

The Canute Syndrome:

An investigation into contemporary linguistic changes in British English

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King Canute must have rued his attempt to demonstrate to his English subjects the impossibility of holding back the tidal waves. Indeed his attempt certainly misfired. Today, many know of him only as the king who foolishly tried to stop the ocean waves from rolling in. In fact, he was, of course, demonstrating the futility of seeking to curb the power of natural phenomena.

One might apply Canute's analogy to linguist change. It is just as inevitable and certainly more controversial. Mathew Arnold, in his poem 'Dover Beach', hears the ocean's roar and is reminded of 'ignorant armies (that) clash by night' ... religious armies in his case, but there is a valid linguistic metaphor here, too, as proponents and antagonists wage bitter battle over linguistic boundaries. Indeed, such battles have been waged for centuries. Chaucer (quoted in Mittins et alia, '70) noticed this linguistic phenomenon, perhaps unaware that his own writings would be seen later by some as a major factor in not only facilitating linguistic change within a language, but even, through his decision to write in English rather than in French, determining the linguistic Battle of Britain:

“Ye knowe ek, that in forme of speche is chaunge
Withinne a thousand years, and wordes tho
That hadden pris, now wonder nice and straunge
Us thinketh hem; and yit they spake hem so....”*

*“You know, too, that forms of speech will change
Within a thousand years, and that words then
In current use, now we wonder at, think quaint and strange,
Yet once they were, indeed, a living, spoken language.”

(Free translation).

This paper will:

- 1 Examine various categories of linguistic change that have taken place during the last 30 or so years, referring to criteria for establishing linguistic change (e.g. correctness versus acceptability/appropriateness), and linguistic stances taken (e.g. prescriptive versus descriptive).
- 2 Review a recent (May '97) BBC survey of solecisms ... comments made by listeners to BBC radio, criticizing the standard of English used in programmes recently broadcast.
- 3 Indicate further recent changes observed during a small survey carried out by the writer, listening to BBC Radio 4 (May 1st. '97 - March 14th. '98) as source.
- 4 Discuss the implications of the above for EFL language teachers, with reference to a brief survey carried out among an international group of EFL teachers at the Department of Language Communication, Aichi University, Japan.

Linguistic Change—Position in the '70's

In 1970, W.H. Mittins et alia (Mittins, '70) published the results of an enquiry by the University of Newcastle upon Tyne Institute of Education English Research Group into attitudes to English usage. The purpose of the enquiry was to add to the then current stock of information about usage and attitudes to usage. The survey contained 50 items considered to be disputable in use. 457 respondents were asked to judge their acceptability within the parameters of informal speech/informal writing/formal speech/formal writing. These respondents were broadly classified into five groups: students (175), teachers (87), lecturers (100), examiners (35), non-educationists (60).

Five broad categories of disputable items were used in the questionnaire:

- 1) Colloquial items, usually associated with informal speech, e.g. not *all that easy/pretty* reliable
- 2) Etymological items, where the prescriptive/censorious critic may invoke derivational justification (particularly Latin roots), e.g. *data is/different to*.
- 3) Grammatical items of various types where alleged misuse of concord (*these sort of plays*), case (told Charles and I), adverbial position (he *only* had), choice of part of speech (did it *quicker*) etc. take place.
- 4) Lexical/semantic items involving apparent confusion of meaning or blurring of distinction, e.g. *infer/imply*, *historic/historical*, *disinterested/uninterested*.
- 5) What Mittins classes as 'language myths' where a prescriptive attitude of 'dubious authority' is taken, e.g. *his family are/if it was offered* etc.

The results showed that when the 50 items were averaged out across the four parameters of formal/informal speech and writing, there was a 'general tendency, of the order of nearly 3 to 2 (58 to 41 percent), towards rejection rather than acceptance'(Mittins, '70). The order of categories by degree of *acceptance* was as one might have predicted. That is, first, informal speech (61%) acceptance, then, informal writing (46%), then formal speech (31%), and finally formal writing (24%). This would seem to indicate fairly clearly the route by

which linguistic change occurs.

The results of the survey may be open to various challenges. For example, the fact that the survey took place in 'experimental' rather than 'natural' conditions, thereby perhaps not reflecting 'actuality'. Introspection may or may not be an accurate indication of what one actually says and writes. (see Blundell J.A. et alia, '82, for an indication of the factors involved in determining appropriate choice of language — setting/topic/social relationship/psychological attitude—at various levels of formality). Also the composition of the survey respondents in terms of age/sex/class/education/profession or job etc. can hardly be said to reflect the views of a total population. However a totally representative sample of informants would be impossible to establish, and Mittins argues quite convincingly, (perhaps in unconscious defence of the claim that the sample is heavily weighted toward middle class academic) that those respondents familiar with modern linguistics and influenced by its advocacy of a descriptive as opposed to a prescriptive approach to usage would be balanced (he claims 'easily outnumbered') by those who felt that their English usage was *being tested* (my italics). In other words, informants expressing *unrealistically tolerant descriptive* attitudes would be (over?) compensated by those expressing *unrealistically censorious prescriptive* attitudes.

In fact, from the point of view of measuring linguistic change, such an over-zealous defence may not even be necessary. One has to decide whether one is attempting to describe some concept of 'total linguistic change' within a country or nation, or whether one is seeking to observe those changes that filter down to general acceptability within the more narrowly defined boundaries of, for example, 'BBC English', 'The Queen's English', or 'Standard Southern English', typically embracing school teachers, university lecturers, professional men and other bastions of the middle class. In other words, the sample may well be said to be representative of the attitudes of those who exert a major influence on acceptability. Once rearguard actions have been fought and lost by this type of informant, within these narrower boundaries, linguistic change may truly be said to have taken place.

It is, perhaps, also interesting to note the vehemence and bitterness that typically accompanies such rearguard actions. Mittins has indicated the predominance of censoriousness over permissiveness (see above). This is supported by the fact that when invited to add to the list of debatable uses, the respondents produced a list of well over 200 new different items 'of which the great majority were explicitly or implicitly condemned.' Apparently, the following adjectives *laziness, slovenliness, lack of discrimination, meaninglessness, confusion, inaccuracy, deterioration, degeneration and contamination* were used! Mittins laments the fact that: 'dogmatic and sometimes irrational and ignorant condemnation of change and innovation seemed to occur much more frequently than approval or acquiescence.' (ibid.) Yet, somewhat ironically, he himself is stung into a retaliatory defence in answer to one of the respondents who criticised the wording of an instruction in the questionnaire. Mittins is provoked into describing the criticism as exemplifying a typical 'witch-hunting' attitude, which is, in itself, a fairly emotionally-loaded phrase. The altercation takes place over the grammatical concord of the instruction: 'Please tick whichever of the following descriptions

fit you. Mittins's defence is that 'whichever' has the *possibility* (my italics) of taking a plural as well as a singular reference, and that an individual: '*might* (my italics) belong to more than one occupational category — teacher *and* examiner, professional writer *and* lecturer/doctor etc.' This rather unconvincing argument aptly illustrates the emotional baggage we carry around with us when the 'correctness' or 'acceptability/appropriacy' of our use of English is called into question.

Recent BBC Survey of Solecisms

On May 12th. '97 the BBC broadcasted a program (Feedback) in which listeners wrote in to say what they thought of the use of English in BBC programmes. Hundreds of replies, according to the announcer, 'cascaded into the office'. Clearly the BBC had hit a nerve. The list might be seen as somewhat akin to the over 200 different new items produced by the respondents to the Mittins questionnaire, and is particularly interesting because it is very recent and is sourced directly from respondents and may therefore represent more truly those areas of language change/acceptability currently at issue, than an academically sourced questionnaire, which might miss key areas of change, however carefully constructed.

A summary of the majority of items is given below, using the alphabetical listing method of the radio programme.

- A: *actually*—felt to be greatly over used (perhaps verging on hesitation phenomena).
- B: *beg the question*—'correct' use seen by listener as 'to assume the point under discussion' as opposed to being a synonym for 'to prompt/raise the question'. (e.g. 'Are you going now, or in half an hour's time?' begs the question by assuming that now or half an hour's time are the only possibilities open to the addressee).
- C: *centred round*—described by listener as '*Inane!* Anyone using it should be *banned* until they can produce a diagram showing something centring around something else!' (my italics).
- convince/persuade*—Listener insists on the grammatical forms 'convince *that*/persuade *to*. 'Harriet Harman *convinced* the Speaker to give her another chance? No! She *persuaded* her to!'
- D: *De Profundis*—literary work by Oscar Wilde. Listener insists on 'correct' Latin pronunciation rather than the French pronunciation of 'de' given by the announcer. (Raises question of how to pronounce foreign words. To anglicise or not to anglicise, that is the question! However, in this case it is a matter of attributing a French pronunciation which does seem odd, unless the French pronunciation of the word 'de' has in fact become an acceptable anglicisation in its own right.
- E: *epicentre*—Listener complains of misuse. Not 'the *very* centre', but, 'a point on the Earth's surface *directly above* the centre of an earthquake.'
- evacuate*—Listener (apparently using Latin grammar as a reference base) complains of misuse in applying 'evacuate' to people. I.e. *buildings* may be evacuated, but not *people*

—described by the listener as ‘a very messy business indeed!’.

- F: *February*—Listener complains of mispronunciation. (The initial /r/ is often omitted, or even the ‘uary’ pronounced simply as /i:/). He refers to ‘ill-educated readers’ who ‘perpetrate the horrible’ pronunciation. And interestingly: ‘We look to Radio 4 to uphold standards’.
- Frustrated/exasperated*. Listener complains these should not be used as synonyms. ‘Frustrated is when a person is thwarted in his or her desires (e.g. an athlete with a broken leg). Such a person may also be *exasperated* (made very angry), but one may be *exasperated* (e.g. by noisy neighbours) without being frustrated, and, says the listener: ‘should not be described as such!’.
- G: *Get under way*—listener complains of overuse as synonym for ‘start’. His suggestions for alternatives: “‘Start’ or begin, or, *in extremis*, ‘commence’”, suggest he is more inclined to the formal than the informal, and indeed the announcer comments: ‘Great users of Latin, our correspondents!’
- Gone missing*—an expression described by a lieutenant-colonel as ‘abhorrent to people of my generation’ (80 years old), presumably on the grounds that one either *is* missing or one *goes* somewhere, but to ‘go missing’ confuses two verbs and might even imply intent. ‘Us people’ ‘have a listen to’ and ‘arrived back at’ are also on his ‘hit list’.
- H: *The letter ‘H’*—Many listeners claim that the very name of the letter ‘H’ is *perpetually mispronounced*, and insist on no initial aspiration when pronouncing the name of the letter itself.
- I: *Indeed*—Many listeners feel this word is *being tacked on to the end of* certain phrases far too often. Particularly When thanking an interviewee after an interview: ‘Thank you very much, *INDEED!*’
- J: *Just*—Listener complains that ‘just is wrongly used as a synonym for ‘only’. Insists that with a time expression (e.g. ‘This has been done by a girl of just six, *just* means ‘recently’, not *only* in the sense of ‘surprisingly’ (young)).
- K: *Karaoke*—Listener is *mystified* by the English pronunciation of this word /kari:oki:/ stressed comfortably for the English on the third syllable, and wants a pronunciation nearer to the Japanese original word. However, the announcer is drawn into the debate at this point and says, somewhat irritably: ‘The trouble is, that if you *now* started saying ‘kara-okay’ *on one would have the faintest idea what you were talking about!*’
- Kilometre*—Listener accused BBC of advising the Australian Broadcasting Commission, when asked for a ruling on the correct pronunciation of *kilometre*, that the word should be stressed on the *first* syllable, as in *kilogramme*. Why, then, he continued, do we hear BBC staff and contributors pronouncing it the American way, with stress on the *second* syllable?
- L: *Looks like*—use of *like* as a conjunction where *as if* is available. Listener complains of many instances of misuse on the BBC, e.g. *Looks like he’s going to resign.* / *Looked like she wasn’t going to come*, etc. Listener rages: ‘Has this *slapdash, vernacular usage now been given the imprimatur of the BBC?*’

Lochinvar—Scottish versus English pronunciation of the /x/ ‘ch’ sound. Listener, infuriated, enquires acerbically: ‘What *possessed* the BBC to allow a woman *with a speech impediment to ruin* one of our most beautiful Scottish poems?’

M: *May have / might have*—Listener complains of semantic confusion resulting from misuse of modal tense, viz. *may have*—a possibility still exists, *might have*—it no longer exists. “E.g. A news reader said that three people had died in a fire. Then he said ‘a smoke detector *may have* saved their lives’ which could only mean that they were possibly still alive!”

Me / myself—Listener laments overuse of *myself* when *me* would be perfectly adequate (‘myself’ normally being used for reflexive or emphatic purposes). Complains of use on BBC of: ‘Given to *myself* / My wife and *myself* / ‘It will make no difference to *myself*. “What’s happened to the word ‘*me*’?”

N: *Numbers*—Listener complains of four-figure numbers (e.g. share prices) being read on BBC programmes in pairs, e.g. 3724 being read as ‘thirty-seven, twenty-four’, rather than ‘three thousand, seven hundred and twenty-four.’ (BBC is conscious that it needs to be economical of time).

O: *Of*—‘... which BBC news reporters are turning into a verb—“to of”!’ (‘Mispronunciation’ of short form of ‘have’, usually pronounced with a schwa (weak, unstressed /e/) when preceded by modals such as *may/might/could/would* etc. Listener complains: ‘On the BBC’s flagship ‘Today’ program, the reporter, speaking about a woman convicted for possessing heroine, said quite distinctly, “She *could of* got life.”

Off the wall / in your face—Listener complains: “I don’t know what *off the wall* and *in your face* mean! *English has been destroyed in the name of fashion!*” (my italics).

One (as in *one pence*)—Seen as a problem since decimalisation of the British currency. Listener pleads: “Please can we get back to what we used to call a penny—a *penny* or *one penny*.’ (i.e. number/noun concord). The listener presumably feels we now no longer need to make a distinction between pre- and post- decimalization currency. He also refers to ‘*the dreaded one P*’—presumably dreaded because of its ‘indelicate’ associations, and therefore ruled out as an alternative.

P: *Plurals*:—Plural verbs and singular subjects and vice versa. The announcer says: “This has produced more letters than any other topic.” E.g. British Airways *has* been holding a press conference to explain *their* position. / ‘The council who *are* responsible only *meets* on Thursdays’. Listener comments: “This sort of thing occurs everyday on BBC radio, often in *scripted* material.”

Plus—Listener objects to misuse of *plus*: “I’ve got to do this, *plus* I’ve got to do that. What’s wrong with ‘and’?”

Q: ‘*Queen’s English*’—Listener believes this should be used in all documentaries and news broadcasts: He questions: “Don’t they realize that many foreign students listen to the BBC to learn correct pronunciation? I *fear the BBC is failing them, as well as the UK audience.*” (My italics).

R: *Restauranteur*—Irritated listener writes: “Could you get it across to broadcasters that

there is no 'n' in *restaurateur!*"

Relatives of the bereaved:—people keep talking about (my italics) '*relatives of the bereaved*' when they mean '*relatives of the dead.*'

Refute/deny:—Listener objects to these words being used as synonyms: '*Refute*' isn't another way of saying '*deny*': it means to '*disprove.*'

- S: *Schizophrenia / schizophrenic* — Listener complains of distortion of meaning from 'psychiatric syndrome' to 'unable to make up your mind'. (Heard a lot in the last general election campaign).

Soundbits / spin doctors—listener complains he does not know the meaning of these phrases (also used a lot during the last general election campaign). (*Sound bites* = a concise point made very briefly in a few seconds of TV or radio time available). (*Spin doctors* = Politicians who present certain information to the public in a particular light advantageous to their party, putting a certain 'spin' to, or 'slant' on the information. Complains of searching in vain in his OED (Oxford English Dictionary) for any explanation. Announcer adds that they now appear in the Supplement to the OED 'but that means that they will certainly appear in the next edition.'

(*Misplaced*) *stress*—A 'mailbag full of letters' on this: not 'irrepArable', but 'irrEparable'; not 'formIdable', but 'fORmidable'; not 'cOntrive', but 'contrIve'; not 'rEsearch' but 'resEArch'; One listener rails: 'A very irritating habit, and one, which I for one, could well do without!'

Subjunctive—'My pet hate is the abandonment of this mood of the verb 'to be' so that 'if I were', is now universally expressed as 'if I was'. Laments that the Prime Minister (then, John Major), said on the radio today: 'if that was to happen'.

- T: *This evening*—Listener enquires: 'Can anybody explain why these words have almost disappeared from BBC radio? They've been supplanted by '*tonight*'. However a programme at 7.30.p.m. is taking place '*this evening*', not '*tonight*'.

Three times bigger / three times as big—Listener complains that many journalists confuse '*three times bigger*' with '*three times as big.*' (three times bigger' = 'four times as big').

- U: *Unveil*—Listener complains of misuse (mis-extension of meaning/mis-collocation). 'Day after day, we hear that the government, a company, has *unveiled plans* etc. You can only unveil two things: statues and women! (Here, the announcer neatly interposes a comment relevant to the position of the adverb 'only' in the listener's comment: 'I think he means you can '*unveil only two things*' because it's obviously not true that the only thing you can do to a women is unveil her!'

- V: *Virus / bacterium*—Listener complains that 'journalists often seem to use *virus* and *bacterium* interchangeably. This is highly misleading.... Anti-biotics are useful against bacteria, but ineffective against viruses.'

Vowels—'those vowels near the beginning of words which have a worrying tendency to disappear (the vowels, presumably, not the words—(writer's note)), as in: k(a)laidoscope, p(o)lice, p(o)litical, Mother T(e)resa, c(o)llection, p(e)rennial and c(u)rriculum.'

- W: *Weather forecasters*—Listener complains: 'They will tell us that temperatures will be *hot*

or *cold*. Temperatures can be *high* or *low*. Only the weather can be *hot* or *cold*.'

who / *which*—Listeners claim that these words are too often confused, e.g. 'The council, *who* met on Tuesday. / The countries *who* belong to the EU,' when it should be *which* in both cases.

X: *Sixth*—Listeners complain that 'Presenters seem incapable of pronouncing '*sixth*'. Everyone seems to be saying: '*sickth*'.

Y: *You know*—Listener refers to BBC's practice of 'excising hesitation sounds from pre-recorded material as 'de-umming'. "I would *plead* (my italics) with the BBC to treat the phrase '*you know*', in the same way." I.e. objects to the overuse and meaninglessness of the phrase.

Further linguistic solecisms/introduction of new language/linguistic forms

The following is a list of items in chronological order, heard by the writer while listening to Radio 4 (May 1st. '97 - March 1st. '98).

- 1 *Proximity talks*—an expression probably coined to meet the need to describe talks that take place between two parties in the same building, but not in the same room, because the parties are so antagonistic towards each other. In this instance talks between Orange Order Loyalists and Galvachy Road residents to attempt to avert problems on the day of the forthcoming Orange (Protestant) March, through a largely Catholic area.
- 2 'If women want to *upskill themselves*'—new verb meaning: 'to increase one's skill'.
- 3 'I've never come across this before. It's totally new to *myself*.'—Emphatic pronoun used instead of normal object pronoun without clear reason. (Cf. under 'M' in list above).
- 4 '*Trekkies* are often seen as *anoraks*.' (People who are fans of the Star Trek TV/film series are seen as (boring) people, who wear anoraks.
- 5 'I was *short-headed* at the Derby—jockey on Thames Valley radio explaining that he had lost a race by the narrow margin of the length of a horse's (short) head.
- 6 '*Researches* at a university in Australia.' Unusual plural use of 'research'.
- 7 'Perhaps you are going to sell *less* new cars in the long run. Use of this uncountable qualifier with a countable noun is becoming extremely common now.
- 8 'Some of the subsequent things that happened *may have been* prevented.' A particularly clear case of *may have* (implying a still existing possibility) being used to describe a completed event which it is now impossible to change ('subsequent things that happened'—(cf. 'M' in list above). It might also be worth pointing out that 'subsequent things that happened' is also clearly tautological, and that the utterance might therefore be seen as doubly reprehensible by those of a prescriptive bent!
- 9 '*Cherished number-plates*' a new term as an alternative to the official DVLA term 'personalised number-plates'.
- 10 '*Drug czar*'—a person recently appointed by the government to control the problem of drug misuse in the UK, and having direct access to the Prime Minister. The term has probably been coined in response to the expression 'drug baron', a 'czar' presumably

- outranking a 'baron'. (Origin probably USA).
- 11 'The weather is already turning *pear-shaped* across London.' (Radio 4 weather forecaster, John Kettle). The adjective 'pear-shaped' (originally used informally to describe unflatteringly part of the human anatomy that changes shape with age), is increasingly becoming more widely used to describe generally something that has 'gone wrong' in some way.
 - 12 '*Lone parent*'—Sociological change seems to have forced the coining of this word. Until fairly recently the term 'single parent' was adequate to meet society's needs. Now, with the increasing break-up of marriage, apparently sufficient numbers of married, but 'lone' parents exist, to warrant the coining of a new term.
 - 13 'He *trousered* the excess profits'. 'He *pocketed* the excess profits' is a common informal expression, but 'trousered' is apparently a new coinage.
 - 14 '*Presenteeism*'—coined as an analogy to 'absenteeism'.
 - 15 'Cutting the dead and the *injured* free and getting the *wounded* to hospital.' BBC TV announcer describing an accident. Not only would one have expected 'injured' to have been used *throughout* in the description (as it is not a war situation), but the contrast of the adjectives is particularly glaring as they are used in such close proximity.
 - 16 'Is that a way of *diarying* your own life?' Creation of verb from noun. 'Diarying' is perhaps a quicker, though scarcely easier, way of saying 'keeping a diary'.
 - 17 'This is a case of *spindoctoring* the news. Interesting extension of the noun 'spin-doctor' to a verb form (cf. above list under 'S', 'spin doctor' itself being a recently coined term.
 - 18 '*Gray power*'—interesting extension of 'gay power'. Owing to 'ageism', elderly people now seem to have acquired a catchy epithet in analogy to that coined by the homosexual lobby.
 - 19 *Computer rage*'—as an analogy to 'road rage'. Apparently a gentleman in the USA was so enraged by his computer, that he shot it seven times.
 - 20 '*Dumb down*'—the verb 'to dumb down' (an informal and pejorative meaning similar to 'to (over) simplify', seems to have been coined as a result of society's decision to make exams so easy that almost anybody can pass them—even 'dumb' or 'stupid' people.
 - 21 '*Xenotransplantation*.' In analogy with such words as 'xenophobia', derived from the Greek, medical science seems to have occasioned the coinage of a term to distinguish the 'foreign' transplant of an organ of the body.
 - 22 '*Englishes*'—For some time, 'English', a once indisputably uncountable noun, has, owing to the large variety of international types of English that are now extant, in the eyes of some, become countable. Viz. the professional journal entitled 'World Englishes'.

The above items may be grouped broadly into the following (sometimes overlapping) areas:

1 Creation of Verbs from Other Parts of Speech

E.g. nouns (*to trouser*, *to diary*, *to spindoctor*), preposition + noun (*to upskill*), adjective + noun (*to short-head*).

2 Creation of New Words to Fulfill the Changing Needs of Society

E.g. *proximity talks, trekkies, anoraks, cherished number-plates, drug czar, lone parent, presenteeism, spindoctoring, computer rage, dumb down, graypower, xenotransplantation, Englishes.*

3 Blurring or Generalization of meaning

E.g. *may have/might have, injured/wounded.*

4 Personification of Inanimate Nouns

E.g. *trekkies, anoraks.*

5 Uncountable Nouns Becoming Countable

E.g. *researches.*

6 Uncountable qualifiers being used with countable nouns.

E.g. *less new cars*

7 Inappropriate Use of Emphatic/Reflexive Pronoun

E.g. *myself (It's totally new to myself).*

Although this survey is extremely limited, it is, perhaps, interesting to observe that by far the largest category is in Category 2, reflecting the need to create new words in response to changes in society.

Implications of the Above Surveys for EFL Teaching Today

'Is this correct?' The question is simple enough, and foreign students of English have every right to ask it. But is the answer always as simple? And is the question, in fact, so apposite? One is reminded of the traveller, who, on enquiring how to get to place A, received the reply: 'Well, actually, I wouldn't start from here!' How useful is it then, to receive (or offer) information about the correctness of language without taking into consideration its appropriacy, and using that as a starting point? —Or at least regarding it as a relevant factor to be taken into consideration?

However, the concept of correctness does seem to be quite invaluable and valid in its own right. One is certainly tempted, initially at least, to acknowledge a clear correctness/in-correctness dichotomy. 'Paul speak Japanese.' is wrong. However, place a comma after 'Paul', and an exclamation mark after 'Japanese' and our sentence becomes 'correct'. (Although, depending on various factors, (Blundell et alia '82) it still may not have become appropriate). And what about: 'You lent them to Paul and I.' (Ungrammatical hyper-correction or acceptable formal English?), Or: 'There were less people there than I thought.' (Countable/uncountable congruency relevant or not in determining appropriacy of this utterance?).

There seem to be two issues here. First, teachers of English as a foreign language will vary *consciously* as to their degree of prescriptivism/descriptivism. Prescriptivists will insist on the 'correctness' of a particular form, often on the basis of logic and a long tradition of grammar rules to support their argument, perhaps invoking the Latin model (e.g. insisting on '*in* the circumstances' as opposed to '*under* the circumstances' the latter regarded as

incorrect on the grounds that something cannot be both *under* and *around* (Latin: *circum*=*around*.)). Prescriptivists also tend to resist change. Descriptivists, however accept and welcome change more easily, and adopt a more flexible approach, tending to reject the idea of 'correctness' as a useful concept, in preference to the criteria of appropriateness and acceptability. EFL teachers will find themselves occupying various points along the prescriptivist/descriptivist cline according to several factors, such as their own linguistic background in terms of social class, their age, sex, natural inclination to formality/informality in terms of idiolect, the prevailing situation, psychological mood, relationship with interlocutor etc. There are so many factors that can influence our judgement of the 'correctness'/appropriacy/acceptability of an utterance that it may seem surprising that we are able to communicate with each other at all. And indeed very often we fail to do so! (Hence the branch of linguistics entitled pragmatics). The second aspect here is the teacher's *unconscious* point on the prescriptive/descriptive cline. It may well be that we are not always aware of our own 'cline point' when answering a particular student's question regarding the 'correctness' of an utterance. For example, at some point in the past (and possibly even today), a teacher would have had to answer such a question as: "Which is correct? 'Who did you give it to?', or, 'To whom did you give it?'" The answer from a teacher of background X could have been *either* alternative, given as an instant reaction, and unconsciously reflecting his/her various linguistic influences. A more positive and helpful approach, however, might be to try *consciously* to envisage the various factors determining *acceptability* of such a phrase, explaining to our student that *either* might be acceptable, according to such factors (level of formality of setting/relationship of interlocutors etc.)

It may seem fortunate that the area of language where linguistic change is taking place is very small compared to the body of language seen as a whole, and that it is in this smaller area that concepts of appropriacy/acceptability become high-lighted, and may serve as useful indicators with which we can enlighten our students. However, is it really only in this area of linguistic change that these concepts may be useful? Within the main body of language (i.e. what is *accepted* by native speakers as being the main body) is there not also a place for such concepts? In British English, for example, we would have to say, if asked, that expressions such as 'Fancy a beer?' or 'Feel like a beer?' are examples of 'correct' English. However, what happens when our students go up to their elderly, formally inclined English teacher, and use those expressions to him in the form of an actual invitation? Perhaps we should feel delighted that classroom language has transferred into a 'real situation', but we do our students few favours unless we point out that a far more appropriate form of invitation is necessary to achieve totally successful communication.

Clearly, then, the question posed at the beginning of this section is not easy and requires a conscious effort on the part of the teacher to keep in mind his/her point on the prescriptive/descriptive cline, and the ability to introspect and offer advice as to the appropriacy of a particular utterance according to the various factors outlined above.

12 acc. acc. acc. acc. acc. 100% acc.

It may be interesting to note that, although the results cannot be regarded in any way as significant:

- 1 Complete agreement occurs in only three out of twelve items (25%).
 - 2 Where there was agreement, it never reached a level higher than 60%.
 - 3 There was only 50% agreement on items between the two teachers from the USA and Canada.
- It should also be pointed out, however, that the survey covers only an infinitesimal amount of language that falls within a recognised area of debate, and that one would expect a much broader area of agreement to exist across the general spectrum of the various Englishes spoken in the above countries.

Conclusion

In this paper we have examined various linguistic changes that have taken place during the last 30 or so years, involving the Mittins et alia Newcastle University Survey of '70, the recent (May '97) BBC survey of solecisms and a recent (May '97 - March '98) limited survey of such changes carried out by the writer. This has involved a discussion of prescriptive/descriptive linguistic stances, and the concepts of 'correctness' versus 'appropriacy'/'acceptability'. Implications of the above for EFL teachers have also been considered, and the concept of conscious/unconscious prescriptive/descriptive stances introduced, along with that of a prescriptive/descriptive cline on which a given teacher-stance may be positioned. Finally, an indication of the wide variation of acceptability within a very narrow range of disputable linguistic utterances was indicated through the questionnaire data supplied by the team of international teachers at present employed at the Department of Language Communication, Aichi University, Japan.

The author would like to thank the team of teachers, Andrew Mellor, Katharine Shipley, Christine Turner, Ian Walkinshaw and Julie Williamson for their kind co-operation in completing the questionnaire.

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論文要旨

本稿では特に現代の用法に焦点を当てながら、ここ30年程の間にイギリス英語に起こったさまざまな変化について考察する。ここでは「正確さ」(correctness)対「適切さ」(appropriateness)または「容認可能性」(acceptability)といった概念についての議論を含んでいる。次の2つの概念が提案される。第1は、言葉の正確さ/容認可能性の判断に関して意識的か無意識であるかの態度について、第2に教師の立場からの規範的/記述的概念についてである。

本稿は以下の4つの章から成り立っている。

はじめに、1970年ニューカッスル大学、Tyne Institute of Education English Research GroupのMittins氏を中心に行われた英語語法についての調査の結果をまとめ解説する。「不寛容な」(intolerant)規範的と「寛容な」(tolerant)記述的態様の概念が論じられる。

次に、BBCの番組における英語の用法について視聴者の意見に基づいた最近の調査(1997年5月12日)を示し、論じる。この調査はMittins氏の調査を補足するものであるが、あらかじめ意図的に作られた学術的なアンケートによるものではなく、実際に話されたデータに基づいていることから、おそらく真に言語学的変化/論争を代表するものとみなすことができる。この最近のデータは言語学的判断を下すとき、強い感情が含まれることも示している。

次の章では、ある作家が行った英語の新語・新表現についての調査の結果について述べる。新表現は7つに分類される。ときに重複している分野もあるが、最も重要なのは、変化する社会の必要性に対応するためにつくられた言葉についての部分である。

最後の章では、今日のEFL教師のために「正確さ」(correctness)対「容認可能性」(acceptability)、「適切さ」(appropriateness)という概念の意味するものについて扱う。無意識の規範的/記述的概念を提案する。たとえば、言葉に対する態度が規範主義/記述主義である度合いによって無意識に言語の変化を受け入れたり抵抗したりすることがある。次に規範的/記述的クラインの概念を示す。われわれは自分が規範的であるか、記述的であるかはっきりしないにしても、どちらかの傾向があると考えられる。語学教師にとって、自分がどちらのクラインにいるかを知ることが信頼性のある、有益な情報を生徒に与えるために重要であることを示す。

最後に簡単なアンケートの結果(イギリス英語における、ある表現の容認可能性についての12の質問)を示す。国際コミュニケーション学部英語学科の5人の講師[イギリス、北アイルランド(イングランド在住)、アメリカ、カナダ、ニュージーランド 計5名]の方々へ回答していただいた。かなり多くの部分で意見が分かれる興味深いものとなった。ただし、上記の国々で話されている多種多様な英語という範疇で考えれば、多くの部分でより同意が得られるものと思われる。