

Response to the critiques of the Sakurai (2015) article, “The influence of translation on reading amount, proficiency, and speed in extensive reading”

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The paper “The influence of translation on reading amount, proficiency, and speed in extensive reading” (Sakurai, 2015) outlined the first six years of the official English education system and policy in Japan. It then discussed the efficacy of extensive reading (ER) followed by a distinction between reading and translation. Previous research indicated that translation inhibited the number of words to be read in ER programs from increasing (Sakurai, 2013). Therefore, this study explored the influence of translation in reading comprehension and reading rate which were considered to be interrelated with the reading amount. The analyses of data retrieved from university students in Japan suggested that refraining from translating English into Japanese during ER would lead to better comprehension of stories and a faster rate of reading as well as an increase in the number of words learners read in ER programs.

It should be admitted that there are occasions when the use of translation works effectively and can enhance second language (L2) acquisition in the EFL learning environment. For example, Folse (2004) and Lewis (1997) acknowledge that translation is valuable in L2 vocabulary learning. Research demonstrates that translation is useful in learning new vocabulary (Folse, 2004). It is to learners’ advantage when it comes to words with high content that tend to have direct translation in the first language (L1) such as “appendicitis” although expressions such as “You’re not kidding” cannot be satisfactorily translated (Lewis, 1997, p. 62). Likewise, translation can support L2 learning when difficult notions are dealt with. Yoshida and Yanase (2003) note that the use of Japanese can help students when they have to understand complex, abstract concepts in English without other non-verbal, concrete clues to rely on. Translation potentially results in making input more comprehensible to students (Yoshida & Yanase, 2003).

On the other hand, books containing words and notions that are beyond a student’s English ability are supposed to be avoided in ER programs. As the first of the ten principles of ER by Day and Bamford (2002) states, books with levels lower than a reader’s proficiency should be employed in ER programs. ER books should be simple, short, and easy enough for each learner. Day and Bamford advise that there should not be more than one or two unknown words per page in books for beginners and no more than five for intermediate-level students. Reading material that students choose to read extensively is expected to be written in vocabulary familiar to them. Another principle posited by Day and Bamford is that students read to enjoy and get information, so they should select books about what they are interested in. Therefore, in many cases, readers are comfortable with the topics of books they read and they can comprehend the content sufficiently. With this kind of reading material, students are likely to feel relaxed rather than

anxious. The instructor in an ER program has a responsibility to supply and recommend appropriate books for individual students considering their levels and interests. Another role of the teacher is to direct students to consult a dictionary after they finish a book if they want to confirm their guess of the meaning of an unknown word.

ER should not be the only reading instruction that learners receive. According to Nuttall (1982), reading consists of intensive reading, extensive reading, scanning, and skimming. These four components in a good balance are vital for L2 acquisition. It is possible for intensive reading classes to include translation activities such as those implemented by Lee, Schallert, & Kim (2015) and Dagiliené (2012). In the study by Lee et al., students were provided with a slightly demanding, 100- to 200-word long reading passages, and they translated it alone or with classmates using dictionaries. The teacher was not to give grammar explanations during this process but could otherwise answer their questions. Dagiliené prepared for articles and passages that were adequate and intriguing to the students and had them engage in various translation activities. For instance, they discussed the topic and analyzed the most difficult parts in pairs and groups. These student-centered, extended translation activities can work favorably in intensive reading programs under some conditions. First, all students and the teacher in a group need to share the same L1. Also, the efficacy of the activities may depend on how close the student's L2 is to their L1. How much class time is allocated for translation activities has to be carefully planned as well.

What English learners in Japan need is balance. Most university students in Japan have received intensive reading instruction for 6 years in their previous education. Yoshida and Yanase (2003) claim that the classroom at school is the only place where most Japanese people have a chance to study English. They report that typical Japanese spend 315 hours for 3 years in junior high school, 525 hours for three years in senior high school and 240 hours for two years in university studying English in class. This does not offer satisfactory input for L2 acquisition. ER can compensate for what English learners in Japan are lacking.

Moreover, balance between accuracy and fluency is essential in L2 learning. Dr. Kato Lamb acquired 17 foreign languages on her own by reading dictionaries, studying grammar and reading extensively (Krashen & Kiss, 1996). This report is identical to the outcomes of a study by Takeuchi (2003). He investigated strategies that successful English learners employed in their English learning, and found that they all listened to and read English intensively and extensively. Most students in Japan focus on accuracy at school in the beginning of formal education. Thus, it is beneficial that adult learners in tertiary education engage in activities to facilitate fluency. One viable solution is ER.

In order to increase fluency and the amount of input, ER books with CDs can be utilized if it is financially feasible to have a wide selection of them. No research that proves the effect of extensive listening exists in the Japanese context to the author's knowledge. However, it is speculated that books with audio recorded at the appropriate reading rate inhibit students from stopping at words that they have trouble pronouncing.

In conclusion, translation can be utilized in the English classroom as long as it grants opportunities for active learning. However, students should be discouraged from translating

English sentences into Japanese during ER. A great number of studies have proved that ER improves various aspects of English (Day & Bamford, 1998; Krashen, 2004). In order to maximize the power of ER, learners should read a lot. They can read a lot if they read at a fast rate. Enjoyment will motivate them to read more. It is believed that ER in this manner will contribute to gain in fluency not to mention the amount of input.

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