What Did Good Interpreting Learners Do in Their Self-Learning of Consecutive Interpreting?

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「良い通訳学習者」の自己学習に見られる逐次通訳の学習方略

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Abstract

In recent years, many colleges and universities have introduced classes applying interpreting training methods. There is little research done, however, as to how the students employ their learning strategies to acquire relevant interpreting skills. Acquiring interpreting skills requires a sufficient amount of self-learning outside of class, and revealing what learning strategies can be effective may lead to giving a proper guidance to the students. This paper analyzes the results of self-reflection reports submitted by the students of an interpreting class at a college and examines how good learners of interpreting (Good Interpreting Learners: GILs) employ cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies compared with poor learners of interpreting (Poor Interpreting Learners: PILs) in their self-learning of consecutive interpreting.

Key words : interpreting skills, learning strategies, self-learning, self-reflection, consecutive interpreting

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　近年、数多くの大学で通訳訓練の手法を応用した授業が展開されているが、通訳スキルの習得にあたって、生徒が如何なる学習方略を取っているかについての研究は不足している。通訳スキルを習得するためには、教室外での自己学習を十分に行うことが不可欠であり、どのような学習方略が効果的かを明らかにすることは、より適切な指導を行うことに繋がる。本稿では、大学の通訳授業で取り入れた自己学習レポートの分析結果と、期末試験における逐次通訳テストの結果を比較し、テストの結果が良好であった通訳学習者（Good Interpreting Learners: GILs）とそうでなかった学習者（Poor Interpreting Learners: PILs）が、どのような認知的及びメタ認知的方略を取ったかを比較検討し、その多寡と傾向について考察する。

キーワード：通訳スキル、学習方略、自己学習、自己評価、逐次通訳

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Introduction

In recent years, a number of colleges and universities in Japan have introduced English to Japanese (and vice versa) interpreting training classes. The survey conducted by the Japan Association for Interpretation Studies (JAIS) revealed that more than 105 colleges, universities and graduate schools in Japan offer interpreting classes as of 2005 (Someya, et al., 2005). The majority of the courses are offered, however, as one of the English learning classes aiming at fostering students' English proficiency through interpreting training, instead of providing them with high level professional training to be interpreters (Tanaka et al., 2007). Given the relatively low level of English proficiency and knowledge of the world that average college students possess, it is inevitable that the main focus of these classes has been to enhance the students' abilities of English per se by way of interpreting training.

Interpreting can be defined as an act of presenting in the target language the exact meaning of what is uttered in the source language either simultaneously or consecutively, preserving the tone of the speaker (Mahmoodzadeh, 1992, p. 231). Namely, consecutive interpreting (CI), in which the interpreter begins interpretation of a complete message after the speaker has stopped producing the source utterance, is one of the most basic skills required for virtually all the interpreting trainees to acquire. From a viewpoint of language learning, since CI requires the learner to listen to and understand the source utterance carefully, analyze it, then verbally translate what they have understood, it requires really high level of listening skills. In other words, since successful CI requires very accurate listening comprehension of the utterance and memory retention of the meaning as the prerequisites, practicing CI can be considered as highly intensive listening training even for non-professional level English learners.

Then, how is consecutive interpreting learned or trained by interpreting trainees?

From my experience as a former trainee and an active trainer of interpreting who has taught in a variety of interpreting classes, most interpreter training programs have seemed to apply an instructor-centered approach where the trainer plays the major role in judging and evaluating trainee interpreters' performance. Since interpreting training is skill-oriented training, it is indispensable that the trainees are provided with professional guidance by the trainer during class. However, skill-oriented training in general requires more than that. Given the nature of the training, it requires for the trainees to take on extensive practice by themselves outside of class in order to acquire skills they have been taught in class. This should hold true for interpreting training classes at colleges or universities as well. Naturally, it is necessary for the students to repeatedly try out the learned skills after class if they wish to acquire them. In other words, they would need to be good at self-learning or to become autonomous learners. Therefore, being a good interpreting learner (GIL) requires self-

regulated and self-monitored strategic learning outside of the training hours in class.

In the late 1970's, the notion of 'language strategy' had became a buzzword in Second Language Acquisition or Foreign Language Acquisition research. The nominal stage of strategy research focused primarily on what could be learned from the 'good language learners', and the results of the research findings revealed in a fairly consistent manner that it was not merely a high degree of language aptitude and motivation that caused some learners to excel but also the students' own active and creative involvement in the learning process through the application of individualized learning techniques (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 166- p. 167). In more recent years, researchers have pointed out that the language learners with strategic knowledge of language become more efficient, resourceful, and flexible, thus acquiring a language more easily (Carson, J.G., & Longhini, A., 2002; Tseng, Dörnyei and Schmitt, 2006).

Having said that, the nature of the learning strategy concept had not been theoretically clarified even in the later stages of the research, and a marked shift occurred in the evolution and status of the notion of learning strategy in L2 research, which has resulted in an increase of research on language learning strategies in view of language teaching methodology (Dörnyei, 2005, p.173). In other words, delving into learners' strategic learning may lead to more effective teaching methods for the learners.

If the learners' involvement in learning brings about better learning results, how can ther teachers facilitate it? As Dörnyei (2001, p.104-105) suggests, it is effective to share responsibility with the learners about their learning processes, and to achieve this, it is effective to use self-assessment procedures that raise the learners' awareness of their own learning so as to give them a concrete sense of participation in the learning processes whenever appropriate. In their research on language learning strategies, Donato and Mccormick (1994) incorporated a performance-based, portfolio assessment procedure so that their students could reflect on the self-selected evidence of improvement in their language abilities. They claimed that by providing opportunities for the students to perform self- assessment, set goals, plan courses of actions to reach these goals, and identify themes in their own learning, they were engaged in a critical dialogue with themselves, their actual performance, and their instructor (Donato and Mccormik, 1994, p.459). As a result of their research, it was indicated that the students became more frequent consumers of their actual work for evaluating their progress and establishing strategic courses of action (Donato and Mccormick, 1994, P. 462).

Meanwhile, to the author's best knowledge, it seems that little research has been done into the interpreting learners' strategies at colleges or universities. However, since some of the interpreting training subjects such as consecutive interpreting (CI) can also be considered as intensive listening training as described above, good interpreting learners (GILs) may present good strategies or particular behaviors in their self-learning processes. The main focus of the

present paper is to try to figure out if the GILs would incorporate their self-regulation and/ or some sets of learning strategies into their self-learning of CI outside of class and to compare their strategy use with poor interpreting learners (PILs).

The study

Purpose of the Study

In his qualitative study of good foreign language learners in Japan, Takeuchi tried to find out if good language learners share some behaviors or strategies for learning which might help researchers facilitate their understanding of foreign language learning process (Takeuchi, 2003). The result showed that there were some strategies uniquely preferred in the Japanese FL context that included metacognitive strategies to maximize the input and use of foreign language, skill-specific strategies pertaining to conscious learning, memory-strategies to internalize the linguistic system, and cognitive strategies for practicing (Takeuchi, 2003, p.387-389).

 The author expected that some of the good interpreting learners (GILs) might present certain characteristics in terms of learning strategies and behaviors like the good language learners did as revealed in the aforementioned study. Thus, the purpose of the study is to ascertain what learning strategies would be used by good learners of interpreting training (or GILs) compared with poor interpreting learners (PILs) while they take on practicing consecutive interpreting (CI) from English to Japanese. In this study, the GILs will be defined as those who gained more than 60 percentage points and above-average scores in CI section of the final examination of the interpreting training class where the author teaches.

Subjects and Methods

The subjects of this study were the students of the Interpreting Intermediate course at a private university in Osaka. The course is designed for the students whose English proficiency levels are regarded as intermediate according to the English proficiency test administered by the college. The average TOEIC IP score of the students was 520. The class met once a week for 100 minutes, 12 weeks in total, from September 2007 to January 2008. The class consisted of 14 female students. As only females comprised the class, gender differences were excluded from the scope of this study.

In the class, basic interpreting skill exercises including shadowing, dictation, summarization, simultaneous interpreting, sight translation, and consecutive interpreting, and others were introduced. The author explained these basic skills in advance and got the students to take on the training of the respective skills. Consecutive interpretation (CI) was introduced relatively later in the course (from week 7), starting with sentence-level CI,

then more advanced, paragraph-level CI with note-taking. The materials for the interpreting training ranged from business news reports to short lecture-style speeches.

In the class, the author gave the following instructions and tips for consecutive interpreting to the students before getting them to take on actual practice:

(Sentence-level CI)
- Do not take notes.
- Grasp the main idea by following the flow of the utterance.
- Try to retain (remember) what you have understood. Do not try to memorize individual words.
- Interpret quickly as the utterance stops.
- Try to 'reformulate' what you have understood in Japanese. Avoid a word-for-word, direct translation.

(Paragraph-level CI)
- First, take notes of proper nouns and numbers as they tend to slip your mind.
- Comprehension is the first priority. Note-taking is just a help. Try to minimize your notes
- Take note what you have understood. Avoid dictation.
- Get used to note-taking by practice Japanese to Japanese note-taking first.
- Take note vertically so you can see what you have written at a glance.
- Use symbols whenever you can. ex) increase = ↑ , decrease = ↓ , mentioned = □ ed, earth = ϕ , no = X, OK = O
- Pay attention to the logic and flow of the utterance and the links of the speech such as and, so, but, however, on the contrary, etc.
- Note-taking involves multi-tasks: you have to take note while listening and understanding the utterance, which requires repeated exercises so that you can automatize the task.

As the assignments for the students, the author asked them to practice interpreting at home and to create self-reflection reports on what they have tried, what worked for them, what did not work for them, or any other strategy they have employed. Although, the students were allowed to write down any strategy they have employed, the instructor had explained possible learning strategies in class that the students could use when they practice consecutive interpreting at home, which included the aforementioned tips for consecutive interpreting as well as other advice: getting used to the speed by repetition, using a easy-to-write notebook, guessing from the context, etc.

The students were asked to submit the report in A4 paper (one to two pages) every two weeks. During the course, the students were asked to submit five reports in total, in which the report on CI training was made in Report 4 and 5. 12 of the 14 students submitted each of the reports which resulted in 24 reports on the CI self-training in total. The author analyzed the 24 reports to try to find the students' particular behaviors and learning strategies they had employed. By analyzing the students' reports, the author categorized the learning behaviors and strategies of the students trying to examine if the "good strategists" gained good scores in the English to Japanese CI section of the final examination.

The final examination was conducted at the end of the course, in which CI accounted for 35 points (70%) of the total score (50 points). In the CI section, 5 paragraphs (7 points per paragraph) were presented to the students for interpretation consisting of three English and two Japanese utterances. Thus, English to Japanese interpreting accounted for 21 points (7 points X 3). In the examination, each paragraph was aired in the class one by one, and the students were asked to write down the interpretation of it during a pause between the paragraphs. The materials used for this test were randomly selected from those used in the lessons in the class. Normally, interpreting test is conducted in such a way that a test taker records his or her verbal interpretation into a cassette tape for assessment. In other words, interpreting performance should be valued by spoken delivery. However, as the primary aim of the CI in the class is to enhance the students' listening comprehension, not the spoken delivery of the students, the authors considered that the listen-and-written interpretation form should be sufficient to assess the students' comprehension, the rate of information coverage, and the Japanese expressions they would produce. Of the 7 points each paragraph given, comprehension accounted for three points, information coverage accounted for two points and expressions amounted to two points. Evaluating all of the students' points of the CI section (English to Japanese), it was found that the average score was 12 points. Also, seven out of the 14 students gained more than 13 points (60%) who were ranked B of the distribution of the scores, and they were identified as the good interpreting learners (GILs) (Table 1 and 2).

Results

Analyzing the self-reflection reports submitted by the students, the author found that they tried to incorporate a wide range of learning strategies (Table 3).

Metacognitive strategies.

Metacognitive strategies involve higher-order strategies aiming at analyzing, monitoring, evaluating, planning, and organizing one's own learning process. The result showed that not so many students had incorporated metacognitive strategies into their self-learning (Table 3).

However, it was found that the GILs utilized a wider range of metacognitive strategies than did by the below-average students, or the poor interpreting learners (PILs). "Practice regularly" was indicated by three of the GILs while only one PIL mentioned about it. The GILs reported other concrete metacognitive strategies such as "Try not to panic while doing the task.", "Use an easy-to-write paper for note-taking such as recycled paper.", and "Enjoy learning.".

In analyzing the performance of interpreting, the author explained to the students about the importance of recording their own interpretation to assess the quality of presentation if possible. Unfortunately, no student reported about the recording. That means it was not known whether or not the students actually tried to record their performance.

Cognitive strategies.

Cognitive strategies involve the manipulation or transformation of the learning materials/ input (e.g. repetition, summarizing, using images). It was found that most of the students utilized a wide range of cognitive strategies (Table 3). Namely, the following cognitive strategies were reported by the majority (more than 3 students) of the GILs:

- Getting used to the speed and sound of the speech by repetition.
- Pre-learning of vocabulary
- Schema activation
- Maintain concentration while doing a task

Most of these cognitive strategies had been taught by the instructor in the class; therefore, it is not surprising that the student reported on them. However, it is notable that only one PIL student referred to some of these four strategies in reporting.

Moreover, while the three GILs mentioned about note-taking ("Taking concise memo/ minimize note-taking", "Use of symbols for effective note-taking"), only one PIL referred to it. As note-taking requires for the interpreting learners to add additional workload, it is assumed that the PILs felt difficulty in or would not like to practice note-taking.

Also, as shown in the difference in the metacognitive strategies, the GILs were found to utilize much more and a wider range of cognitive strategies than the PILs did (28>18), which includes " Avoid rough assumption.", "Starting with shorter sentences, then longer ones.", "Pay attention to the first and last sentences.", "Keep balanced distribution of concentration.", and so forth. Interestingly, these strategies were not necessarily explained by the author in class.

Discussions

The result of the study indicated that, in general, the good interpreting learners (GILs)

seemed to incorporate a variety of learning strategies in their self-learning process. Compared with the poor interpreting learners (PILs), the GILs reported a wider range of metacognitive and cognitive learning strategies, many of which had already been learned in the class, but the others had not been explained by the instructor. However, we can not safely conclude that the PILs did use less strategies than GILs did. It may well be that some of the PILs were subconsciously using a strategy and many not be aware of it, or that they may be aware of it but did not think it is worth reporting it. Also, two of the PILs (B and F) reported no strategies at all (Table. 3). This is because they did not turn in the report on CI, which might affect the reliability of the collected data. Furthermore, two of the PILs (A and D) used more cognitive strategies than most of the GILs, so it is difficult to conclude that a poor performer is a poor user of strategies. Additionally, since the test materials had been previously used as classwork materials, the students who had studied them harder might have had a better chance of getting a higher score on the test regardless of their interpreting skills or aptitude. Thus, the GILs may be regarded as just serious students who have spend a good amount of time practicing at home, which makes the author wonder if they can be really called good interpreting learners. Taking these factors into account, it would be necessary to devise a more reliable way of data collection and evaluation.

At present, since there seem to be no universally accepted criteria provided for the learners of interpreting on the learning strategies of interpreting, interpreting instructors tend to give an unilateral instruction to the learners of interpreting. This has resulted in forcing learners to do practice outside of class on a rather "trial and error" basis. Of course, the learners have their own learning preferences, but the analysis of the learning strategies utilized by the GILs might suggest more effective instruction can be given to the learners so that they can be engaged in the self-learning of interpreting outside of class. As Dörnyei put it, "even if the notion learning strategy does not exist as a distinctive aspect of learning but only indicates creative and personalized learning behaviors, the training of these 'strategies' would be a highly desirable activity as it would amount, in effect, to the teaching of learners way in which they can learn better" (Dörnyei, 2005, P.173).

Furthermore, as possible implications for the future, this sort of taxonomy of the learning strategies of the GILs might lead to the creation of a "learning strategy instrument" to measure the learning aptitude of the interpreting learners to some extent, which will require a more comprehensive analysis of the self-learning of good interpreting learners that should cover a wider range of interpreting skills other than consecutive interpreting.

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Appendixes

<Table 1.   Summary of scores gained by the students in the English to Japanese consecutive interpretation section of the final examination>

Student IDs	E to J CI score (21 points)	Above/Below Average (12 points)
A	4	Below
B	8	Below
C	8	Below
D	9	Below
E	10	Below
F	10	Below
G	11	Below
H	13	Above
I	13	Above
J	14	Above
K	14	Above
L	17	Above
M	18	Above
N	20	Above

<Table 2.   The distribution of scores in the results of the consecutive interpretation section>

Scores (%)	Rank	The number of students	Percentage
17 – 21 (80-100)	A	3	21 %
13 - 16 (60-79)	B	4	19 %
8 - 12 (40-59)	C	6	29 %
7 - 0 (30-0)	D	1	7%

<Table 3. Summary of the strategies reported by GILs and PILs>

Strategies	IDs of the GILs	IDs of the PILs
Metacognitive strategies		
Planning to do tasks every day	M	
Try not to panic	L	D
Maintain concentration	L	C A E
Practice regularly	L I H	G
Step by step, incremental learning	M	A D
Enjoy learning	M	
Use of easy-to-write note-book (recycled paper)	J	
From easy to difficult	M	G
Metacognitive Total	**8 (*7)**	**5**
Cognitive strategies		
Getting used to the speed and sounds by repetition	L J I H	E
Understanding the main idea first	L J N	C
Pre-learning of vocabulary	L J I M	
Paying attention to the first and last parts of the sentences	L	
Guessing from the context	H	D A
Paying attention to the link phrases	K M	D C
Avoid rough assumption	N	
Paying attention to the keywords	K N	A
Anticipating the theme	M	D
Activating the schema	L K M N	G
Listening attentively	L	
Starting with shorter sentences, then with longer ones	M	
Maintain concentration while taking on a task	M L N I	
Try to take balanced distribution of concentration	I	
Try to grasp the flow of speech	I	
Taking balance between listening and note-taking	L I	D A
Practice and Repetition	I	D
Paying attention to the logic of a speech	N	A

Taking concise memo, minimize note-taking	N K J	A
Use of symbols for effective note-taking	N I K	A
Logical analysis & Numbering	N I	
Visualizing note-taking	I	D
Note-taking for main idea, no individual words	H K	E D
Use of shortened words for note-taking	H	
Take notes vertically	J	
Use of diagram for note-taking	I	
Avoid direct (word for word) translation	L	
Paying attention to Japanese expressions and structures	N	
Avoid redundant sentences for production		A
Deliver the main points first		A
Getting used to note-taking from Japanese to Japanese		G
Always try to be communicative		D A
Cognitive Total	**28 (＊19)**	**18**

Note. The mark (＊) indicates the number of students ranked A in the distribution scores in Table 2.