

大学学部生を対象とした「通訳教育」の考察

— 基礎通訳訓練法が入門期の学習者に与える影響について

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A Study of a College Interpreting Class in Japan

— The Influence of Basic Interpreting Training on Introductory Level Students

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要旨 : This article presents a study of the influence of Basic Interpreting Training on the introductory level undergraduate students in Japan. In this study-project, students experienced several basic interpreting training such as shadowing, retention, and segmental interpretation for 12-weeks in class.

In order to find out whether such practices and instructions had any effect, all students took an English listening comprehension test. The results of the tests indicated a slight improvement in their listening comprehension ability. The students' responses to the questionnaires revealed that nearly two-thirds of them thought their English proficiency level, especially their listening comprehension ability had improved during the course of study.

This article concludes that this project affected the students in three ways. First, it made students aware of their listening comprehension ability, second it provided them with some L2 listening comprehension skills and third it stimulated their motivation to study while also enhancing their self-esteem.

1. Introduction

As the Ministry of Education in Japan started urging educators in the field of EFL to make their English teaching more communicative oriented (see “Action Plan to Cultivate Japanese with English Abilities”, 2004) the number of universities that have started incorporating interpreting training as part of their language teaching has increased remarkably. At present, there are more than 100 universities and junior colleges that teach interpretation (Someya et al, 2005) in Japan.

Unlike other traditional language teaching methods, the introduction of various interpreting methods in classrooms is fairly new. For a long time, the training of interpreters

had solely been carried out by vocational schools. While these schools aim to train and produce professional interpreters, interpreting classes at undergraduate level focus more on providing effective language training to students.

Among the 34 students enrolled in my interpreting class, there were only a few who had a sufficiently high language ability to start full-fledged interpreter training. While interpreting training covers various aspects of aural-oral skills, listening comprehension ability plays a crucial role in interpreting successfully. Therefore, the goal of this class was focused on improving the students' overall listening comprehension skills. Thus, basic interpreting training methods such as "shadowing", "retention" and "segmental interpretation", as well as various instructions on listening strategies were provided.

In order to find out whether such interpreting training and instruction in listening comprehension strategies had any effect on the students, two listening comprehension tests from TOEFL and two questionnaires, one each at the beginning and at the end of the study period were administered, and the results were compared and analyzed. In addition, the students kept a short journal throughout the course and then wrote what they thought about their learning.

Through this study, it became clear that there was a noticeable improvement in students' TOEFL scores and a shift on how students thought about their listening comprehension ability. The series of activities conducted in class seem to have enabled students to better understand about their listening skills, while also helping them to improve listening comprehension skills and increase their motivation to study.

2. Review of Literature

In this section, the development of interpreting training programs and how training is utilized in language lessons will be reviewed. Thereafter, the study of L2 listening comprehension strategies and its relevance to interpreting training will then be reviewed.

2.1 Interpreting Training

It was mainly in Europe that the field of interpretation developed and that the first steps toward achieving international recognition were taken through academic training programs (Freimanis, 1994). Naturally, the criteria of professional conference interpreters set by such programs were very high. Extraordinary linguistic and communicative skills accompanied by a broad general knowledge, and fluency in languages was sought for interpreters (Weber, 1984).

Seleskovitch (1978, p.77-78) stated that “in order to learn how to interpret, the would-be interpreter must already have acquired a command of his language which would be described as perfect”. However in Japan, the field of interpretation developed in a different way. Due to the limited foreign language skills of most students, interpreting training in itself is often incorporated into language lessons. As Torikai (1999, p.121) stated, “out of necessity, language teaching has been an inevitable element in interpretation training”. There are some researchers like Pollock (1985) who approves using interpreting training to develop language skills since it integrates essential elements of oral and aural skills such as comprehension, phonology, lexicon, and grammar.

Among the series of interpreting training tasks that are often used in classroom settings, shadowing, retention and segmental interpretation practices were chosen for this study. Shadowing refers to the practice of repeating incoming information exactly as it is heard in the same language, not paraphrasing, and at times imitating the tone of the original (Freimanis, 1994).

Retention refers to the exercise of repeating consecutively to the speaker. The merit of retention exercise is that, as it “stresses concentrating on the essential elements of the message” it “faces the students to analyze the original message and to retain its key element” (Weber, 1984, p.39).

Segmental interpretation refers to the exercise of consecutively interpreting the segment of a paragraph. Students are required to concentrate on the speaker’s intended meaning, which means that they must listen beyond the words and get the message of the speaker (Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1995).

2.2 L2 Listening Comprehension Strategies

Until the 1980s, much of the language teaching field took listening for granted (Morley, 1991). However, over the past several years, there has been a steady increase in the interest in listening comprehension for the second/foreign learner (Brown & Yule, 1983). According to Vandergrift (1999), listening is a complex, active process in which the listener discriminate between sounds, understand vocabulary and grammatical structures, interpret stress and intonation, retain what was gathered in all of the above, and then interpret it within the immediate. Therefore, in order to make sense of spoken messages, listeners may need to integrate information from a range of sources: phonetic, phonological, prosodic, lexical, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic (Lynch, 1998).

Similar to reading, researchers have demonstrated that, there are top-down and bottom-

up aspects to the listening process (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2001). Top-down processing is the process by which listeners predict their way through the input by making use of their background information on the topic. In bottom-up processing, listeners analyze language in small pieces and build meaning from these external units (Oprandy, 1994, p.165) and it involves knowledge of the language system such as phonology, grammar and vocabulary.

In order to help compensate for a lack of listening comprehension ability, students need to understand these two processes and at the same time to make use of various listening strategies which successful listener utilize. For example, segmenting, recognizing, and relating the incoming message to one's background knowledge, identifying, interpreting rhythm/stress/intonation, and extracting essential information without necessarily understanding every word (Nunan, 1989, p.26).

To sum up, the reviews of studies in the field of interpreting and L2 listening comprehension seem to indicate that interpreting training focusing on listening comprehension strategies might provide an opportunity for students to improve their listening comprehension ability.

3. The Study

Based on the findings of such studies in the field of interpreting and L2 listening strategies as mentioned above, this study-project was carried out as follows: The aim of the study was to find out whether the interpreting training and instruction on listening strategies have any effect on the students' English proficiency level. The study took place for 12 consecutive weeks.

3.1 Learners

The subjects of this study comprised of 34 students enrolled in an interpreting class at a women's university in Japan. The class consisted of 20-second year, 10-third year and 4-fourth year students. While 32 of them were English Literature majors, there were two Japanese Literature major students as well. Roughly speaking, their English proficiency level ranged from high intermediate to advance and their TOEFL scores prior to the study ranged from 450 to 550.

3.2 Materials

Several listening/interpreting materials from a textbook "Tsuuyaku Toreningu Kosu [Interpreting Training Course] (Mizuno, Kagimura, 2001)" was used for the study. There

are 14 units in this textbook and each unit focuses on one specific topic. Among them, five topics “Communication”, “Sightseeing”, “Aging”, “Global Environment” and “Sports” were selected. A unit consists of two-page English descriptions of the topic, written in about 300 words. Students kept a recording of the text read by a native speaker of English at the speed of 150wpm.

3.3 Procedure

The study was carried out as follows. A week prior to the first class, students took listening comprehension section of Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Next, the first questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was conducted to find out what students generally thought about their listening comprehension ability, what aspects of listening they felt were difficult and whether or not they wanted to improve their listening comprehension.

Thereafter for 12 weeks beginning from mid April to mid July, the students went through various interpreting training which will be described in detail in the following section. The students also kept a brief journal during the study to monitor their own language learning and wrote what they observed.

A week after the final class, students took another TOEFL test. Thereafter the second questionnaire (see Appendix 2) was taken. This time the students were asked what specific interpreting training encountered during the course they found to be most useful, and whether they thought their language proficiency level, especially listening comprehension ability had improved after taking part in this study.

3.4 The Lessons

During the 12-week period of this course the lessons were carried out in the following sequence using language laboratory. First, in order to instruct some of the top-down listening comprehension strategies such as knowing the background information, students worked on some pre-listening activities. For example, students were assigned to gather information from reference books, newspapers, magazines and the Internet for each of the topics in the textbook. Next, they watched short video segments of no more than five minutes, which covered the topic. After watching the video they conducted a short discussion and then shared with the entire class what they understood. Thereafter, they all took a short listening comprehension quiz.

Next, as part of bottom-up listening comprehension strategies which mainly focus on knowledge of the language system, students were asked to work on a series of interpreting

training exercises using the text and the audio recording. The exercises most often used were shadowing, retention, and segmental interpretation. In many cases these interpreting practice was conducted by means of pair-work exercises and while one student performed, the other student and the instructor monitored and gave feedback. In some cases, the several students were also assigned to perform in front of the class.

In addition to these basic types of training, the students sometimes worked on other interpreting activities such as, reproduction, summarizing, paraphrasing, sight-translation, and consecutive interpretation, note-taking and simultaneous interpretation.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data of this study consisted of two TOEFL results, two questionnaires and study journals. The results of the TOEFL scores were compared. The answers to the questionnaires were calculated and analyzed to see whether students thought the series of interpreting training activities and instruction had any effect on their listening comprehension ability. The students' journals were reviewed and analyzed as well.

4. Findings

In this section, the results of the two TOEFL scores and two questionnaires will be reported in detail along with other findings. The results indicate that there was a noticeable shift among some students regarding their TOEFL scores. There was also a change in how students thought about their listening comprehension ability.

4.1 TOEFL Scores

For this project, the students answered 50 questions regarding a listening comprehension section in TOEFL test. When they first took the test in April, their average score was 35 points, which meant that they could answer 70% correctly. When the students took second TOEFL test in July, their scores increased to 37 points, which meant that they could answer 74% correctly. As a result, a two-points or four percent increase was thus observed among the students. The number of students who increased their scores during this study was 62%, while 23% decreased and 15% stayed the same.

4.2 Two Questionnaires

As it was crucial for this study to assess how students thought about their listening comprehension ability, two questionnaires were administrated during the period. The first

questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was given a week before the class began.

As the result clearly indicates, 56% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that they are not good at listening comprehension in general. Fifty-six percent said they could not keep up with the speed of normal English and 48% answered that they have difficulty in understanding sentences as a whole, while 41% percent of the students answered that they had difficulty in picking up individual words in English. Finally, more than 97% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that they wanted to improve their listening comprehension ability.

When the 12-week study was over, the students answered a second questionnaire (see Appendix 2). This was given to examine what students thought about the lessons in general. The results revealed that 83% of students thought shadowing practice was useful for their study. Those who favored retention practice and segmental interpretation were 38% each.

In response to the question of whether they thought their listening comprehension ability improved by participating in this study, 58% answered “improved” or “rather improved” while 36% answered “neutral” and 3% answered “no change at all”.

5. Discussion

The results of the TOEFL indicate that students’ listening comprehension score increased slightly during the 12-week instruction. Although the increase may be minor, this may have had positive effects on the students. More than half of them replied to the questionnaire that they felt that their listening comprehension ability had improved.

Having confirmed this, the next question was to find out in detail, what aspects of the 12-week instruction and practices had prompted students to change their perception towards their listening comprehension ability.

Roughly speaking, the series of instructions and interpreting training conducted in this study affected students in three ways: (1) It enabled students to be aware of their own listening comprehension ability and problems, (2) It provided students with some strategies for learning, and (3) It enhanced their self esteem and increased their motivation to study further.

In this section, each of these three themes will be focused closely and discussed in detail to find out what exactly prompted the students to shift their perceptions towards their listening comprehension ability.

5.1 Awareness

At the beginning of the study, 97 percent of the students answered that they wanted to

improve their listening comprehension ability. However at first, students could not specify what their problem in listening comprehension was. There were even some who blamed the textbook or the recording, for their poor listening comprehension.

Therefore, it was important to make students to be more aware of their own problems prior to the study. Based on the “Diagnostic Chart” (Shinoda et al. 2000, p. X-XI), Questionnaire 1 was made. By answering these questions, the students were given a chance to reflect about their problems more specifically. The following is what the students wrote in their study journals.

I've never thought about my listening comprehension problems in detail so I had to think before I answered ... (April)

I realized I have many problems. I need to do something if I really want to improve my listening comprehension skills ... (April)

By checking their TOEFL scores and answering questionnaires and through various types of feedback from the instructor and peers, students were given opportunities to review their own performance. It seems that they became more aware of their present listening ability.

5.2 Using strategies

During the course of study, various top-down and bottom-up listening comprehension strategies were introduced. Students were encouraged to apply them while practicing interpreting skills. Many of them did not seem to have much difficulty in applying top-down listening schema. They used their own background information on the topic to process their listening comprehension. This is what one student wrote in her journal.

At first I thought the speaker said Kyoto Pool Co., but as we had studied about the global warming last week, I thought it could not be Pool Co. but Protocol. (June)

Compared to top-down listening strategies, students seemed to have had difficult time trying to make use of the bottom-up listening strategies. The bottom-up level of the listening process involves knowledge of the language system. Some students did not have sufficient knowledge on phonological system and thus were unable to pick up the key vocabulary items while practicing shadowing or retention.

I can't repeat what the speaker said because some of the sounds are connected together and not clear. I am frustrated because I can't figure out what the speaker is saying ... (May)

It was quite obvious that some instruction on the English sound system was necessary for these students. Therefore, extra lessons on English prosody had to be carried out. Students practiced liaisons, skipping of sounds, change of intonations, reduced forms of words and use of fillers, some of which have been indicated by Brown and Yule (1983) as important factors in language learning. One Student wrote as follows.

When practicing shadowing, I found myself paying closer attention to the pronunciation and rhythm of the speaker than before ... (July)

In practicing retention, students tried to memorize the whole sentence without paying much attention to the meaning at first. They could reproduce the sentence well when the sentence was short, but as the sentence got longer, they found it quite difficult to reproduce. They were instructed to focus more on the content rather than the sound.

I think retention practice is much harder than shadowing. I easily forget what I have heard. (May)

It is easier for me to retain vocabulary and phrases if I understand what the speaker wants to say. (June)

Some students were very slow in translating. They usually read the whole sentence first before they translated. In order to speed up the process, students tried segmental translation. They were advised to translate English sentences from the top. At first, some students showed strong resistance as they had never tried to do such training before, but they gradually changed their opinion as the course progressed.

I am not comfortable with the "new" way of reading; I wonder why we have to do this. (April)

This is different from what I studied at junior and senior high school. It is faster and easier for me. (June)

To sum up, the results of the questionnaire and the study journals indicate that various new listening comprehension strategies and interpreting practices provided students a chance to actively improve their language skills. Although there was some resistance on the part of the students at first, it is clear that they gradually came to realize the advantages of trying out new strategies.

5.3 Self Esteem and Motivation

During the period of this study, some changes in classroom attitude among the students was observed. In April when the study began, the majority of students seemed somewhat timid and was also very passive in their own learning. However, in late May and early June, there were some students who started to take the initiative in their own learning. These students thought they needed more studying materials besides textbooks. They found some authentic English materials from the internet. In addition, by the end of the study, a certain change in the ways to carry out interpretation tasks was observed. Overall, the students seemed to be in more control of their own learning ability than before the start of this course.

I am not so afraid of English as before because I now know many ways to overcome various problems. (July)

I feel as if I have become a real interpreter! Joke! (July)

A couple of students quoted that the encouragement and support from their peers and instructor was helpful whenever they felt depressed about their lack of progress in English. Many students commented that they liked practicing with friends and competing with them also helped to motivate them.

At first I was absolutely sure that I can't interpret, but when I saw my friends interpret, I thought I must give it a try. (July)

In April, I regretted that I took this class, because it was very difficult for me. But now, I changed my mind a little. I enjoy challenging myself. (July)

The observations of the students and the results of questionnaire seem to indicate that the study motivated students in various ways. It also made students aware of the concept of

learning which thus seems to have raised their self-esteem.

6. Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to find out how basic interpreting training such as shadowing, retention and segmental interpretation influence students' L2 ability. The results of the TOEFL scores indicate that there was a slight improvement in students' listening comprehension ability. In addition to this, nearly two thirds of the students responded that they thought their listening ability improved after taking part in this course.

The second concern was to find out whether there was a change in the students' attitude toward L2 learning and if so, what prompted them to change. As a result of the study, it became clear that the various types of interpreting training affected the students in three ways. First, constant feedback from peers and instructors gave students an opportunity to truly understand their own listening comprehension ability and problems. Second instructions about strategies and many opportunities to utilize such strategies thus provided students with new strategies in language learning. And third, support and encouragement from peers and instructors and their awareness towards learning enhanced the students' self esteem, thereby stimulating the motivation among students in a positive way.

Unlike other EFL teaching pedagogies, interpreting training is still fairly new in Japan. Although several articles and textbooks are now available at present, the number is limited. Although the students taking interpretation classes may not really have the desirable level of command of the English language, through efforts to learn English they actually can learn a lot in such a course (Tanaka et. al, 2000).

Some of the interpreting training described in this article can be utilized in other EFL settings as long as it is modified to appropriately meet the needs of target students. From a pedagogical point of view, interpretation training can be a very efficient attempt to raise the awareness level of the students. It is therefore considered to be beneficial regarding the fact that it changes how students respond to L2 learning. It is a fulfilling experience for students to be able to understand and appreciate what they first thought was beyond their reach. This sense of achievement will certainly further promote the students interest in language learning.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire 1 and the result

(Number of students: 34)

Question 1.

In general, I am not good at listening comprehension.

1) Strongly Agree	5 %
2) Agree	51 %
3) Neutral	36 %
4) Don't Agree	8 %

Question 2.

I have difficulty in picking up words and phrases in English.

1) Strongly Agree	3 %
2) Agree	38 %
3) Neutral	44 %
4) Don't Agree	15 %

Question 3.

I have difficulty in understanding sentences as a whole.

1) Strongly Agree	12 %
2) Agree	36 %
3) Neutral	31 %
4) Don't Agree	21 %

Question 4.

I can't understand when English is spoken quickly.

1) Strongly Agree	28 %
2) Agree	28 %
3) Neutral	31 %
4) Don't Agree	13 %

Question 5.

I can't understand the meaning when hearing a passage for the first time.

1) Strongly Agree	8 %
2) Agree	20%
3) Neutral	51%
4) Don't Agree	21%

Question 6.

I have difficulty in understanding the contents of a passage.

1) Strongly Agree	5 %
2) Agree	26%
3) Neutral	44%
4) Don't Agree	25%

Question 7.

I want to improve my listening comprehension ability.

1) Strongly Agree	84%
2) Agree	13%
3) Neutral	3 %
4) Don't Agree	0 %

Appendix 2

Questionnaire 2 and the results

(Number of students: 34)

Question 1.

Why did you take this class? (Multiple answer)

1) I was interested in interpreting.	74 %
2) I wanted to study practical English.	65 %
3) Because of the class hour	0 %
4) Someone recommended me.	0 %
5) No reason	3 %
6) others (no answer)	6 %

Question 2.

In general I am

1) satisfied with this class	41 %
2) somewhat satisfied	50 %
3) rather dissatisfied	6 %
4) dissatisfied	0 %
5) others (no answer)	3 %

Question 3.

The level of this class was

1) too high	9 %
2) rather high	53 %
3) moderate	35 %
4) rather easy	3 %
5) others	0 %

Question 4.

What interpreting training was useful to you? (Multiple answer)

1) vocabulary practice	24%
2) shadowing	83%
3) retention	38%
4) consecutive interpretation	38%
5) others	0%

Question 5.

Do you think your listening comprehension ability improved by taking part in this class?

1) improved	10%
2) rather improved	48%
3) neutral	36%
4) no change	3%
5) others (no answer)	3%

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