

Interpreter Training Techniques and Second Language Acquisition

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Abstract

Interpreter training techniques (ITT) are now spotlighted in relation to second language acquisition (SLA). This is a new trend because there has been disparity between ITT and SLA until only recently. ITT have gained attention from researchers and practitioners since the 'by-product' of ITT was that learners successfully developed language proficiency regardless of whether they actually became professional interpreters or not. This paper addresses various types of ITT as evaluated from SLA and neurolinguistics.

The concept of 'interlanguage' has been evolved into 'communication strategies' (CS). I have observed close relationships and practical values between CS and ITT. The fusion of CS and ITT seems capable of bringing about enhanced effects on SLA.

1. Introduction

Interpreter training was considered for a long time to be something special and professional, therefore it was confined to fostering vocational interpreters. Since the spread of the satellite broadcasting system more than 10 years ago, the art of interpretation has come to be highly spotlighted (Shinoda and Shinzaki 1992). It is with this trend that a number of interpreting training schools and courses at universities have increased. Torikai (1997) reports that the number of Japanese colleges and universities which offer interpretation courses exceeds 24. She also indicates that there is a trend to employ ITT as a means to teach English rather than merely to train interpreters.

Simultaneous interpretation between Japanese and English was first realized in the beginning of the 1950's. Until then, simultaneous interpretation had been considered to be impossible to carry out between the two languages (Nishiyama 1988). This was asserted on the grounds that significant syntactical disparities exist between the two languages, which belong to stark different 'language families.' The dramatic event in the history of simultaneous interpretation in Japan was the landing of the manned spacecraft *Apollo* on the moon in 1969. It was substantially the first occasion that the Japanese general public came to know about simultaneous interpretation through the TV broadcasting of *Apollo*.

Concerning interpreting research in Japan, Kondo (1997) views the current phase as being in the pioneer period. He describes the current phenomenon of a striking increase of books, theses, etc. In the books and journals, interpreting skills are applied to SLA (Hirano 1993; Hirano 1994; Kobayashi 1982; Shinoda and Shinzaki 1992). Some researches have been also conducted in view of the relationships between ITT and SLA (Tamai 1992; Yajima 1988).

Researchers and practitioners of SLA have begun to pay attention to ITT since enhancement of language proficiency, aside from interpretation proficiency, was observed conspicuously in a number of learners.

I have observed similarities between ITT and CS in that they both share the notion of 'paraphrasing.' What makes the art of interpretation intertwined with the sphere of CS is frequent usage of paraphrasing. This term is not used in a strict sense as is espoused in CS. It refers to "expressing the message in different ways": either lexically, syntactically, or even through cultural conversion (or filtering). Cultural conversion referred to in this case is closely related to sociolinguistics. To put it simply, literal translation would convey only superficial messages in many cases. We should always give sufficient consideration to 'transliteration' as advocated in the communicative approach (or communicative language teaching).

Paraphrasing takes place in interpreting for the following reasons. First, cultural differences between the relevant languages urge the avoidance of literal translation. Secondly, we are often faced with the needs for a context-based approach in interpreting. Think about interpreting the Japanese sentence "*Watakushi wa kono mondai ni zensho itashimasu.*" The term 'zensho' differs greatly from context to context. We should avoid such a literal translation as 'to treat it positively.' It can be interpreted in various ways depending on the context: "I will address this issue positively. / I will take a forward-looking manner about this issue. / I will give this issue due consideration. / I will see what I can do about this issue. / I cannot give you our concrete stance about this issue yet." Thirdly, syntactical 'deviations' between the source and the target languages compel

the change of word order or syntactical transformation to facilitate real-time processing in simultaneous interpretation. For example, the subject of an original sentence needs to be altered to a different 'part of speech' or other syntactical components including phrase or clause. A fourth reason, which is inevitably related to CS, is that the interpreters' language resources often make it necessary to resort to CS.

It is for these reasons that I have decided to address the issues of ITT and SLA.

2. Research Background

First, I would like to take a brief overview of CS, then move on to ITT.

2. 1. CS

The study of CS addresses the questions of how learners of the target language manage to communicate in spite of their limited working knowledge of the language. Toward the achievement of their communication goals, they may have to compensate for a lack of knowledge of vocabulary or grammar.

The term 'communication strategy' was first used by Selinker in 1972. What was referred to is one of the processes that are responsible for producing 'interlanguage' errors. Since that time on, many researchers have endeavored to set up frameworks for CS. Various kinds of taxonomies have been created (Váradi 1980; Poulisse 1990). Poulisse (1990) presents the most extensive study of CS in which a psycholinguistic approach is undertaken. This study is called the Nijmegen project. She focused on 'compensatory strategies' and adopted retrospective comments to identify learners' strategies. Of high value in this study is a simple taxonomy of CS. It reveals the mental processing facets involved in producing CS. The taxonomy has two archistrategies: 'conceptual and linguistic.' The conceptual strategies are further divided into two: 'analytic and holistic.' Analytic strategies include circumlocution, description, and paraphrase. Holistic strategies include the use of superordinate, coordinate, or subordinate terms. The linguistic strategies have also two subcategories: 'transfer' (borrowing, foreignizing, and literal translation) and 'morphological creativity.' It is certain that the Nijmegen project has opened up a new sphere in the research of CS due to its streamlining the conventional taxonomies into a parsimonious yet elegant cognitive framework.

There seem to be at least three issues centering around the future CS research. One is addressing the learners' propositional or grammatical knowledge. This is because the research to date has predominantly concentrated on lexical problems encountered by

learners. Another issue is related to ‘teachability’ of CS; whether CS should be taught or not. The other issue concerns exploring the relationship between the use of CS and SLA, which this paper addresses. Some researchers support the use of CS over acquisition, whereas others do not. Ellis (1994) argues that these conflicting views can be resolved only through further careful research.

2. 2. ITT

ITT are not so familiar to the general learners/teachers involved in SLA. Furthermore, ITT have not been the object of academic pursuit or systematic approaches until recently. They have been inherited from ‘mentor to disciple’ under the apprentice system or have been devised by individual interpreters.

Hara (1994) traces back the history of interpreter training in Europe as follows. The first interpreting school in the world was established in Germany around 1930, between WW I and WW II. *Ecole des Interpretes*, a renowned interpreting university in Switzerland, initiated lectures in 1942.

Magoshi (1993) lists two graduate schools for training interpreters in the U.S.A. and Australia. The one in the U.S.A. is Monterey Institute of International Studies. Historically, this university is closely related to the *Army Specialized Training Program* intensive language courses in the 1940s. In the U.S.A. during the WW II, the area studies as part of the war strategy urged fostering capable language specialists in a short period of time. Magoshi explains about the other graduate school in Australia. It is the University of Queensland. The Department of Japanese and Chinese Studies of this university was established in 1965, and the interpreting course between English and Japanese was coordinated by Masumi Muramatsu, Japan’s pioneer conference interpreter. It may show the difficulty of becoming a conference interpreter to mention that no professional interpreters between English and Japanese have come out at this university.

The first interpreting course on the graduate level in Japan emerged at Daito Bunka University in 1995. As we have seen, the history of ITT is quite short as compared with that of SLA. This fact inevitably means that we do not have established taxonomies or technical terms yet.

3. The Study

First, I would like to discuss major ITT in view of SLA and neurolinguistics. Then, I will take up an experiment Hiramatsu(1997) carried out to further investigate the relationships

between CS and ITT.

3. 1. ITT

1) Shadowing

The word 'shadow' is originally a psychological term. As Murphey (1994) argues, the brain of a child naturally imitates and repeats (shadow and echo) whatever stimulus is presented. In ITT, shadowing is defined as "while listening to the speech through the headphone, to utter the same speech in the same language almost simultaneously" (Yajima 1988: 30). This is the most frequently used training method in the field of simultaneous interpretation. Yajima (1988) admits that there is no established terminology for this technique. It is also called 'repeating/follow-up/following.' There was poor discrimination between shadowing and repeating. I have separated and practiced the two modes based on their respective effects on SLA. Recently, I found a thesis (Miura 1997) which categorizes the two modes separately. Shadowing contributes to improving accent, pronunciation, stress, and so on. Of course, it serves to improve active listening. Repeating, on the other hand, serves to automatize the working knowledge of language as well as to strengthen retaining information in short-term memory (STM).

In view of neurolinguistics, shadowing is related to the activation of the two language areas of the left hemisphere of the brain: the Wernicke's area (receptive function) and the Broca's area (productive function) because listening and speaking occur simultaneously.

It is useful to take up some discussions about the merits and demerits of shadowing. Magoshi (1993) quotes the view of Weber, former director of the graduate division of the Monterey Institute of International Studies (MIIS). Weber believes that there are no merits in the practice of shadowing in that the essential properties of simultaneous interpretation do not start with mechanical repetition of information. For this reason, shadowing practice is confined to the first several hours of simultaneous interpretation training at MIIS. Magoshi raises an objection to Weber's view on the grounds that shadowing is effective where there is great disparity between two languages like Japanese and English. Magoshi continues that Weber's opinion may hold true for similar European languages. Yonehara (1994) holds a neutral standpoint for shadowing. She introduces the basis of the negative opinion that shadowing will not cultivate the skill or habit of grasping the 'information core.' Nevertheless, she maintains that shadowing is an important training for the purpose of acquiring pronunciation, intonation and natural sentence patterns and expressions.

2) Repeating

There is no uniform or conventional way to distinguish repeating from shadowing. But

from both theoretical and pedagogical points, I think it advantageous to make distinction between these two ITT. While shadowing is carried out with a time lag of a few seconds, repeating needs a 'pause' after utterance. The information bit of this utterance is usually confined to a single sentence. I think repeating more than two sentences should fall under a different category. It is called 'reproduction,' where repeating by the unit of more than two sentences or by the unit of paragraph is required to be performed without referring to the written text. Repeating or repetition in the traditional language teaching class is, in many cases, carried out while seeing the written text. As Miura (1997) appropriately points out, repeating should be practiced without referring to the written text. This approach gives greater load to the brain, as a result it enhances the retention of STM and accelerates automatization of the language use. Interestingly, I noticed that this technique is inseparable from the term 'elicited imitation' used in SLA. When learners are instructed to repeat a sentence which they see or hear, they often make changes in the sentence so that it becomes more like their own utterance. This happens due to their insufficient linguistic rules. Therefore, elicited imitation can be employed as a grammaticality judgement test to measure the learners' knowledge of a language. Someya (1996) asserts that the average limit of 'exact' repeating is a sentence consisting of 20 words. In terms of training interpreters, the value of exact repeating is challenged. This is because the nature of interpreting is not the conversion of the 'superficial structure,' but what counts most is the notion of 'deverbalization.' In other words, the 'meaning' should surpass the 'form.' But from the point of SLA, as the notion of elicited imitation shows, trying to repeat as precisely as the original carries significance in acquiring language proficiency.

In actual training, I employ shadowing and repeating alternatively in a single session using the same teaching materials in expectation of synergistic effects. I embrace a hypothesis that the alternate practice of these two modes in the same session gives more strenuous stimulus to the brain than practicing independently. In theory, repeating may not realize simultaneous activation of both the Wernicke's and the Broca's area in that listening and speaking take place with a time lag of several seconds. But my experience shows that repeating immediately after shadowing places itself in a 'warm-up' condition of the two areas.

Once again, what makes shadowing different from repeating is: shadowing nurtures flex and response, whereas repeating serves to enhance automatized or working knowledge of the target language.

3) Reproduction

This practice involves reproducing what one has listened to or read, usually performed by

the unit of paragraphs. While we listen or read, we can take notes if necessary.

Communicative competence consists of four components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Discourse competence addresses the ability of producing unified written or spoken discourse manifesting 'coherence and cohesion.' Here, coherence is related to grammatical links and cohesion to appropriate combination of communicative functions. Some researchers include reproduction in the category of repeating. But I have made a definition of reproduction as: 'to be performed by the unit of paragraphs.' Therefore, the practice of reproduction is closely related not only to content grasping and memory retention but also to enhancing discourse competence.

4) Note-taking

Note-taking is one of the most effective ways for a message to be retained and interpreted (Otani and Ishii 1991). This is one of the indispensable ITT especially for consecutive interpretation, which requires information retrieval. Here are two main reasons why note-taking is vital in interpreting. First, our internal memory capacity has limits on the STM level. So we have to retain information in an external memory system in the form of notes. Secondly, good note-taking facilitates retrieval from our long-term memory (LTM). In the retrieval process, we have to use 'clues' for precise recall, and the notes serve for this purpose. An excellent note-taking means the use of symbols, signs, pictures, and acronyms, etc. rather than resorting to letters and characters. This is where note-taking differs greatly from stenography.

The merits of note-taking applicable to SLA are as follows. In view of neurolinguistics, the practice of note-taking activates not only the left hemisphere of the brain but also the right hemisphere since non-verbal clues including symbols and pictures are much used. This is where we can use the expression 'vital interaction' of the left and the right brains. While we listen to the source language, we try to image and visualize information as much as possible, and the visualization manifests itself in the form pictures and symbols, etc. Kobayashi (1982: 95) gives an account of this asserting that "Graphic afterimages can be retained longer concerning the human cognitive processing."

5) Paraphrasing

When an appropriate expression cannot be instantly produced, we should be so trained as to put it differently using other words or phrases. We are supposed to pursue equality in information value between original utterance and paraphrased one. As I mentioned earlier, paraphrasing is one of the most salient features shared by ITT and CS. However, paraphrasing is identified differently between ITT and CS. In ITT paraphrasing is sometimes

regarded as an ‘emergency evacuation measure’ due to interpreter’s insufficient language resources. In SLA and CS, on the contrary, paraphrasing is estimated positively as serving for ‘raising ability to express ideas in various ways.’ Suppose that the original message “Citrus fruits contain abundant vitamin C.” is paraphrased as “Oranges have a lot of good things for our health.” / “There is much vitamin C in lemons.” / “Fruits like lemons are rich in vitamin C.” Paraphrasing in this case is positively evaluated in SLA and CS since the learner did not abandon the message to say the least. On the other hand, it may show poor rendition in terms of interpretation. In this respect, paraphrasing is similar to the ‘interlanguage’ system since both notions are positively viewed in SLA.

It may be a good idea to start practicing with such mechanical paraphrasing as ‘conversion between the passive voice and the active voice.’ The modes of paraphrasing should be not only lexical but also propositional. Furthermore, content-focused paraphrasing should be encouraged more than form-focused one.

6) Sight translation

As this term shows, one is required to translate orally while seeing the script. Sight translation differs from conventional translation in that it is performed in what is called a ‘head-cut/ first-in first-out’ mode. Sight translation, therefore, should be performed in line with the logical stream of the source language. Sentences are to be translated by the unit of ‘sense group.’ To facilitate sight translation smoother, slash marks can be inserted showing the division of sense groups. For this reason, terms ‘slash reading’ and ‘sense group reading’ are also used. These two terms connote higher value than the term sight translation in view of SLA, where comprehension in the syntactical order of the source language takes precedence over actual translation.

7) Acronym guessing

I have developed this technique through the application of note-taking. Acronyms (or initial letter words), signs, and pictures are much used in note-taking. It is essential to be able to recall the original information or words by looking at these acronyms and symbols. Aside from note-taking, acronym guessing itself proved effective through my experience for training ‘flash or spark’ of the brain mechanism. Exercising this technique seems to accelerate the neural networking of the brain.

Let’s take the acronym ‘MPD’ for example. It stands for ‘multiple personality disorder.’ In the first place, learners are presented with this acronym. Then, they are given an explanation of what it means in Japanese. This explanation would be like: “It is related to illness or an abnormal mental condition. More than one nature or character of a single person is observed.” Upon this explanation, they get engaged in guessing what the acronym

stands for. The possible answers can vary. 'Mental, many, mind, multiple, etc.' may be the responses for the letter M in MPD. As for P, 'person, people, personality, problem, etc.' would come back. Finally for D, 'disease, difficulty, diversity, disorder, disability, dilemma, etc.' may come up. A further step required of the learners is to incorporate these separate words into a unified phrase, using function words if necessary. They could be: "many persons' disease, mind problems of diversity, mental personalities difficulty, etc." It is of course important to give the correct answer. However, it is a 'product' after all. The practice of 'crossword puzzles' is somewhat product-oriented. Acronym guessing is process-oriented. The process of guessing is of higher value in this practice because it is aimed at constructing neural networking or association.

8) Morphological guessing

Along with acronym guessing, I have developed this technique. By addressing morphemes, learners can experience their 'consciousness raising.' Superficially, this practice is related to an etymological approach in vocabulary building. The essential nature of this practice, however, lies in neural networking or association, so does acronym guessing. Morphological guessing raises 'mild' neural networking, whereas acronym guessing aims at 'sharp' neural networking. Consciousness raising is an approach to the grammar teaching where instruction of grammar is regarded as a way to raise learners' awareness of the grammatical features, and it is thought to 'indirectly' facilitate SLA. I think consciousness raising in SLA, therefore, is a slow yet steady approach. Suppose an example of country or area names of 'Austria, Bulgaria, Indonesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia.' When learners are presented with these names and asked what they have in common, they would point out the suffix 'ia or -nesia.' There is a big chance that some of them make a correct guess saying that 'ia or -nesia' is related to country or area. What, then, is the feature which differentiates 'ia' from '-nesia?' Students' geographical knowledge may lead them to answer that '-nes' would mean island, so '-nesia' should refer to 'island country.' Like acronym guessing, the process-oriented approach should be given priority over the product-oriented one.

3. 2. The experiment

To investigate further effects of ITT on SLA, Hiramatsu (1997) carried out tasks of performing simultaneous interpretation, recorded them in audio tapes, and later transcribed and analyzed them, employing retrospective comments and problem indicators. The retrospective comments were made both immediately after the tasks and again at the time of analysis. The problem indicators include filled and unfilled pauses, repeats, false starts,

corrections, drawls, and rising intonations. I developed a tentative taxonomy which has three main archicategories: CS, interpreting-specific strategies (IS), and errors. What differentiates CS from IS is that CS manifest the existence of problems whereas IS indicate 'characteristics' rather than problems. One of the typical features of IS is the syntactical processing in line with the word order of the source language.

The result of the experiment turned out that the strategies were used as follows: 42% for CS, 48% for IS, and 10% for errors. The result shows that CS and IS are intertwined with each other. Also found in the study was that CS are mostly lexically-oriented and IS are syntactically-oriented.

4. Conclusion

As a pedagogical implication, I argue for the teachability of CS and ITT. It seems more advantageous to fuse ITT and CS rather than just teaching CS in view of potential synergistic effects.

For further research, exploring a dynamic dimension in the study of CS is expected. Conventional studies of CS have been somewhat confined to the lexical level. Substantial exploration into the propositional level has not been made. ITT, in this respect, have many resources to offer.

Also expected to be explored is the neurolinguistic approach to ITT and CS. There are some studies on CS including Kasper, G. and E. Kellerman (eds.) (1997), but most of them address brain-damaged pathology. Many studies have been reported in such established journals as *Brain and Language*. Since the theory and application of the art of interpretation have great potentiality to offer viewed from neurolinguistics, active and interdisciplinary studies into this field are highly anticipated.

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