



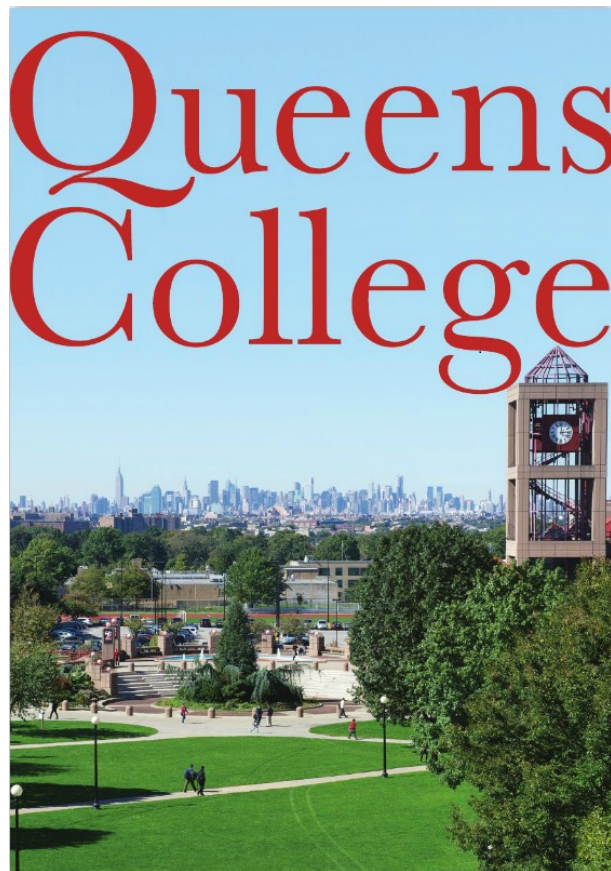
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■ Reports

The common sense behind the logic of the English language

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Living in New York is going to be over in a month. We, FD members, have done our best to dream of becoming fluent English speakers someday, but we realized that we couldn't master English so easily. Why do we feel that English is so difficult all the time? What are the fundamental problems? Here, I do not mention English pronunciation, but I would like to make note of general problems for Japanese people.

1. Difference in syntax

It is interesting to think about the similarities in the grammatical arrangement of words in sentences between English and other languages. What are the similarities in word order between English, German, Chinese and Japanese? For example, what the sentence construction of these languages is compared with English. Based on my own perception, German would have a similarity to English of 90%, while Chinese would have 50%, and Japanese, just 10%. A knowledge of the difference in *syntax*, or in other words, the difference in *the thinking process* is the most important point to improve English. When we want to say "I love you" to someone, there are many arrangements of words in Japanese (there are at least six ways). In English, however, we must follow the rule of syntax: it doesn't make sense if we say, "I you love" or "Love you I", etc. This makes Japanese people have a hard time learning English. I have seen many Americans who speak Japanese well within just a year after they come to Japan. Japanese has particles (or postposition) in basic parts of speech, so that people can speak well regardless of the word order. Aside from that, it is thought that

Japanese is not rational language to transfer meaning compared with English. Let's say, "*watasiwa / asita / anatato / issyoni / eigawo / mi / tai* (I want to watch a movie with you tomorrow)". If you want to understand the sentence, you need to listen to it until the end. If Japanese has similarities of 90% to English like German in word order, and if I said "*I / tomorrow / with you / a movie / watch / want to*", and then everyone understood what I meant, we might have an easier time learning English. We need to get the essence of the Japanese phrase to make it into an English phrase.

2. Summary of thought – the secret of inference

For improving your English, you should get used to *the sequence of thought* of Americans through practice in daily life. But, it is difficult for us who have been used to Japanese sentence structure. I think the way to speak English is to express the factors (main point) first and then add the relevant words consecutively. It is like a summary process to *make a long story short*. Practice will make us perfect on how to draw the idea and on how to infer the next story in our mind quickly. There's a golden rule in every language, which is subject + verb. Imagine: after you hear a long-winded love story, you try to summarize it in a single phrase. Well, it can be eventually described as a factor like these: *Watasiga aisiteru* (Japanese) – *Wo ai* (Chinese) – *Ich liebe* (German) – *I love* (English). The rule to summarize the idea is constant. English follows the golden rule. That's the logic of the English language. After that, you just arrange the words that are inferred following the factor. While a sentence in Japanese cannot be understood if

not heard until the end, English is not like that. I think the first step to understand the logic of the English language is to get used to the sequence of Americans' thoughts.

3. Conclusion

English, which most Japanese people think is difficult, is not a *law* but a *common sense*. English is just a means of expressing thought rather than a law (or rule) we must memorize difficultly, and it is the logic of language or the application of common sense everyone understands. We could call this grammar (how to speak). Moreover, if you overcome the differences in syntax of the English language and the sequence of Americans' thoughts, you

can master English in a short period of time.

There are various purposes why many people in the world study English. It includes travelling, making friends and just simply speaking English. However, these are not the primary purposes. People should study English to add prestige to their country in diplomatic strategy. For business, one could get the best deals for their company if they could speak English fluently. Lastly, we should aim to speak English for education-related activities. With these primary purposes, English becomes essential in order to obtain substantial benefits to compete with English speakers. I think this recognition is the most important point.

Writing an essay

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There were lectures of writing/reading and speaking/listening in the English class. We often wrote essays in the lecture and the examinations of writing. We have to write an essay about given theme within the time limit of 30 minutes in the examination. The examples of themes are as follows: "Should we teach children to be a bilingual?," "Which is the most important thing of a language, writing, reading, speaking, and listening?," "Is it a good idea to have only one child?" The themes usually give us some choices. I also wrote essays about my response to articles of newspaper.

If we hope to receive a high evaluation in the examination of writing an essay, we have to write it in accordance with rules. An essay consists of four or five paragraphs which consist of several sentences. The first paragraph is for introduction. We have to

present our position on the theme clearly. For example, we have to answer the question (theme) about "Is it a good idea to have only one child?" with yes or no, even if we can't decide a position simply because we know advantages of both positions. A "hook" which attracts readers might be included in the introduction. The second and third are body paragraphs. In the first body paragraph, supporting ideas based on the experiences or facts are written. If we have siblings, we should write actual personal experiences concretely to explain our position concerning the theme, "Is it a good idea to have only one child?" In the second body paragraph, we have to counter an opposing position. We have to write a counterargument in anticipation of an argument of the people in an opposing position. Finally we write a conclusion in fourth paragraph. We have to restate main

idea about theme and summarize supporting ideas. A reader can understand the outline of the essay by reading only the concluding paragraph. Although I didn't know how to write standard essay, it seems that general rules of writing an essay is well known in the United States.

The grading of my essay by the instructor was very low because in addition to not being good at English, I didn't know most of the rules. Although I have kept the rule which requires me to express my position in the first paragraph clearly, I have usually felt uncomfortable with the rule. I have thought that we can't decide on my position clearly because we know that all arguments from the varying viewpoints are usually important. If the arguments of the essay are simple, plain and consistent, the grading will be high. I was not able to decide my position clearly, so my arguments were often difficult to understand. It seems that implicit expression is not favorable and much tolerance for an opposing position gets

misunderstood as inconsistent arguments. I think that, under general rules, the "hook" is needed to make a reader have interest in the theme, not arguments. We should avoid intricate arguments which are used to make a reader have an interest and indirect expression which expect a reader to understand.

I should have decided my position without careful thought because the position and the contents of the arguments are not evaluated to grade the essay. It would be better for me to concentrate my attention on making an assertion without consideration for opposing position to develop a simple, plain and consistent argument. I should have argued the theme using simple and easy examples, not unique and special examples which a reader doesn't expect. I have felt that only the techniques with which we assert our idea to a wide range of people is important in the lecture of writing an essay.

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