terms as chairman of a chapter have passed. It was quite an unexpected and unwelcome post for me when the responsibility was first suggested in a chapter board meeting held in Hiroshima in 2001. However, as I had been abundantly benefited from the JACET organization for so many years, I could not but accept the role after some hesitation. I was reminded of a saying, "It is more blessed to give than to receive"(Acts 20:35), although I did not mean to give but felt I could not avoid filling the role to repay what I had received.

Everything is changing, either evolving or simply changing. I would like to mention several cases from my observation during the past twenty-five years and my own experiences as a language teacher. First, what about the current English education at the secondary school system in the nation? While it is the result of the so-called "YUTORI" education meant to give pupils room to think, reason, and be creative, so that they could be equal to the counterparts of other advanced nations, it obviously caused a considerable decline of their ability of English as well as other subjects. I think this could be regarded as a case of simple "change," and I anticipate a swinging back of the pendulum.

Next comes the methodology of EFL education in my mind. Here most of the readers would think this is the sure case of "evolution." We know the general sequence of Grammar-Translation Method to Direct Method, to Audio-Lingual Method, then to the latest Communicative Method with various different names and ideas. Each method claims to be the best, repudiating the preceding ones. We might be justified to say here is a real case of evolving. When I prepared a paper on syllabus design to submit to 清华大学(Tsinghua University) in 1998, however, I found out each stage has something that cannot be totally rejected. So I have a bit of a reservation. I even feel similar element(s) recurring each time some "new method" is noised around. A maxim aptly describes: "Is there anything of which one can say, 'Look, this is new'? No, it has already existed, long ago before our time." (Ecclesiastes 1:10)

Third, regarding the EFL teachers, or the state of ourselves. Have you turned from a liberal arts instructor of English as one of the basic education courses to a professor who teaches at

graduate level, or to a professor who teaches at an English major, or have you expanded your field of instruction beyond EFL courses to teach (English) linguistics, intercultural communication, and the like? Many or most of the readers here must have been fortunate enough to move forward and upward in their careers. But we know quite a few who have not been so fortunate and are daily coping with the students left behind.

These colleagues of ours are often times burdened with administrative chores to the full. Here we see the great divide between the privileged educators and those who are not, dealing with drop outs. In passing, let me share my humble opinion/observation regarding English teachers in Japan. I have often been surprised at the conspicuous lack of fluency on the part of Japanese English teachers. I feel many Japanese English teachers, young and old, should be making more efforts to develop fluency. I know this is a self-addressed message and I know there are many excellent Japanese English teachers in terms of spoken English: I respect them. And then I would like to see more English teachers learn another foreign language: that will help them understand where their students stand and come up with fresh ideas to teach.

Finally, if we look at the JACET organization itself. Is it evolving or simply changing or has it left behind necessary innovations? I observe it as undergoing two aspects of transformation. One, in leadership, seems to be shifting from outstanding individuals to organizational executives with various committees. Two, the organizational entity is about to change from an arbitrary association to a public corporate body, which is more accountable to society. Therefore, I can say that, according to needs of the times the JACET organization has been “evolving.”

In conclusion, not everything is evolving but many things, both human and nonhuman, are simply changing, often toward a lower level. However, it is also true that every individual being is striving for improvement or, at least, survival. We learn and mature through this process, which can be called “evolving.”