The Effects of Oral Reading for Japanese Junior High School Students

In this paper, I would like to clarify the characteristics of a group of Japanese junior high school students' awareness and strategies of oral reading in the learning of English by using a questionnaire and investigate the results in terms of the difference of the participants' sexual difference and their grade levels of English proficiency. The number of the students was 67 and they were learning English at a junior high school in Kobe city in Hyogo prefecture. The questionnaire employed in this study was virtually the same as the questionnaire adopted in Shinzawa (2004) which in itself was a combination of question items from earlier studies on oral reading in the learning of English by Japanese learners and his own originals. Since Shinzawa (2004) conducted his questionnaire with junior high school students in Niigata prefecture, my present paper can be seen as a replication of his study.

The present paper consists of 5 chapters, each of which is concerned with the respective theme as follows.

Chapter 1 presents the introduction of this thesis. I have the following three research questions. Research question 1: Are there any differences in the results of response between boys and girls? Research question 2: Are there any differences in the results of response between the students with high grade levels of English proficiency and those with low grade levels of English proficiency? Research question 3: I will conduct a factor analysis in order to find out the relationships among question items in the questionnaire. I think it is valuable to clarify them.

Chapter 2 reviews the previous studies on the characteristics of Japanese junior high school students' awareness and strategies of oral reading. Oral reading is one of the techniques for reading English. This method is considered to be effective for Japanese learners of English. Nakashima (2002), for example, thought that oral reading was a fundamental action to master English. After the training, junior high school students were able to get the listening and reading high ability. On the other hand, Tenma (1989) insists that silent reading is more suitable for understanding the meanings of sentences than oral reading. I want to find out which is more effective to master English. Asano (2001) insisted that oral reading was the most important activity required to enhance English proficiency. Also I want to identify the effectiveness of oral reading which enhances English proficiency.

Chapter 3 presents the method of the present survey. First, I want to make clear the importance of English oral reading for Japanese junior high school students, and the relationship between the effectiveness of English oral reading
and the general English ability. Second, I have the three research questions already mentioned in Chapter 1. Third, the study was conducted with the students in a public junior high school located in Kobe city. The number of the participants was 67, all ninth graders, in two out of the five classes in the school. Of the 67 participants, 38 were boys and 29 were girls. Fourth, the questionnaire employed in the present research had two kinds of questions, Questions A and Questions B. Questions A asked the participants about their attitude toward studying English and their grade levels of English. Questions B asked about their awareness and strategies of oral reading in the learning of English. Fifth, the questionnaire of my study was conducted in early May, 2010. It was conducted in two classes for about 50 minutes during regular English classes. Sixth, statistical significance testing and a factor analysis of the responses on the questionnaire were conducted to reveal the characteristics of awareness of strategies of oral reading among the participants.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the survey. I analyzed the responses in three ways. First, the responses were compared between boys and girls. Second, the responses were compared between the students with good English grades and the students with poor English grades. The English grade of each participant reflects his or her grade of English decided by his or her English teacher of the school. Third, a factor analysis was conducted on the responses of the participants. The results showed the following things. Boys are more fond of English and good at English than girls. The group with upper grades is more fond of English and good at English than the lower group. The students who conduct oral reading are able to read texts of English accurately and rapidly. The results of factor analysis identified the following 5 factors:

Factor 1: Accuracy and Rapid Reading of Words  
Factor 2: Difficulty with Sounds during Oral Reading  
Factor 3: Strategies toward Oral Reading  
Factor 4: Attention Points during Oral Reading  
Factor 5: Ideal Rapid Reader

Chapter 5 presents the conclusion of the survey. First, in statistical significance testing, I compared the results between girls and boys and between participants with high English grades and those with low grades. I conclude that the boys in this study practice more and more good at English than the girls. And I conclude that the students in this study with high grade levels of English proficiency practice oral reading activities more and more good at English than those with low grade levels of English proficiency. Second, this study extracted five factors to characterize the awareness of and strategies for oral reading for the junior high school students in this study. The result is that the students who conduct oral reading are able to read texts of English more accurately and rapidly.

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