

Robert McCrum 著「Globish - How the English Language Became the World's Language」Penguin Books, Viking 2010 刊を読む

Prologue: 'Crazy English'

1 . The twenty-first century has revealed a world more intertwined than at any time... Will we stand for the human rights of the dissident in Burma, the blogger in Iran or the voter in Zimbabwe? Will we give meaning to the words 'never again' in Darfur?

Barack Obama, speaking in Berlin, 24 July 2008

2 . The Renmin University of China, also known as the People's University, in Beijing has about 36,000 students, studying everything from politics to social anthropology. The university, one of several in the capital, is based to the north-west of the city, on Zhongguancun street in Haidian district. Its alumni are typical of the post-Mao Zedong generation. Every Friday evening, quite informally, several hundred gather in the so-called 'English Corner' to hold 'English conversation'. This extraordinary scene, reiterated on campuses across China today, is a popular routine that says a lot about the aspirations of contemporary Chinese - and the state of the nation. This is, after all, an authoritarian, one-party regime in which dissent is ruthlessly crushed, and its enemies imprisoned, beaten up or sent into exile. However, here in the twilight, on a cool March Friday, under the shady pine trees of a little square, there are hundreds of young Chinese in running shoes, jeans and puffs jackets chatting together, in English, about anything and everything, including asides about Tiananmen Square. I remember the Soviet Union before glasnost and perestroika in which the atmosphere was menacing and fearful; surveillance everywhere; and the state inflexibly vigilant. This feels different. Perhaps these Chinese have been cunningly infiltrated by informers, or perhaps everyone in exercising heroic self-censorship about the topics that matter, but the mood is unquenchably relaxed, friendly and inspired by a common purpose, which is to learn better English.

3 . As a tall westerner, I stand out in this crowd like Gulliver, and is not difficult to start up a conversation. When I begin with 'I'm from London', about a dozen students crowd round at once. Everyone's interested, there's a murmur of 'London' across the group. One brave soul strikes up with 'Where in Lon-don?' I explain that my home is near Notting Hill. Oh yes, they have all heard of *Notting Hill*. Now the conversation, initially a stilted Q & A, goes quickly forward; movies, film stars, Hollywood, America... So then, I ask: 'Has anyone been to America... or London?' No, not yet; but they all seem to want to. I hand out Chinese business cards with an email address. We get on to the US presidential race. 'Hillary' is a hard name for the locals to get their tongues round, but, apart from a few stumbles, the level of conversation is remarkably high. The group's interest is really to ask about the UK, about football, Victoria Beckham, BBC television and so forth. Eventually, I move on to another circle, which is learning basic language skills by rote.

4 . The instructor stands by a blackboard, as much like a bookie at a racetrack as a foreign language teacher, and reads out a line of English: 'I'm sorry I misjudged you, Mr Prescott.' The group repeats it: '*I'm sorry I misjudged you, Mr Prescott.*' Someone hands me a flyer with some Chinese characters beneath the slogan 'Never Let Spoken English Become Your Limitation'. The teacher intones another line: 'If you hate this job, why don't you quit?' '*If you hate this job,*' repeats the group with the furrowed concentration of a prayer meeting, '*why don't you quit?*' 'Jobs aren't that easy to come by,' says the teacher. '*Jobs aren't that easy to come by.*' Repeats the class. Less than a 'conversation', this seems more like boot camp, but no one's complaining. They are here to join the English-speaking world, and will submit to whatever extraordinary adjustment it takes. After all, Mandarin (more than 1,000 million speakers) outnumbers the global figure for English by more than two to one, and the marketing of China's quest for English suggests that even the Chinese recognize it as slightly eccentric. One of the more popular ways of learning English in China is through a course entitled 'Crazy English', where the emphasis is on learning to speak the language before writing it down: 'To shout loud, you learn.' But the process is not as bizarre as one might think and the way that the English language has travelled and changed through time and space throws up many examples of contemporary craziness.

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[コメント]

中国での熱狂ぶりからスタートした本書は、英語の実用性をよくあらわしている。“English Makes Money” という中国映画を思い出した。Global English を略して Globish と著者は言うが、われわれはよき Globish の使い手を目指さなくてはと思う。

- 2010年8月15日 林 明夫記 -