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by Issy Yuliasri

NOTE-TAKING IN INTERPRETING CLASS

Issy Yuliasri

Abstract: Note-Taking is said to be helpful in undertaking interpreting task, particularly in consecutive interpreting. As research found out, note-taking was proved to be 'a necessary helper' in consecutive interpretation (Meifang, 2012). In informal research in two interpreting classes it was found out that for majority of the students note-taking was helpful. However, in consecutive interpreting practice some students found that it was distracting and made the interpreting task even more difficult because they had to do two tasks at the same time, i.e. listening to the speech to be interpreted and thinking about what to write. In addition, they also claimed that they had difficulties in using their notes for accomplishing the interpreting task. More practices were then given on how to take notes during the interpreting task. The factor which students claimed to be intimidating was also eliminated. This paper will present how the note-taking practice works in the interpreting classes.

Keywords: *note-taking, interpreting*

Introduction

This classroom action research was done in two "Interpreting" classes at the English Department of the Faculty of Languages and Arts, the State University of Semarang (Unnes), Indonesia, 2014. The classes consisted of 23 and 19 sixth semester students of the English Literature Program respectively. The course was designed to introduce the students with the task of consecutive interpreting (both English-Indonesian and Indonesian-English) so that when they finish their study later on the will be familiar with the challenge of such task. In this semester the students had acquired some courses that were important to accomplish interpreting task such as intensive grammar, elementary grammar, intermediate grammar, advanced grammar, intensive listening, listening comprehension, lexical studies, intensive speaking, speaking for general purposes, public speaking, etc. However, most of the students had no prior experience of undertaking interpreting task or practice.

In the first meeting of the interpreting course, students were facilitated to practice an informal interpreting task. Two students performed a pre-designed role play representing a dialogue between an English-speaking person and an Indonesian. The third student was asked to interpret the dialogue. Firstly, the student acting as the interpreter did the interpreting task incorrectly: she retold or made indirect statement of what the speakers said. This happened in both classes. After model interpreting or demonstration was given by the teacher, the following students performed much better. In the second meeting, students performed interpreting task of informal dialogues even better. However, in the following meeting, when monologue of a more formal nature was given, students seemed to face difficulties. It was with this background that note-taking was then introduced to help the students with their interpreting practice.

Previous research found out that note-taking was proved to be 'a necessary helper' in consecutive interpretation (Meifang, 2012). According to Mazzei (NA) in note-taking it is the function and the structure of the speech's parts that are noted, and not the content. Dissecting the speech involves the following: analyzing its structure and progression, analyzing the communicative functions of different parts of the speech, recognizing the main ideas and secondary ones, and spotting the links between them. Albl-Mikasa (2008) suggests that consecutive notes consist of three highly interdependent text representations, i.e. the source text, notation text, and target text. They are different in language, called source language, notation language, and target language. They are also different in explicitness; the source text is said to be explicit, the notation text is said to be reduced, and the target text is said to be expanded. However, they represent the same explicit content or explicature.

Research Method

This classroom action research was done in two cycles. In the first cycle, students were given some exercises of consecutive interpreting of different types of texts: general, education, health, environment, and speech. The interpreting task was done two ways (English-Indonesian and Indonesian-English). They were allowed to take notes.

In the second cycle, after some practices were given among which was taken from Mazzei (NA), and with minimized intimidating factor by not warning the students of what they were supposed or not supposed to write. Students were given more freedom to take note in their own ways after learning and experiencing note-taking practices.

Findings and Discussion

In the first cycle, note-taking was introduced. They were allowed to take notes while interpreting to help them cope with the long utterances to interpret. They were told to take note of just the important ideas and not the whole utterances. However, many of them seemed to have even more difficulties; they could only interpret little part of the utterances and missed a lot of messages. Although some of the students claimed that note-taking was helpful in their interpreting task, some other found difficulties in taking notes and complained of the disturbance caused by the "double tasks", focusing on or listening to the source speech and taking notes of the source speech. This was in line with what Andrew Gillies suggested as cited in Mazzei (NA): "If you are thinking too much about how to note something, you will listen less well". Moreover, they somehow felt intimidated with the teacher's instruction to take note only of the important ideas and not the whole text. They claimed that they got confused of what to write. This was revealed in the classroom discussion after some practices. Their performance was also poor and average score was unsatisfactory. This was then anticipated in the second cycle.

With more model note-taking, and with more freedom given to students to take notes in their own ways for less intimidation, students seemed to perform a bit better in the second cycle, especially dealing with numbers, years, names, and abbreviations (including those of the names of institutions). However, they still found difficulties in focusing on the long utterances to interpret. Also, they still could not cope with difficult technical/specialized terms and unfamiliar words, especially when the interpreting task was from English to Indonesian. This proved that listening to English utterances and mastery of vocabulary seemed to be the weak areas for most of the students. This was further proved from the sight interpreting task given to them at the end of the semester. Most students did well and more fluently in sight interpreting English text into Indonesian, which showed their better performance because of their reading of the text instead of listening to it. However, when it came to difficult expressions or terminologies they halted, which showed that vocabulary mastery was also an obstacle in their interpreting performance.

Questionnaire

At the end of the semester the students were given questionnaires to find out how they responded to or perceived note-taking in interpreting. 37 out of the 42 students responded to and returned the questionnaires.

In response to the question on what their FIRST impression of interpreting with note-taking, 18 out of 37 students (49%) claimed that note-taking distracted them from their focus on listening to the utterances to interpret. Also, they considered it disturbing and confusing. They further claimed that they lost a lot of content of the utterances to be interpreted because they had to think of what to write while also think of what to listen. Meanwhile, 15 students (40%) claimed that note-taking was helpful, especially to deal with difficult words or terms, names, and numbers. Four students said that note-taking was distracting but also helpful to remember difficult words and other details.

Being asked whether note-taking was useful in undertaking English-Indonesian interpreting task, 34 students (92%) said it was, while only 3 students (8%) said it was a little bit useful, and none of the students said it was not useful. This is in contrast with their first impression of note-taking in interpreting as described in their response to question 1 above. This also suggests that the note-taking exercises have changed their opinion of note-taking in interpreting.

A further question was asked in what aspects/situations note-taking was useful, the respondents replied that it was useful in helping them remember the following: technical terms, names, years, numbers, unfamiliar words, long sentences, technical/ specialized terms, statistics, abbreviations, and complex sentences.

In order to see whether there was a difference in the case of Indonesian-English interpreting task, a further question was asked whether note-taking was useful in undertaking Indonesian-English interpreting. 27 students (73%) claimed that it was useful, whereas the rest 7 students (19%) claimed that it was not useful. Those who claimed it was not useful commented that note-taking was not necessary in Indonesian-English interpreting because of some different reasons as follows: they could easily understood the utterances; they thought it was disturbing; and it was difficult to find the equivalence of some Indonesian terms. The rest 3 students (8%) claimed that note-taking was sometimes useful but some other times was not useful, depending on the text to interpret.

In response to the question in what aspects/ situations note-taking was useful in Indonesian-English interpreting, the students mentioned the following:
Vocabulary with difficult equivalence, numbers, names, years, long sentences, technical terms, foreign names, abbreviations, legal texts, grammar, word orders, unfamiliar words, and aspect of time.

Being asked which was more difficult, English-Indonesian or Indonesian-English interpreting, 8 students (22%) claimed that Indonesian-English interpreting was more difficult, whereas 28 students (75%) claimed that English-Indonesian interpreting was more difficult, and only 1 student (3%) claimed that either way was difficult.

A further question was asked whether interpreting was a difficult task, 30 students (81%) answered yes and 7 students (19%) answered no. Those who answered yes said that interpreting needed to think fast, concentration, mastery of the subject matter, mastery of vocabulary, while they could not open a dictionary. Those who said no believed that interpreting could be fun as long as they knew the vocabulary, could think fast, and it would depend on the text to be interpreted.

When a question was asked whether the note-taking exercises made them know better how to take note in interpreting, 33 students (89%) said yes and only 4 students (11%) said no. Those who said yes believed that the note-taking exercises made them aware of which ideas were important to take note of and which were not. They also believed that the exercises made them used to it. Those who said no argued that note-taking disturbed their concentration and that speed of writing could not catch up with the speed of the spoken utterances.

Another question was posed to find out whether note-taking helped the students in undertaking the Indonesian-English and/ or English-Indonesian interpreting more easily, 26 students (70%) said it helped in both Indonesian-English and English-Indonesian interpreting, 3 students (8%) said it helped make English-Indonesian interpreting easier, 4 students (11%) said it did not help make interpreting easier, 1 student (3%) said it helped a little, and 3 students (8%) said it sometimes helped but sometimes not. This shows that to majority of the students note-taking was helpful in both Indonesian-English as well as English-Indonesian interpreting.

The last question was given to find out which was easier, consecutive interpreting or sight interpreting, 33 students (89%) claimed that sight interpreting was easier and 1 student (3%) claimed that consecutive interpreting was easier, whereas 3 students (8%) claimed that both were equally difficult.

Conclusion

Note-taking exercises in interpreting classes helped the students perform better when dealing with numbers, years, names, and abbreviations (including those of the names of institutions). However, it did not help much with unfamiliar words or expressions, especially technical/specialized terms. Also, it was found out that English-Indonesian interpreting was more difficult than Indonesian-English interpreting because of the listening factor. In the case of the sixth semester students under study, they could cope with interpreting of informal dialogues, but still need a lot of practice for better interpreting of more formal texts.

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Biodata

Issy Yuliasri is a lecturer at the English Department, Faculty of Languages and Arts, the State University of Semarang (Unnes), Indonesia. Her interests include ELT and translation. She has attended international conferences on ELT and translation in Indonesia and overseas. Her articles were published in AWEJ and T&I Review Journals.

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