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ABSTRACT

The problems encountered by native Japanese-speakers in reading English as a second language are examined. The available literature on the subject as well as firsthand experiences in teaching English, developing reading materials, and conducting research projects are discussed. The discussion focuses on five major areas: the reading process; the fact that English texts are usually not written for Japanese students and the effect this has on their reading; why written texts are more difficult than spoken texts; major problems encountered by the Japanese in reading English texts; and some cultural and social barriers to reading English. Ten suggestions are made for improving Japanese college- level English reading instruction, including choosing appropriate texts, avoiding exercises requiring that students replace Japanese words with English, providing background information, encouraging faster reading, giving students a purpose for each reading task, teaching about English discourse organization, practicing basic reading skills, using activities based on real experiences, providing opportunities for discussion, and encouraging further cultural or topical study. Fifty-one references are provided. (MSE)

Difficulties Japanese Have in Reading English

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Difficulties Japanese Have

in Reading English

Introduction

Many Japanese people who have studied English believe that they can read English well but cannot speak it. Since so many people believe it, it has become an axiom. But is it really true that Japanese can read English well? Matsumura (1984) argues that this is only a fiction. Most Japanese can neither speak nor read English well. We have taught reading English to more than 2,000 Japanese college students since 1978, and we have strong doubts about Japanese students' actual English reading proficiency.

Most of students use an English-Japanese dictionary whenever they read English. As soon as they find an unfamiliar word, they look it up and write down the first meaning of that word in Japanese. They do not care whether that meaning fits in that context. They go on reading until they find another unfamiliar word. After they finish checking the meanings of all unfamiliar words, they replace all English words with Japanese words one by one. Even when doing this, not many of them pay attention to the meanings. Even if the meanings of Japanese sentences they make do not make sense, the students may not think anything is wrong. They are too busy with replacing words. If asked to explain main idea of a passage, some of the students answered that they could not explain it but could translate it.

Students usually do not pay attention to what words refer

to, how sentences are related, how ideas are organized, etc. The maximum unit they pay attention is a sentence. Most of them do not pay attention to paragraphs. They also put the same amount of importance on each word they see and try to understand a sentence using their knowledge of grammar.

Students know very little about the cultural or social implications of words, sentences or discourse. They do not make use of the context or situations to help them understand the meaning of the text better.

Some students consider reading aloud to be reading. If asked to read a passage aloud, most students can read it so that it is understandable to native speakers of English. However, after they finish reading, they cannot recall anything about the content of the passage unless they read it again silently. Students cannot achieve their goals without understanding at least part of the text. Without comprehension, no matter how fluently students read aloud with natural pronunciation and intonation, it is not reading.

For many Japanese students, reading is not necessarily related to understanding or comprehension. The way that they read, as we have described it, could be a part of reading or an approach to reading, but it is not really reading.

In this paper, we would like to discuss what reading is and raise questions about why Japanese readers find English texts so difficult to read and, in general, why Japanese people have problems in reading English, for future research or discussions.

we will discuss the actual problems they have in English courses and possible causes of those problems. We will also speculate on how those problems might be solved and suggest some ways of improving their reading.

Reading

Reading has been defined as "the meaningful interpretation of written or printed verbal symbols" (Harris and Sipay, 1975, p. 5). In other words, reading is decoding written symbols and reconstructing the world the writer had in mind. However, it is difficult to do that, and we always understand both more or less than the writer intended even in our native language (Ortega y Gasset, 1959).

Goodman (1967) characterized reading as a psycholinguistic guessing game. Meaning does not come from the printed letters alone. It involves an interaction between thought and language. Rather than reading each individual word, readers select the fewest, most productive cues from the printed page that are necessary to produce guesses. They anticipate what they have not seen and confirm their anticipation as they read. Smith, Goodman and Meredith (1970) discuss reading as an active process rather than a passive, receptive one. Smith (1973) further claims that reading is not even primarily a visual process. Nonvisual information that comes from the brain is more important in reading. Nonvisual information is all the things we already know about reading, about contexts, about language, and about the world in general. Since every reader has had different ex-

periences and has built up connotative meanings of words and his own system of knowledge, interpretations of the same text can be quite different. Reading is not the passive reception of meaning from the text. It is active, and the readers' knowledge interacts with the text.

Theories of reading are new and not well established. Theories of reading in a foreign or second language are even less well developed (Takanashi & Takahashi, 1984). For most of non-native speakers of English, reading is the most important skill, but it has been neglected in English teaching (Rivers, 1981; Paulston & Bruder, 1976). In Japanese colleges, the situation is different. Reading is the most emphasized skill in English courses. Out of 213 textbooks published for the academic year of 1985, 182 were for reading (Yoshida, Kurata, Kawamura, Yoshida, Kitao, & Kitao, 1986).

Many language teachers consider functions of reading and divide them into the categories of intensive and extensive reading and discuss the differences or methods of teaching them (Rivers, 1981; Paulston & Bruder, 1976; Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill & Pincas, 1978). In Japan, intensive reading is aimed at understanding all the details of the text, and extensive reading at understanding the main ideas of the text. That is, intensive reading is reading difficult texts with word by word translation from the beginning to the end, and extensive reading is reading easy texts without word by word translation, even if it includes some translation of important parts or sentences.

Students seldom learn to do different types of reading when they are reading for different purposes. They seldom practice specialized skills of reading such as skimming or scanning. They read almost every text in the same way.

When Japanese people read English, there are many factors which hinder their comprehension of the text. We will discuss some of the problems Japanese college students, whose English proficiency is intermediate, have.

English Texts Not Written for Japanese

When we overhear conversations about which we know little or nothing, it is often not easy to understand what the participants are talking about. The reason is that we are just the audience and not participants. The speaker is not communicating with us. He/she is not considering us as receivers of the message. References that the intended listener understands may not be clear to us. The same problem occurs when Japanese read many texts written in English. If a text was intended to be read by native English speakers, Japanese readers may be reading in a way similar to overhearing a conversation.

The content of texts written in English, intended for native English speakers, is not necessarily familiar to Japanese. When people read, they make use of both information from the text and nonvisual information from the brain. The latter helps the reader understand the former (Smith, 1973). A reader who knows the topic well can make use of that knowledge to understand the text. However, if the reader is not familiar with the topic, the

assistance that familiarity with the topic normally gives is not available. Thus, whether the reader is one of the intended readers makes a great difference in the understanding of a text. Writers writing for native English speakers in general or a specific group of native English speakers include information relevant to the reader, but they may not include enough information for Japanese people. Writers provide enough information, no more and no less than necessary; relevant information; and brief, clear, and precise information (Grice, 1975). They do not explain what the intended readers are already expected to know. They refer to previous texts or current events which intended readers already know. They convey cultural and social meanings without explanations. Since Japanese people lack much of the cultural and social information which native speakers of English share, there is a big gap between Japanese and native speakers' nonvisual information.

Kaplan's (1966) analysis shows clear differences in development of paragraphs in different language groups. He characterizes the development of English paragraphs as being in a straight line and paragraphs written in Oriental languages as being developed in a spiral. These results may, to some extent, represent the ethnocentric biases of the researcher, but they show, at least, that patterns of expressing ideas are different. Japanese readers sometimes find it difficult to follow the logic of English. Opinions or judgments are based on English-speaking people's values. Without understanding them, it is very

difficult to understand the text.

Elsewhere, I have discussed some different methods of expressing things in English and Japanese. English is analytical, dynamic, and abstract, while Japanese is descriptive, passive, and concrete (Kitao, 1982). This also makes English texts more difficult to read.

If the text is written for specific readers and a Japanese student happens to be a member of that group, the text may be easier to understand. If the book is about medicine and is written for American medical students, a Japanese medical student may understand it better than some native speakers of English who do not have any medical background. However, it is still written for students who will work in medicine in the United States. Medical practice in the United States and in Japan are different and some information is not easy to understand. Not sharing the same background hinders understanding of any text written for native speakers of English.

Reading and Schema Theory

This role that background information plays in reading comprehension has not been widely recognized in ESL reading pedagogy. The traditional view of second language reading comprehension is that meaning resides in the text to be comprehended, not in the reader doing the comprehending. If a second language reader cannot comprehend a text, it is considered to be because of a deficiency in his/her understanding of the words, grammatical forms, anaphoric cohesive ties, etc., in the

text (Carrell, 1984). However, as Goodman (1967) has pointed out in his model, reading is a "psycholinguistic guessing game" in which the reader uses the graphic display encoded by the writer to reconstruct the message. According to Goodman's model, the reader does not need to use all of the textual cues. Instead, the reader makes predictions and checks them against the text. The better able the reader is to make correct predictions, the less it is necessary for him/her to check the text. Therefore, background information, which allows the reader to make more correct predictions, is an important factor in reading comprehension.

The role that background information plays in comprehension has been formalized in schema theory. Schemata are previously acquired knowledge structures. They tell us what is essential, expected and possible in a certain situation (Van Dijk, 1977). They are arranged in hierarchical fashion from the most general down to the most specific.

Schemata can be activated from the most general to the most specific (top-down processing) or from the most specific to the most general (bottom-up processing). Top-down processing takes place when general predictions made about the situation are checked against incoming data. Bottom-up processing takes place when the incoming data is perceived first and used to make inferences about the general situation. Generally, when a reader tries to interpret a text, he/she activates an appropriate schema and uses it to check against the text. However, non-native

speakers tend to use bottom-up processing. They use the words and sentences themselves as the basis for comprehension rather than an understanding of the overall situation (Kasper, 1984).

Carrell (1984) listed a number of ways in which a reader could miscomprehend or not comprehend because of ways that schemata interact with the text. She listed 1) no existing schema (the text assumes background knowledge that the reader does not possess), 2) naive schema (insufficiently developed schema), 3) poor text (not enough cues to the appropriate schema), 4) multiple schema appropriate (more than one interpretation of the text possible, and the reader does not know which one to choose), 5) schema intrusion (reader chooses an inappropriate schema).

Difficulty of Written Texts

Many Japanese people believe that reading is easier than oral communication. They may feel this way because they can read a text as many times as they want at their own pace, using a dictionary. They can translate a written text into Japanese for their comprehension, something they don't have an opportunity to do in conversation. Another reason that they might think that reading is easier is that they have had more training in reading than in oral communication, and they are more comfortable with reading.

While it is true that most Japanese have more training in reading than in listening, it is not necessarily true that reading is easier than listening. Reading can be more difficult than

listening for both native and nonnative speakers. Reading does not usually provide as much about the situational context as a conversation does. If the setting and situation are clear, that helps a listener understand each utterance, because he/she knows that speakers say only things relevant in that setting (Grice, 1975). The situation in a written text may not be as clear to the reader.

In addition, speakers use para-linguistic devices, such as stress, intonation, rate of speech, etc., to convey meaning. Often what we intend to convey goes far beyond the linguistic meaning of what we say. Even if I say, "You look very nice today," if the intonation is not right, it may sound ironic. Para-linguistic devices help us interpret how serious, ironical, sarcastic, or humorous the speaker intends to be.

Speakers also raise their voices and slow down at important points. They show their emotions through para-linguistic forms, and we can tell whether they are happy, sad, angry, hurrying, etc. In many cases, this is unconscious and conveys more information than verbal messages. While speakers can control verbal messages easily and, for example, tell a lie, it is not easy to control the entire para-linguistic meaning.

Other nonverbal features of communication help oral communication. Kinesics (gestures), distance, facial expressions, timing, etc. can help communication. If a speaker smiles and says something insulting, it has a different meaning from the same thing without a smile. The speaker's body movement and position

can convey a great deal, and may convey more than linguistic meanings. Time, space, and even silence all communicate messages (Hall, 1959).

Most readings do not include the information that we gain from para-linguistic and nonlinguistic cues in spoken English. The reader has to rely on only printed letters and the knowledge he already has. There is no aid in reading except visual information such as pictures, maps, graphs, tables, and illustrations, if available. Thus, we do not have much aid (Ortega y Gasset, 1959).

Moreover, written texts are denser than spoken language. Writers polish their writing. They use more sophisticated words, synonyms, pronouns, and references rather than repeating the same words. They omit redundancy and unnecessary information. They express themselves more precisely with fewer words. They use more complex sentences than spoken language. Written texts can convey more complicated information with fewer words. That makes written texts more difficult than spoken messages. Written language is different from daily spoken language and is certainly more difficult for Japanese.

Reading is one-way communication. Readers cannot ask any questions so the writer tries to put all necessary information together in reading. That sometimes makes it more difficult to understand even which part is important.

Toyama (1977) argues that English paragraphs are different from Japanese ones. English paragraphs have unity with one main

idea, and are clearer than Japanese paragraphs. Sakuma (1983) reports that American college students could reconstruct paragraphs from an unindented editorial in The New York Times much better than Japanese college students could from an editorial of The Asahi, one of the major national newspapers in Japan.

Writers of English are considered to have more responsibility for the readers' comprehension than Japanese writers do, and Japanese readers have more responsibility for their own comprehension than English readers do. Hall (1976) describes Japanese culture as being a high-context culture. A high-context culture is one in which people are deeply involved with each other and information is widely shared. Because information is widely shared, it is less necessary that texts be explicit than in a low-context culture. On the other hand, American culture is a low-context culture. The relatively few shared assumptions require that more information be conveyed in English and connections made clear. Information is expected to be well organized and relationships made clear among pieces of information within and between paragraphs. There is usually a topic sentence, and all other sentences support it, giving examples, details, etc. Unless the writer specifies a change, we assume that the pronouns refer to the same people, and that the topic, time and place are the same (Brown & Yule, 1983). While in some ways, this should make reading easier, Japanese readers are not often familiar with the devices used to make paragraphs and texts coherent.

Many English reading textbooks used in Japan use texts written fifty or more years ago. It is more difficult to understand these texts than modern texts. Language has changed a lot, and meanings of words have changed. Expressions are different. We do not always know much about the background of those texts. The same is true about non-standard English, slang, or black English. We have less knowledge about the language and the background, it is very difficult to understand them.

Japanese Students' Problems in Reading English

With several other English teachers, we have, since 1980, observed and tested more than 2,500 Japanese college students in more than ten different colleges to investigate their problems in reading English. We made two parallel reading tests which included five literary forms: directions, dialogues, essays, newspaper articles, and poems. The tests included both multiple choice and short answer questions. We timed how fast students finished each section. We gave some students the same test at the beginning and end of the school year.

We analyzed the results and reached the following conclusions. 1) Japanese college students could read essay form better than the other four literary forms. 2) They understood the other literary forms, but it took them longer. 3) They read very slowly. Generally, students with high scores read faster. 4) Over the course of an academic year, students could improve their reading comprehension if they were taught using a method that avoided translation. 5) Students increased their ability to

anticipate and relate the ideas in the text. 6) Students' vocabulary was poor (Kitao & Miyamoto, 1982; Kitao & Miyamoto, 1983; Kitao & Yoshida, 1985; Kitao, Kitao, Yoshida & Yoshida, 1985; S. Yoshida, 1985; Kitao, Yoshida & Yoshida, 1986; Yoshida & Kitao, 1986).

In another study, another teacher and I found that Japanese college students could read only 105 words per minute in a situation when they were asked to read fast, and their comprehension was only 54% (Yoshida & Kitao, 1986). We speculated that many of them believed that if they read slowly, they could answer comprehension questions better. This is a myth. As a matter of fact, if a reader reads too slowly, it is more difficult to relate the ideas in a passage, and it is more difficult to understand the passage. Short-term memory does not retain information for longer than few seconds and it is impossible to relate previous information with new information (Smith, 1982). Thus, reading slowly appears to hinder comprehension.

There are many reasons why Japanese people read English passages slowly. First of all, letters of the Roman alphabet are not easy for Japanese to recognize. They are used to reading Chinese characters and it is easier to visually identify Chinese characters than combinations of letters of the alphabet. Moreover, Japanese have not learned the rules to connect letters of the alphabet in English, and it takes time to figure out morphemes and words. If they pay attention to the connections between letters, their eye span is narrower and they cannot grasp

the phrases together. Japanese tend to see one word at a time. Native speakers can recognize a word without considering the combination of letters (Weaver, 1980). If they are given non-English words or unnatural combinations of letters, they cannot recognize them, because they violate the rules for combining letters. The same is true of recognizing words. Native speakers recognize words in familiar situations better than unfamiliar situations (Reid, 1958). This also means that they recognize a group of words with one fixation of the eye, and theoretically, they can process four or five words with one fixation of the eye (Weaver, 1980).

Second, Japanese usually read vertically and are not used to reading left to right. H. Yoshida (1985) found that Japanese can read faster if words or phrases are placed vertically using a computer.

Third, Japanese have more frequent regressions, that is, they go back and read the same words or phrases again while they are reading a passage (Takahashi & Takanashi, 1984). This is the main cause of slow reading for native speakers. The reason why Japanese readers do this is thought to be that they cannot relate the pieces of information they have read, and they cannot keep enough information in their short-term memory.

Fourth, if Japanese people find a word they do not know, they stop there automatically and consult with an English-Japanese dictionary. They have not had the training to guess what the meaning of that word is in the context or to decide

whether understanding that word is important. They do not try to guess the meaning in the context or ignore it if it is not very important. In their native language, readers very rarely used dictionaries in reading; they can often figure out the meaning of an unknown word from the context if they go on reading, or at least decide that the word is unimportant. However, Japanese readers of English are more likely to stop reading and just worry about that new word, which slows down their reading. Many Japanese students don't believe that they can understand a passage without understanding all the words in it.

Japanese students have learned 3,000 words or less by the time they graduate from high school. (This number includes all the forms of the same word counted as separate words, e.g., go, went, and gone is counted as three words.) Students' vocabularies are very limited (Kitao, Kitao, Nozawa, & Yamamoto, 1985, pp. 130-131). In my experience, passages that have more than five percent new words are very difficult even for proficient students to understand if they try to guess the meanings of new words. More than 5% of the words in texts written for native English speakers are new to most Japanese readers.

Even if a students knows 3,000 words, he/she may know only one meaning for words which have several meanings. According to the Course of Study, which is set by the Ministry of Education for the guidelines of secondary education, there are no rules about teaching more than one meaning for each word on the list of words that teachers have to teach. In many cases, Japanese

students tend to use the first meaning in the dictionary. Not many of them are familiar with the various meanings for each word.

Another problem with English vocabulary is that the basic words Japanese students learn are different from the words frequently used in daily life. We compared with 2,000 words used to define words in the Longman dictionary of contemporary English and 3,000 words in the Oxford progressive English course books 1, 2, and 3, and found out that those publications use words frequently used in daily life. On the other hand, Japanese learn more difficult words, some of which are not commonly used (Kitao & Kitao, 1985).

Another problem concerning vocabulary is that Japanese do not learn the relationships among words. They do not know antonyms or synonyms or words with similar meaning. Thus, in reading a text, they often do not realize that two words have the same meaning or that two words are opposites. Without understanding the relationships among words, it is hard to understand the passage.

Some readings use slang, idioms or dialect, which are usually not familiar to Japanese readers. In many cases, these expressions are not in dictionaries. If readers cannot guess the meanings from the context, they do not understand the passage.

Passages written for native speakers of English may have some common vocabulary or expressions from TV, famous speeches, movies, etc. These may be appealing for native English speakers,

but they are very difficult for Japanese students to understand unless they share the same knowledge.

Native speakers pay attention to clauses rather than words (Yoshida, H., 1985), the clause being the minimum unit of meaning. However, Japanese readers tend to pay equal attention to each individual word. Not many of them seem to understand which words are important and which are not. The same is true with sentences. Readers tend to try to understand each sentence independently without understanding the relationships among them or which sentence is most important. They may reach a conclusion very different from what the writer intended, since they do not understand the transitions.

English sentences have a word order different from Japanese, and it takes more time for Japanese readers to understand it. Most of Japanese students tend to replace Japanese words and make Japanese sentences before they try to understand. That takes time, and readers lose the flow of the passage. Also, cultural or social meanings associated with words may be lost in the translation (Kitao, 1979).

In order to understand English passages better and faster, it is often necessary to understand pragmatic and discourse rules. It is difficult for Japanese readers to understand implicatures of English texts, how things are implied. Japanese readers may do not grasp the implicatures and may just pass them by. Knowledge of grammar helps readers to understand sentences, but they need pragmatics and discourse rules to understand para-

graphs or passages.

Many Japanese students believe that if they understand all the parts, they can understand the whole. They try to understand each word and accumulate the meanings of words, sentences and then understand the passage. They seldom anticipate the whole meaning first and test their hypothesis, as good readers do in their native language.

Good readers reading in their native language always monitor their comprehension while they are reading using their knowledge, experience, and syntactic and semantic cues. MacKinon and Waller (1981) report that good seventh grade readers of English correct 85% of the grammatical errors they make while they read aloud, while poor readers could correct only 42%. Clay and Imlach (1971) report that only one quarter of good readers could use cues between clauses and sentences. Isakson and Miller (1976) report that good readers stopped when they found irrelevant verbs in passages but poor readers did not.

Poor readers cannot use contexts well in reading. Potter (1982) argues that four factors are important in use of contexts. They are decoding skills and grammatical, semantic, and background knowledge. He also divides contexts into two types: preceding and succeeding contexts. Poor readers do not make use of succeeding context. There are several reports that poor readers understand implicit meanings very poorly (Ryan, 1981). Oakhill (1984) reports that both good and poor readers are equally good at imagining the meaning of a passage using the words in

the text. However, using implied cues, there were significant differences.

Poor readers cannot reconstruct information they gain from the passage. Some of them cannot even find the topic sentences. They cannot find which sentences are supporting them. They cannot identify examples, quotations, statistics, reasons, results, conclusions, etc.

Poor readers cannot read passages for different purposes. For them, reading is the same in any case. Even if the purpose of reading to obtain a certain piece of information, they still read all the whole passage try to understand unimportant parts as well as important information. Very, very few students can skim (get the overall idea of a passage by reading it quickly) or scan (pick out specific information by reading a passage quickly).

Cultural and Social Barriers

Written communication involves expressing oneself and understanding others by verbal means. When the writer has a concept to express, he changes that concept into verbal signs. The reader sees those signs and interprets them to get the concept. If the reader's concept is the same as the writer's, communication has been successful.

If the reader does not arrive at the same concept as the speaker--if he/she has not been able to comprehend the intended meaning of the speaker's communication signs--the communication has failed. For example, if an American writer refers to "gingerbread", a Japanese reader may understand the meanings of

"ginger" and "bread". However, unless he has seen and tasted gingerbread, he cannot imagine what it is really like. Translating signs into concepts is difficult unless the reader has knowledge of or has experienced what the concepts refer to.

Therefore, even though the Japanese know much more about the United States than they do about other countries, their knowledge is limited. They do not know much about the daily life, school life, etc., of Americans. They do not understand the unconscious patterned behaviors of Americans--ways of thinking, patterns of discourse, etc. Therefore, when Japanese people encounter new situations in reading, they have difficulty understanding them. This is one of the biggest barriers to full communication. If people do not share the same experiences or background knowledge, the efficiency of their communication is limited.

Culture also affects communication through association. Each individual has associations based on his knowledge and experiences. The culture and surroundings make up an important part of the associations.

Associations are used when signs are converted into meaning and meaning into signs. Association is related to culture. A speaker does not use all the signs necessary to convey the concepts. He/she relies on associations to add information. Therefore, the speaker can convey a broad meaning with only a few signs. However, the Japanese and Americans do not always have the same associations, so they sometimes misunderstand each other.

When a Japanese reads something written by a Japanese, the writer has changed the concept into signs, and the reader changes those signs into a concept. There is usually not much difference between their concepts, in part, because they have similar associations based on Japanese culture. Such associations help them change their concepts into communication signs and visa versa.

However, if the writer is an American and the reader is a Japanese, the writer uses associations based on American culture to change the concepts into signs. The reader either translates those signs into concepts, using associations based on Japanese culture or does not have associations on which to base the concepts. If they are communicating about something in which the associations of their cultures overlap, the reader is still able to understand the writer, but if their associations are different, they misunderstand each other, unless one of them understands the other's culture adequately.

Thus, a Japanese who does not understand American patterns of association cannot understand Americans effectively unless the American writers happen to understand Japanese culture and express themselves in the Japanese manner. A Japanese reads breakfast and translates in into Japanese as <u>choshoku</u> or <u>asagohan</u> and may imagine boiled rice without salt or sugar, soybean soup, seaweed, a raw egg, some pickles, and green tea. This association of the term "breakfast" is very different from an American breakfast, traditionally bacon and eggs, toast, orange

juice, and coffee, milk, or black tea.

An English sentence translated literally into Japanese may not always make sense to a Japanese, because the sentence may reflect American traditions, associations, and conventions, which most Japanese are not familiar with. For example, if the expression "making bricks without straw" is translated directly into Japanese, a Japanese would not understand its meaning. This expression comes from an incident recorded in the Old Testament, where the Israelites, enslaved in Egypt, had to gather the straw necessary to make bricks but still make as many bricks as they had when the straw had been provided for them. In English, it refers to a situation where one is forced to accomplish something without the necessary materials.

Kunihiro (1973) discussed the structure of associations. He asserted that association falls into two main categories: word association, which links stimulus-response words, and cultural association, which links a word with its cultural connotation. Cultural association is most important for reading.

Cultural association is of two types. One is sentence association. Through this, native speakers may be able to guess a writer's age, sex, social class, and occupation from the text. The other is indicative association, which is related to history, literature, legend, custom, etc. For example, if a woman is described as being a platinum blond, the association that this would have for most Americans would be a beautiful woman, but with an artificial rather than natural type of beauty. A

Japanese reader would be unlikely to know about this association.

Japanese readers also have difficulty understanding meanings of speech acts, if the illocutionary force is different from the locutionary force. Fraser (1978) maintains that understanding the illocutionary force a speech act is important in second language acquisition. Speech acts are acts of doing something in saying something. He explains they include institutional acts, which are conventional expressions, used in connection with the actions of some social or cultural institution, and vernacular acts, expressions used in different social situations not governed by a particular institution. For Japanese people, institutional acts are unfamiliar unless they have learned them. Vernacular acts are very difficult to understand. Fraser (1978) discusses five speech acts: representative, directive, evaluative, commissive, and establishive acts. It is often very difficult for Japanese readers to understand the illocutionary force the writer intends, if it is different from the locutionary force. For example, Fraser lists eighteen different ways to request help. Each one has connotative meaning, but nonnative speakers cannot tell the precise differences. Speech acts differ in their degree of politeness, deference, and mitigation. Illocutionary acts are influenced by power differences and solidarity. These are tied very closely to cultural and social conventions, and they can be hard to understand without cultural and social competence.

There are many aspects of cultural and social competence.

English language and communication using the English language are deeply embedded in English-speaking people's cultures and societies. Japanese people who do not have much cultural and social competence may not understand certain meanings or may misunderstand because they interpret meanings using cultural and social competence in Japanese.

Improving Teaching Reading in English

We have discussed what reading is, problems of English written texts, how cultural and social background causes misunderstandings. Then how can we improve teaching reading in English?

There are many things we can do (Kitao, 1982). First of all, we should choose appropriate reading texts for Japanese college students. They should be slightly above students' English proficiency. Krashen and Terrell (1984) argue that input should be at an i + 1 level (slightly above the current level of proficiency) and comprehensible. Only a few new language items should be added to the old ones, so that they can understand them. They should not include too much slang or dialect or too many technical terms, idioms, etc. New vocabulary should be kept to less than five percent of the total words in the text, and syntax should not be too complex. The content should include some cultural information but should not be heavily culturally oriented. It should be understandable, meaningful, interesting and new to students. Textbooks should have some visual materials and exercises to help students understand what they are reading. Passages should be written for nonnative speakers, at least

initially, and should have correct and natural English. (Kitao & Kitao, 1982)

Second, textbooks should not use exercises that involve replacing Japanese words with English words. Students need to read English without using Japanese; this makes it easier to follow logic in English and understand associations in English. No matter how well we choose Japanese words to translate English words into, they have different meanings and associations, and Japanese words distort any cultural meanings of words or the passage. Also, replacing words takes much times and slows reading down greatly.

Third, before students read, teachers should explain the background or something about the text, or discuss the topic before students read. If the text is very difficult, students can be given a summary or some hint about the text. We can let them read a version of the passage in written in easy English first. Students have some knowledge about the text and anticipate the content when they read, and then they understand it better. Giving students a summary in advance worked very well in listening practice (Arima, Kitao, Kitao, & Yoshioka, 1984) and giving them an easier version also worked well (Okada, T., 1980).

Carrell (1984) made some suggestions for activating students' schemas in order to improve their reading comprehension. She suggested that background material could be provided in the forms of lectures, movies, slides, demonstrations, class discussions, predictions about the text,

etc. These activities, which are Carrell states are best used in varying combinations, provide background knowledge that help students comprehend the text material. For students with vocabulary difficulties, Carrell recommended introducing vocabulary before the reading of the text. However, simply providing lists of words and definitions does not seem to help as much as looking at the words in terms of its associations (e.g., antonyms, synonyms, attributes, personal experiences, etc.).

Langer (1981) proposed a prereading plan that would help teachers identify what students know about a topic. This makes teachers better aware of what background knowledge students might be lacking. The plan involves three steps: 1) initial associations with the concept (ask students for anything that comes to mind when they hear the key concept), 2) reflections on the initial associations (ask students what made them think of particular associations in the first step, for the purpose of revising, rejecting, integrating, etc., the associations), and 3) reformulation of knowledge (ask students for new ideas on the concept, based on the discussion in the first two steps).

Fourth, students should be encouraged to read faster, for example, by keeping track of their reading speed. Students will improve not only reading speed but also reading comprehension, as our previous studies have shown (Kitao & Miyamoto, 1982; Kitao & Miyamoto, 1983; Kitao & Yoshida, 1985; Kitao, Kitao, Yoshida & Yoshida, 1985; Kitao, Yoshida & Yoshida, 1986; Yoshida & Kitao, 1986).

Fifth, students should have a purpose for reading each time they read, such as intensive reading, extensive reading, skimming, or scanning. It is a good idea to give students questions in advance of reading as well as directions on how to read the text. Therefore, students will understand what they should do each time they read.

Sixth, students should be taught about the organizations of English passages, how to find the main idea and its supporting details, how sentences and paragraphs are connected and organized. Students should do exercises to outline or summarize the passages, put main concepts in order, draw diagrams, etc.

Seventh, we should teach and practice some basic reading skills, such as skimming, scanning, finding topic sentences in each paragraph and the supporting details and examples and understanding pragmatics and discourse. In my experience, doing these things in small groups is most effective.

Eighth, we should let students do activities that involve real experiences. In the classroom, activities are often very artificial. However, if we make the purpose of reading real by providing opportunities to do something using information they read, it is real experience and students enjoy this type of activities. One activity that my students have particularly enjoyed is cooking from recipes that they read in English. If doing outside activities is difficult, at least students should be able to have skits or role plays, if texts are appropriate.

Ninth, students should have the opportunity to discuss the

text and exchange ideas about it. If it were in Japan, what would happen? What are the differences between the text and a similar situation in Japan? Students should relate their knowledge and previous experience with the text as they read.

Tenth, students can study more about the topic or cultural information provided in the text. If they know more about English-speaking cultures and societies, they can understand English texts better.

Conclusion

We have discussed five major topics: 1) what reading is, 2) the fact that English texts are usually not written for Japanese students and how it affects their reading, 3) why written texts are more difficult then spoken texts, 4) what major problems Japanese college students have in reading English, and 5) some cultural and social barriers in reading English. Discussion of these topics was based on previous studies, my experiences in teaching English and developing reading materials, and some research projects.

Based on that discussion, we made ten suggestions about what could be done in Japanese college English reading classes to improve the situation. We hope that the effectiveness of the specific application of these proposals will be further studied by researchers in the near future.

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