**Bridging the Two Worlds: Language Research and Language Teaching**

고영종

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It was in the summer one rainy day. I was standing very nervously in front of one gay bar in Jongno. “Should I come in?” As a graduate student in linguistic anthropology ambitiously but helplessly starting his first day of ethnographic fieldwork, I was asking myself over and over again. “Should I just go home?” My job was to investigate and collect the words and slangs gay men employ to communicate among them and to assert their identities as minorities. My job was then, with help from linguistic research, to describe and analyze their life-world.

I pushed the door of the bar wide open and started my first day. It was never easy. It was not easy not in the sense that I had to meet these “different” people on a daily basis. It was difficult in the sense that they were reluctant to open their minds to this “outsider.” I was a learner of the new language, and the mastery of the language was a daunting task. Then came the turning point of my research when I realized the significance of *participant* observation and practicing it. This *participant* observation is, unlike typical and “scientific” observation method, lets an observer attentively participate in the target research group. The researcher does not only study people, but also study *with* people. I will explain the underlying meaning of that research method later.

To make a long story short, after over a year of research, I gradually managed to win their cooperation, their support, more importantly, their trust. They began to invite me on various occasions. They began to use the word “friend,” not a “researcher.” Knocking on the door of the gay bar was no more an issue for me.

Then, at this point, you will ask one very reasonable question. Why and how is your experience relevant to this essay? How do you intertwine one to another? As a beginner researcher in the field of anthropology, I was not only trained to study people. I was also taught to study *with* people, becoming a student myself with the people investigated.

Ironically, I knew I was not a bad researcher when at the point I stopped attracting public gaze in their gatherings. It was not that they had no information about me. They *knew* I was a “mainstream” heterosexual researcher, but it did not matter to them, and it was not even an issue any more. Without compromising my researcher position, I became one of them, part of their culture.

Then, coming back to my question at the beginning of the paragraph, can I portrait my ideal type of teacher recalling and utilizing my researcher experience? Roger Greenberg, my TESOL instructor once introduced the class this very thought-provoking quote. I cannot recall the exact words, but it is something very similar to this. “Best teachers are the ones who stop being teachers.” The underlying philosophy here is utterly profound. Just like good anthropologists study *with* people, good teachers teach and study *with* their students. When I say that good teachers teach and study *with* their students, it does not necessarily mean that they stop being teachers in a traditional sense. Instead, they transcend the typical and the stereotyped teachers, and become students themselves, learning the subject matter together with their students.

Emergent language teaching is one good example. According to Greenberg, one learns a new language better when the language emerges itself than when it is hierarchically acquired. One can easily see here my analogy between a good researcher and a good teacher. Instead of circulating questionnaires and going back to school, I chose to “go native” among gay communities. By the same token, instead of circulating handouts and standing behind the lecture desk, good teachers participate in their students’ speech activities as their teachers and also as their fellow learners. They teach their students in a traditional sense, they involve themselves in their students’ learning activities, and they enable that language in their students emerge themselves. This is a picture of me imagining a language teacher.

I started this short essay by briefly talking about my past experience. For the body part, I highlighted the similarities between a good researcher and a good teacher, and presented my ideal portrait of a language teacher. Now, for the last part of this essay, let me tell you about how I can relate this TESOL learning to my future life plans.

I have always been fascinated with stories and language. To be more specific, it is human beings’ language uses that has attracted me and lead me to study anthropology and now TESOL. As language and culture are undeniably intertwined, I firmly believe that we will not have a concrete understanding of the world without studying language phenomenon. These include bilingualism, diglossia, contact linguistics, and the list never ends. Second language teaching and learning are obviously two of the areas that need more vigorous and extensive research. I would like to contribute to the areas. When it comes to researching and studying language behaviors, there is no such thing as mastery. When it comes to researching and studying language behaviors, I will remain a curious and investigating student.

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