The Advantage of "Progressive" Reading Activities Using Sense Groups for Japanese English Learners —— An Experimental Study ——

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Some educators fear that most of the students who have been taught in the grammar translation method perform slowly in reading English. Such students may have fallen into the habit of translating English directly into Japanese when they read English. They seem to do 'regressive' reading activities, which prevent them from developing their reading comprehension ability.

The authors of this paper assert 'progressive' reading activities using sense groups prove more beneficial to Japanese high school students, and conducted an experiment in order to examine which was more effective in helping them promote their reading comprehension ability, 'progressive' reading activities or 'regressive' reading activities.

The results revealed that the subjects who were instructed to do 'progressive' reading activities obtained a higher score in the reading comprehension test than those in the control group who were instructed in the traditional grammar translation method.

1. Introduction

The present research concerns Japanese high school students' reading comprehension ability. The grammar translation method has been prevalent in high school English classes. In this method, every English sentence is translated into Japanese in order to allow students to understand its meaning easily. Teachers attempt to demonstrate a good model of translation, and students are encouraged to translate skillfully from English into Japanese.

If translation is used extensively, however, an odd technique is adopted and, strangely enough, it happens to produce considerably correct translation. According to this technique, the order of parts or constituents in an English sentence is reversed in the Japanese translation. Therefore, the last part of an English sentence is firstly translate-
d, and the previous part is put into Japanese. Thus the first part is translated lastly. An example of this is illustrated in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Word Order of the English Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(A)</th>
<th>(B)</th>
<th>(C)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Alaska) is one-fifth the size</td>
<td>of all the other states</td>
<td>in the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>States put together.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Word Order of the Japanese Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(D)</th>
<th>(C)</th>
<th>(B)</th>
<th>(A)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(アラスカは)まとめられた</td>
<td>合衆国の</td>
<td>他の州の</td>
<td>5分の1の大きさです。</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The order of A+B+C+D in the English sentence changes into D+C+B+A in the Japanese translation.

A definite problem arises as a result of this kind of practice. Many of Japanese English learners may have fallen into the habit of reversing the order of parts in an English sentence, even when they have no need to translate it. They are disposed to do this 'regressive' reading activity. They are inclined to interpret English sentence in a sort of Japanese word order. Conversely, native speakers of English are engaged in 'progressive' reading activities, in which they proceed from A through D in the above sentence.

2. Purpose of This Study

The aforementioned writers are opposed to 'regressive' reading activities, and in this study are attempting to prove that 'progressive' reading activities facilitate Japanese high school students' development of reading comprehension ability. Students should develop the ability to read English sentences in their natural order.

Before depicting our educational experiment in which the two types of reading activities were examined, let us discuss several reasons why 'progressive' reading activities should be encouraged and 'regressive' reading activities should be avoided.

(1) The students who have been taught in the grammar translation method and have gotten accustomed to 'regressive' reading activities may identify the comprehension with translation of English sentences. Thus, whenever they see English words, they automatically seek the equivalent Japanese words. And they are apt to be satisfied with the work of replacing without realizing the meaning of English sentences.

Such students may sometimes fail to comprehend the relation fully between the
correlated parts in a sentence. Their failures prevent them from getting to the important information in the sentence. This means they may feel confused midway and stop reading before they get to the necessary information when they try to understand a long sentence.

(2) In the English language, the principal elements which convey the important information in a sentence are likely to come first and the modifying or trivial elements to follow them. On the contrary, in the Japanese language, this order is reversed as is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Contrast of Word Order between the English language and the Japanese Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Japanese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>noun + relative clause</td>
<td>modifying element(s) + noun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>main clause + subordinate clause</td>
<td>subordinate clause + main clause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative + VO</td>
<td>OV + negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| taller than John             | ジョンより背が高
| conjunction + clause         | clause + conjunction          |
| interrogative + clause       | free position of interrogative |
| bread and butter             | パタつ 

The above fact should convince us that 'progressive' reading activities are more effective and reasonable when we read English. Readers want the important information in the first place rather than the trivial information.

(3) How do our eyes move while we read? According to Eye-Movement patterns they generally move from left to right in a line. Interestingly, eyes do not catch word by word. Like a camera shot, human eyes seem to take in a few words in a single glance, and in the next instance they catch the following few words. The group of words caught in a single glance is called a recognition span. Skilful readers have longer spans. Takanashi and Takahashi (1987) give two examples of a recognition span; one (A) represents a beginner's recognition span and the other (B) represents a skilful reader's.

(A) When someone asks you to deliver a talk in front of a group, what's your reaction? 

(B) When someone asks you to deliver a talk in front of a group, what's your action?

The very existence of Eye-movement while reading fails to support Japanese students'
'regressive' reading activities.

3. Experiment

(1) Aim

The general aim of the experiment was to measure and analyze the reading comprehension of the students in an experimental group and in a control group. Furthermore, it aimed at knowing how sense groups affect their scores of a reading comprehension test.

(2) Subjects

The subjects were the students of 11HR (18 boys and 24 girls), 13HR (18 boys and 23 girls), 14HR (18 boys and 24 girls), 16HR (17 boys and 23 girls), 23HR (18 boys and 24 girls), 24HR (15 boys and 25 girls), 25HR (18 boys and 23 girls), 26HR (16 boys and 25 girls) in a high school in Tokushima Prefecture. 11HR represents 1st year, class 1 and 23HR represents 2nd year, class 3 and the like.

The students of 13HR, 16HR, 24HR and 25HR were treated as the experimental group and the students of 11HR, 14HR, 23HR, and 26HR were treated as the control group.

Equality of the level of English proficiency between the two groups was ascertained by the results of the April test that covered the skills of listening, speaking, and writing.

(3) Procedure

The experiment was conducted from the period of April in 1990 to July in 1990. The number of English classes was 30 for each group.

In April, an authorized English test (岡書文化社教研式「高校新入生学力検査 英語」) was given to the 1st year students, and the same kind of test (岡書文化社教研式「高校学力検査 英語 I」) to the 2nd year students. The results are shown in Table 4 and Table 6.

The students in the experimental group were instructed to do 'progressive' reading activities. English sentences in their textbooks had been divided into small chunks or sense groups, and students were told to catch the meanings of them from the left one to the right one. An example of these "sense group" given to the students is shown in Appendix 1.

The students in the control group were not encouraged to do 'progressive' reading activities. The grammar translation method was preserved. 'Regressive' reading activities were usually employed.

At the end of July, an English comprehension test compiled by the authors of this paper was given to all the students. The test is shown in Appendix 2, and the results are shown in Table 5 and Table 7.

(4) Results and Analysis
Table 4. Mean Score in the April Test of the 1st Year Students. (Full mark is 25.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>13HR(N=41)</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16HR(N=40)</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>11HR(N=42)</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14HR(N=42)</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Mean Score in the April Test of the 2nd Year Students. (Full mark is 30.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>24HR(N=40)</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25HR(N=41)</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>23HR(N=42)</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26HR(N=41)</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Mean Score in the July Test of the 1st Year Students. (Full mark is 100.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>13HR(N=41)</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16HR(N=40)</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>11HR(N=42)</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14HR(N=42)</td>
<td>30.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Mean Score in the July Test of the 2nd Year Students. (Full mark is 100.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>24HR(N=40)</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25HR(N=41)</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>23HR(N=42)</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26HR(N=41)</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 and Table 6 show that the students in the control group obtained a higher mean score than those in the experimental group in the April Test. This is the case with both the 1st year students and the 2nd year students.

From the data, we can judge that, in April, the students in the control group had a slightly higher reading comprehension ability than those in the experimental group.

Table 5 and Table 7 show how their reading comprehension abilities changed after they were instructed in the different methods. The fact that both the 1st year students in the experimental group and the 2nd year students in the experimental group achieved a higher mean score than those in the control groups reveals that the difference of teaching method must have affected the students, and ‘progressive’ reading activities must have promoted their reading comprehension ability.

In order to ascertain that the difference between the mean score of the students in the experimental group and that of those in the control group is significant, let us observe here its resulting t-test.

Table 8. t-test of the July Test Score of the 1st Year Students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p &lt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental Group</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>40.222</td>
<td>16.551</td>
<td>2.107</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The figures of 2.107(t-test) in Table 8, and 2.216(t-test) in Table 9 signify that the distinction is significant, and that 'progressive' reading activities clearly prove effective in promoting high school students' reading ability.

4. Conclusion

This paper has shown that 'progressive' reading activities are more effective than 'regressive' reading activities for Japanese high school students who are learning English. They can read many English words in a limited time by using 'progressive' reading activities.

By utilizing sense groups, they can read and comprehend English rapidly. In order to do 'progressive' reading activities successfully, it is absolutely necessary for them when reading to catch sense groups from the left one to the right one.

Our conclusion is that 'progressive' reading activities, which employ the same processes as listening, are much more effective than 'regressive' reading activities, which presently are prevalent in the grammar method.

Notes

2. Ibid. p.15

References


Fodor, J.A. & T.G. Bever (1965),“The Psychological Reality of Linguistic
Segements”, *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior* 4.

Appendix 1

*NEW EDITION UNICORN ENGLISH COURSE I (英 1 文英堂)* (P.2,L.1～P.3,L.6)
You can see a tall man on this page. Do you know him? He is the symbol of the United States. Why?
He settled in our city, Troy, in 1789. People liked him very much, because he was a good and honest man. He got a pet name—Uncle Sam. His initials are U.S. And the initials U.S also mean the United States. His figure in striped trousers and top hat is now very popular. You can see it here and there in Troy.
He died in Troy on July 31, 1854. Now our national flag flies over his tomb. His tall statue stands in a quiet park near the Hudson River. I am proud of our city, because it is the “Home of Uncle Sam.”

*NEW EDITION UNICORN ENGLISH COURSE II (英 2 文英堂)* (P.2,L.1～P.3, L.8)
The name Alaska means “great land” and the 49th state is indeed a great land. Alaska is one-fifth the size of all other states in the United States put together. Its coastline is 33,000 miles—longer than that of all other lower 48 states. It has ten rivers longer than 300 miles, three
million lakes, nineteen mountains higher than 14,000 feet (including Mt. McKinley, the highest mountain in North America) and more than half the world galaciers. Alaska is located almost an equal distance from Japan, Europe and East Coast of the United States. The northernmost point in North America, the Eskimo town of Barrow, is only 1,200 miles from the North Pole. Alaska has days of midnight sun and night of northern lights. It also has fine modern cities as well as wild land where no human being has ever set foot. Plenty of exotic wild animal and plants are found there.

Appendix 2

1. 次の英文を読み、あとの問いに答えなさい。

Lura is staying in Akiko’s house. She is from New York. She is talking about Japanese food with Akiko. She likes it very much.

There are many Japanese restaurants in New York. It is popular to eat sushi, tempura, and sukiyaki. Lura had had these dishes in New York. She likes sushi best of all, but it is very expensive in New York.

She is very glad to find that Akio’s mother is making tempura and sushi for dinner.

(Ask) The conversation in Japanese is below. You are to select the best Japanese food among the options a) to e) and use the number that matches the best choice in the space provided. You may choose (a), (b), (c), (d), or (e).

Akiko: Do you like Japanese food, Lura?
Lura: Yes, I like it very much.
Akiko: What Japanese food do you like best?
Lura: I like (a. ) best.
Akiko: Where did you eat it?
Lura: In New York. It was very good, but it was very (b. ).
Akiko: Is it popular to (c. ) it in New York?
Lura: Yes, it is. There are many Japanese restaurants.
Akiko: Do you eat any other Japanese food in New York?
Lura: Yes, tempura and sukiyaki are very (d. ).
Akiko: Which do you like better?
Lura: I like tempura better.
Akiko: Oh, great. My (e. ) is making tempura and sushi for dinner.
Lura: Wonderful.

2. 次の英文を読んで、1 ～ 5 までのそれぞれの問いに対する答えとして最も適切なものを作り、それぞれの番号に書きなさい。
I got up at six. When I went downstairs, I found Mother in the kitchen. She was cooking breakfast. Mother usually gets up earliest in my family. I took my pet dog, Kuro for a walk before breakfast.

After breakfast I left home for school at seven, half an hour earlier than usual. On my way I met a good friend of mine, Masao. He said to me, “You are early, aren’t you, Akira?” “Yes. I have to finish my report before school begins,” I answered.

We had four classes in the morning and two in the afternoon. School was over at three. After school we did a few things. Some gave food to the birds. Some cleaned the rooms. I enjoyed playing soccer with my friends for two hours.

I got home about six. My brother, Hiroshi and father were talking in the living room. Hiroshi looked very happy. “I’ve become a regular member of the basketball team. I’ve long wanted to become one,” he said. I said to him, “Father was a very good player when he was young. You’ll become a good player like Father.” Father looked at me smiling. After dinner I studied math and read a story in easy English. It was very interesting.

(1) What time does Akira usually leave for school?

ア. He usually leaves for school at seven.
イ. He usually leaves for school at seven fifteen.
ウ. He usually leaves for school at six thirty.
エ. He usually leaves for school at seven thirty.

(2) Why did Akira leave for school earlier than usual?

ア. Because he got up early.
イ. Because he wanted to meet Masao.
ウ. Because he had to finish his report.
エ. Because he wanted to play soccer with his friends.

(3) Who is Hiroshi?

ア. He is Akira’s friend.
イ. He is Akira’s brother.
ウ. Akira’s brother is.
エ. He is Masao’s friend.

(4) When Akira got home, where did he find his brother and his father?

ア. He found them in the kitchen.
イ. The living room was.
ウ. They were in the kitchen.
エ. He found them in the living room.

(5) What sport does Hiroshi play?
ア．He plays tennis.
イ．He plays baseball.
ウ．He plays basketball.
エ．He plays soccer.

No. 3 is omitted.