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Response to Sakurai: The influence of translation on reading amount, proficiency and speed in extensive reading

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Sakurai (2015) raises an important issue of which native English speaking teachers may be unaware; Japanese learners of English typically translate into Japanese while reading English. Sakurai explained, "It is speculated that Japanese students naturally translate English into Japanese even when they are reading ER books that are supposed to be easier than their textbooks" (p. 98). Reading English may therefore equate with translation from English to Japanese. This practice of translation is not only carried out for difficult texts but is also extended to texts designed for Extensive Reading (ER).

Translating English texts into Japanese while reading is problematic because, as Neustupny (1987) explained, "The order of [Japanese] words and clauses is frequently the reverse of English order" (p. 171). Translation from a language with contrasting word order means that the process of translation necessitates a change from the original word order. Sakurai (2015) advises instructors to encourage their Japanese students "not to move their eyes in the Japanese word order from subject, object and then verb" (p. 109). This method of reading English in the order of first language (L1) Japanese has been identified by Kato (2006) as *kaeriyom*i, or to read from the end of the sentence to the beginning. Akaida (2009) has labelled it as *yakushiage*, which refers to the processing of the end of the sentence before the beginning. It is not accidental that those who have identified this tendency are native Japanese speaking teachers of English, because to non-Japanese speakers, processing English sentences in a contrasting word order appears counterintuitive. It is precisely because L1 English-speaking teachers may be unaware that Japanese students are processing English according to Japanese word order that Sakurai's insights are important for English language education in Japan.

Sakurai (2015) explained how ER can be exploited in order to counteract the tendency to translate when reading rather than process the text directly in English. In her study of 70 university students conducting ER, a decrease in the practice of translation while reading lead to improvements in the amount, speed, and comprehension of reading. "The results of these regression analyses showed that refraining from translating and thinking about grammar was related to the reading amount, improvement in the post-test scores and advancement in reading rate" (ibid, p. 106). Improvements in the amount, post-test scores and rate of reading are important gains, and suggest that a wider implementation of Sakurai's approach of refraining from translating and thinking about grammar while reading, in Japan is warranted.

Audio-Assisted Reading

Another recent study analysing improvements in reading skills using ER has been conducted by Chang and Millet (2015). They explained that most studies of ER in the development of second language reading fluency concern silent reading rather than the reading of audio-books. While Sakurai's study makes no mention of the use of audio-books, the contribution of ER to the improvement in the amount, speed and reading comprehension presented in her study is important. Nevertheless, it appears that Sakurai may have achieved even greater gains with the assistance of aural input. Chang and Millet addressed two of the same skills as Sakurai: namely, reading speed and comprehension. Their study of 64 Year 10 Taiwanese secondary school students over 26 weeks demonstrated that the reading speed of those reading while listening to audio-books grew to double that of those doing silent reading. Furthermore the reading comprehension of the group listening to audio-books was substantially better than those doing silent reading. These two studies may be contrasted in that they achieved improvements in reading speed and comprehension by different means. Sakurai achieved improvements in reading speed and comprehension by a decrease in translation while reading, whereas Chang and Millet achieved these same improvements by audio-assisted reading. Audio-assisted reading renders translation while reading difficult, because the audio-assisted reading forces the readers to process the text in its natural order.

Arguably, Sakurai's objectives, namely the amount, speed and comprehension of reading, could be attained not only by refraining from translation and grammatical analysis, but also by the implementation of audio-assisted reading. As discussed above, the alternative method of audio-assisted reading conducted by Chang and Millet (2015) demonstrated that listening to audio-books leads to a significant improvement in both reading speed and comprehension. Phonological processing of English in its natural order would discourage simultaneous translation in a contrasting word order. Studies of the role of phonological processing while reading, for both L1 and second language (L2) readers will now be considered.

Phonological Processing While Reading for L1 Readers

There is a relationship between L1 phonological processing and reading (Wood, Wade-Woolley, & Holliman, 2009). Sousa (2005) concurred: "Phonological coding skills are crucial for using and developing the ability of working memory to store representations of written words" (p. 49). Dehaene (2009) specified that it takes "forty milliseconds to transform spelling into sound" (p. 29). Similarly Sacks (2010) highlighted the interplay between the visual, auditory and other aspects of processing of the written word:

> Reading, of course, does not end with the recognition of visual word forms - it would be more accurate to say that it begins with this. Written language is meant to convey not only the sound of words but their meaning, and the visual word form area has intimate connections to the auditory and speech areas of the brain as well as to the intellectual and executive areas, and to the areas subserving memory and emotion. (Sacks, 2010, p. 63)

Phonological Processing While Reading for L2 Readers

The importance of phonological processing in reading is not confined to L1 readers of English. Goetry, Kolinsky, and Mousty (2009) explained that "phonological processing is a sine qua non of successful literacy development" (p. 169). They argue that L2 learners need to disregard the sound and symbol relationships of the L1 when reading the L2, in order to avoid the interference of the phonological coding of their L1. Furthermore, Walter (2008) explained the role of the 'phonological loop,' in which the short-term memory stores two seconds of what the listener has heard after the utterance. The phonological loop applies both to what has been heard and what has been read. Walter explained how L1 readers of alphabetical languages mentally store what they have read phonologically rather than visually, and calls for improved mental spoken representation to facilitate improved L2 reading. Rather than translating into Japanese, students should read and listen in English, and utilize the phonological loop to store what they have just read in their short-term memory.

Masuhara (2007) concurred in the need for the reading pedagogy to facilitate the students' phonological awareness of the written system: "The question is whether L2 learners, even at an advanced level, possess the kind of auditory images similar to those of L1 skilled readers? If not, the reading pedagogy has to provide such intervention" (2007, p. 28). In accordance with the findings of the above studies, Sakurai's study could have been enhanced with the inclusion of phonological processing in reading in the form of audio-assisted input.

Future Recommendations

Numerous studies such as those outlined above highlight the connection between phonological processing and reading by both L1 and L2 readers. Many graded reader collections include an audio component in the form of a CD. Xreading, an online platform for extensive reading, provides the text and audio for graded readers, and allows students to play the audio at five speeds. Students can therefore simultaneously read and listen to a text, and then listen to the same text without reading, in order to develop the skill of listening without the support of a written text. Sakurai (2015) has concluded that reading without translation and grammatical analysis leads to improvements in reading amount, speed and comprehension by Japanese learners of English. Given the critical importance of phonological processing in proficient reading, and the findings of Chang and Millet (2015) in support of audio-assistance, I argue that students not only refrain from translation and grammatical analysis, but that they also supplement their reading with audio-assistance.

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