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Week 7 - Answers
Mesthrie, et al. (2009), Chapter 11

1. What are some of the characteristics of language use in the classroom as described in Mesthrie, et al. (2009)? Thinking about your own class, what are the similarities and differences with their description?

The information presented in this chapter is a far cry from, although related to, what we need to do to help our learn how to produce effective spoken English. The situation might be different in that in the English classroom we are supposed to be using English for teacher talk and the students use Korean (or maybe some other language) at home, but the basic notions are applicable.

Basically, classroom language is different from that of language used outside the classroom. Classroom language is characterized by the (IRE) I (initiate) R (respond) E (evaluate) sequence. It is also characterized by a strong control by the teacher over the students. The teacher decides the topic and controls the turns. She has the power to interrupt and sets goals and objectives for the students.

The main point Mesthrie, et al. (2009) are trying to make is that even in monolingual societies, there are some very large differences between language as it is used in school and as it is used in the community at large, and especially across different groups of speakers. For us, where we need and are expected to code shift in our language classroom, that is use English and have students use English, this disparity between in school and out of school language use is obvious, but we might not be aware of the ways they are different aside from the code. Another important issue is how we can deal with things other than the ways depicted in the chapter, as in the situations here it is the teacher who does almost all the talking, even when she certainly feels she is engaging the students. The basic bottom line that we notice is that schools do expect language to be in use differently than in the outside world. A school reflects a particular culture based on the goals assigned to the school based on the needs of society. Ultimately, schools are designed to prepare students to be better citizens of the nation and also to teach them what they need to be productive members of society.

As we mentioned in class, schools also function based on certain assumptions. The major assumption that we have is children arrive in school already being able to deal with the informal interactional aspects of the dominant language or, in the cases of post-colonial societies, the language of the school. This is the one advantage that native speakers have over non-native speakers, it is what they are best at: the ability to deal effectively with highly contextualized interactional situations. It is from our knowledge of interactional language that we are able to build more formalized and explicit types of language. Much of what school is designed to do is to build these more formalized elements of language. As the chapter discusses this is quite problematic when the students coming into the school have not yet mastered interactional aspects of the target language as it is perceived by the school itself. This, for us, it's not really the issue, although what we are doing is kind of an extension of this. What we find in foreign language situations very often is that the language classes still tend to follow what's happening in the other types of classes. But the problem with focusing on more formalized elements of the target language when there is no interactional language is that students are basically doomed to failure. And this, unfortunately, is something that we see as a regular phenomenon in foreign language learning

situations. Teachers often lament the fact that their students cannot learn how to produce English well but the bottom line is that we are not giving them the opportunities. We are asking them to do the impossible and very often we ask our students to do things in the target language that they can not do in their dominant language, in our case here: Korean. This is something we need to seriously consider.

Schools (educational institutions) themselves are a subculture within a given society. As we read in Mesthrie, et al. (2009) and discussed in class, the sociolinguistic aspects of schools are quite different than what we find in the world outside of school. Much of this is a product of the setup within the schools. But of course we have a terrible mismatch because the goals of the school and the goals of our EFL classes do not match all anymore (if they ever really did). We need to be able to get the students to produce the target language effectively, not just formally but at all levels and especially interactionally first. To do this we need to build our own subculture which in the school subculture. Whole class situations where we have teacher-class interactions forming the basis of what we do will not develop this type of proficiency. Whole class situations are simply wrong in every possible way when trying to develop global speaking writing listening or reading proficiency in our foreign language students. We need to fundamentally rethink what we do in the classroom starting with the idea of classroom culture. We have to build a new society in the classroom with new roles and new types of interactions.

2. How would you like to use language in the classroom?
As we read in Mesthrie, et al. (2009), teacher talk is often not what we think it is. In a general sense, teacher talk is much more formal than most teachers believe, even teacher talk that we use in dealing with younger learners. The reason for this is that in the whole class situation we are approaching topics in a totally decontextualized way and this decontextualized approach to the classroom forces the teacher to use much more formal sophisticated language. This is no way around this. The purpose of input is supposedly to model language that the students will then later be able to use, but if the language were using is highly decontextualized and therefore very formal than that is obviously not language that our students are going to be able to use in the near future anyway. Taking this further, because the roles of teachers and students are so vastly different in this type of classroom culture or society that language that the teacher uses will never be a proper model for the students unless they somehow manage to become teachers. Bearing these things in mind, we need to really rethink the type of language that we need to use in the classroom. Again, the only real solution is to change not just our role in the classroom but change the classroom itself. Rather than basing the classroom on teacher–class interaction types we need to get more teacher–student interaction types, at least when the teacher is involved. In this way the teacher and model the contextualized, interactional types of language that students may actually be able to use in the immediate future.

3. How would you approach to issue of input regarding spoken language in the English language classroom?
The issue of input, again, in this model needs to be conceived in a different way. We need a wide range of diverse input types of course, but the main shift will be that much of the input will come not from the teacher or from tapes or videos but from the other students. There is a certain type of interaction that students with listening texts or reading texts or videos that they watch but this is a very different type of interaction then that he will have or should have with other students (or even the teacher) face-to-face. It is these face-to-face interactions that we need to try to focus on. What this also means is that we need to deal with input in a different way in that we cannot control all the

input that students get. We can believe these sessions by setting tasks and gathering in creating certain types of input along the line (the task chain), but we cannot force students to produce specific input for their peers. We need to be there to provide feedback on the input the students get and the output that the students produce which is basically the same thing, so in this way we are killing two birds with one stone, that we cannot control the input. As I mentioned in class, sometimes the class actually works better and students learn more when the teacher is less directly involved in what is going on. This is especially true because in the general school society the teacher controls everything and as soon as the teacher is present due to her power students will behave in a very different way and often, as we've discussed previously, silently as a way of showing deference to inequal power relationships. Thus, it is often preferable for the teacher to hang back and not hover over the students constantly ready to assess and provide feedback.

4. How can you best deal with the students' own dialect in the class?
The use of the word dialect in this case basically draws attention to the influence of the students own L1 or dominant language in the Korean ESL situation most of the students will have Korean as their L1 and this L1 has an effect on the English they produce, in the end creating what we may call it a certain dialect of English (Koreanized English). As we discussed in class our main goal is for students to achieve intelligibility. But of course intelligibility is to a certain extent relative. What is intelligible to a fellow Korean English speaker may not be intelligible to an Argentine English speaker. Within the world of global English most speakers of English whether native speakers or non-native speakers are going to need to be aware and develop two different forms (at least) or dialects which they are able to use effectively. Within Korea it is perfectly natural and normal for people to use Koreanized forms of English and of course people do. The danger is when these people still use this particular dialect outside of Korea. This is a general phenomenon of language use anyone who speaks a particular dialect needs to know when and when not to use that dialect and to be fully accepted into a larger speech community they need to also be able to use intelligibly more standardized forms. This is obvious is something we need to get our students to understand. Koreanized English is not wrong in a certain context anymore than American English is wrong in the context of the US. But, green eyes forms of English may be considered inappropriate outside of the Korean context as some dialects of American English may also be considered inappropriate outside of their own specific context. This is something we need to get our students to understand notches but their own language used about the language use of other English speakers. To do this we need to first and foremost get students to see themselves and perceive of themselves not just as learners but as speakers and valid speakers of English.