

Interpreter Training in English Language Education in Japan

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is two-fold: first is to argue that interpreting exercises can be regarded as a good example of Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT); second to claim that incorporating interpreting training can be an effective way of facilitating the learner's active and independent learning both in and outside of language classrooms. It first presents different scenarios of how interpreting, as well as translation, is (or is not) incorporated in language education in Europe on the one hand and in Japan on the other. Next, it describes TBLT and how interpreting can present a good example of TBLT practice. It then discusses if learning interpreting could serve as an effective method for language learning in a university setting. A small study is presented to support the argument.

1. Translation and Interpreting in Language Education

Translation has long been neglected in language teaching theory since the so-called 'direct method' came into fashion. According to Cook (2010), it is not clear who first coined the term. Cook (2010, p. 7) calls "any and all teaching which excludes the students' own language in the classroom", including translation, 'Direct Method'. In the introduction of *Translation in Language Teaching* (2010), which attempts to revive translation in language teaching and learning, Cook reminds us, "Translation in language teaching has been treated as a pariah in almost all the fashionable high-profile language teaching theories of the 20th century" (2010, p. xv). The impact of *Translation in Language Teaching* on foreign language education researchers is noted by

Pym (2017), a translation studies scholar, who claims that, thanks to Cook, the chasm between the area of translation studies and that of language teaching seems to have become less significant. Laviosa (2014) devotes one chapter of her book, *Translation and Language Education*, on 'The Revival of Translation' (pp. 25-44), starting it with, "Over the past two decades there has been renewed interest in translation as part of language learning and teaching" (p. 25). It is fair to say that translation has been neglected for about a half century as a teaching method and only recently has it attracted attention from applied linguistics researchers.

In Japan, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (hereinafter, MEXT) presented a new Course of Study in 2009, which emphasizes the need for improving Japanese students' communicative skills in English. The MEXT's Course of Study, or *Gakushuu shidou youryou*, is the official guideline for all Japanese elementary and secondary schools to follow. This could pressure schools and teachers to abandon more traditional approach of *yakudoku*, or translation through reading. Moreover, the new Course of Study states that English classes should be conducted principally in English in high school (p. 8), further undermining the importance the students' first language could have in their foreign language learning. MEXT then went on to focus more on teaching and learning of 'communicative' skills in English (MEXT, 2014), which further downplayed translation as a legitimate teaching and learning approach. The instruction for the teachers in secondary education to use English as the medium of instruction (which the MEXT later clarified that they did not mean for the teachers to use *only* English but as much English as possible) also implied that using the students' first language, Japanese, as a resource is not desirable.

Interpreting, which some may regard as 'oral translation', and interpreter training have suffered the same fate to translation studies in European contexts (Komatsu, 2012b). Interpreter training in Europe has been geared towards graduate school programs and is not a common practice in undergraduate programs. Many publications on interpreting reiterate that high level of mastery of the two languages involved - the source language, or the language

they interpret from, and the target language, or the language they interpret into - is a prerequisite to those who want to train to become interpreters. For example, according to Nolan (2012), “Both translator and the interpreter must have a thorough mastery of the target language, as well as a very good passive understanding of the source language or languages they work with” (p.3). The pioneer of interpreting studies, Danica Seleskovitch stipulates that, “An interpreter must know his languages thoroughly before he begins to practice the profession, because he cannot learn or improve his knowledge of a language while expressing the meaning of the message at 150 words a minute” (1998, p.67). While she acknowledges that there are many schools which “claim to teach both language and interpretation at the same time”, she doubts the outcome, stating that “language-learning exercises can be can only impede the learning of interpretation” (p. 67). She also believes that high standards of the would-be interpreter’s linguistic knowledge is “prerequisite” (p. 67). As such, they must have acquired a command of their language as “perfect”, and they must have acquired the command of the foreign language “at an early age and then followed this with studies at foreign schools or universities” (p. 67).

Since it is taken for granted that whoever starts to train to become an interpreter is already fluent in the languages they work with – one at a mother-tongue speaker level and the other almost as good – Daniel Gile’s *Basic Concepts and Models for Interpreter and Translator Training*, Revised edition, does not provide even a chapter covering the topic of how to improve the future interpreters’ weaker language (2009)¹.

On the other hand, the would-be interpreter is not expected to have mastered such high standards with their weaker language in Japan. For example, according to the webpage information provided by Simul Academy, one of the most prominent interpreter schools in Japan, the minimum requirement of the candidates’ English language proficiency for their entry-level interpreting course is somewhere between CEFR’s higher B2 and lower C1, which is far from ‘perfect’. This could be explained by the fact that it is more difficult to find fluent bi- or multilingual speakers in Japan than in

many European countries. For a majority of Japanese would-be interpreters today, it is only when they became a junior high school students that they started studying English under the Japanese education system. Demographic statistics released in 2017 by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare shows that only 3.3 % of marriages in 2016 were between a Japanese national and a foreigner, a trend they note to have continued in the past three years, which in turn suggests that there would be a very limited number of people growing up in a bilingual setting. It is therefore difficult to expect most of the would-be interpreters in Japan to have mastered their passive language from “an early age”, as Seleskovitch describes (p. 67).

Special training for would-be interpreters aside, interpreter training methods have also been practiced in Japan’s English language education. Textbook publisher, Nan’un-do released *Developing Interpreting Skills for Communication* in 1999, followed by *Applying Interpreting Skills to Communicate* in 2006. These books are designed to incorporate some interpreting activities in English language classrooms in tertiary education. The study by Someya, Saito, Tsuruta, Tanaka and Ino (2005) suggests that there are at least 105 universities offering a total of 139 interpreting courses. Although there is no data showing the level of English language proficiency of the university students taking those courses, it cannot be that high, considering the fact that the average score of university students for the official TOEIC tests is 568 and that for the TOEIC IP tests is 443 (The Institute for International Business Communication, 2016), which roughly place them right between CEFR A2 and B1. Against that background, Tatsuya Komatsu, a prominent conference interpreter and interpreter trainer, has repeatedly claimed that interpreting training is a valid way to teach and learn a foreign language and that interpreter training methods can help those average Japanese people better learn English (2005, 2012a, 2012b).

Commercial publications seem to have embraced interpreting training as a valid study method. Monthly journals such as *CNN English Express from Asahi Press* and *English Journal* published by Alc, targeting mostly adult learners who are interested in studying English on their own, often features

interpreter training methods such as shadowing and sight translation in their issues and have professional interpreters write articles for them. For example, Miyuki Tanaka, associate professor at Daitobunka University and an instructor on their interpreting studies course, has written a featured article titled '*Saikyo no risuningu gakushu-ho*' [The best listening method ever] (translation mine) for *CNN English Express*, August 2014, in which she provides the readers with interpreter training methods such as sight translation and shadowing (pp. 28-29)². *English Journal*, September 2013, ran a rather long article by Tomoyuki Shibahara, a prominent conference and media interpreter, titled '*Dooji tsuuyakusha Shibayara Tomoyuki jikiden! Supiikingu gakshuu no oudou*' [Simultaneous interpreter Tomoyuku Shibata teaches you the royal road to mastering speaking skills] (translation mine). Shibahara teaches the readers how to practice dictation, shadowing and paraphrasing, all of which are commonly used in interpreter training.

The significance of interpreter training and/or the perception that an interpreter can be a good model for language learners is reflected in other articles as well. *English Journal* January 2017 runs a four-page article (pp.8-11) about an interpreter and his interpreter company specializing in the topic of rugby football '*Nihon no ragubii o sasaeru ishoku no desumetaru tsuuyakusha*' [Death-metal-lover-turned-interpreter supports Japan's rugby]. Conference interpreter, Mike Sekine, writes a two-page column in the *English Journal* titled '*Tsuuyaku no genba kara*', or 'straight from the site of interpreting', every month, which has been running for more than three years and its 39th appearance is in the June 2018 issue.

In addition, many commercial books whose main target audience is adult English learners are written by interpreters, teaching the readers how to study English using the training methods employed by interpreters. This again seems to suggest that many people look up to interpreters as their learner model, believing that the interpreter training methods are effective in helping them improve their English language skills. Just to name a few of those books: Tamura's *Doji tsuyakusha ga atama no nakade isshunnde yatteiru eiyakujutsu ripuroseshingu* [Reprocessing and on-the-spot

translation employed by simultaneous interpreters] (2011), Komatsu's *Eigo de hanasu hinto: tsuuyaku-sha ga oshieru jotatsuho* [Tips for speaking English: taught by a professional interpreter] (2012a), Shinzaki and Ishiguro's *Eigo spūikingu kurinikku: tsuuyaku kunrenho de kitaeru chiteki eigoryoku* [A remedy for English speaking skills: improving your intellectual English skills by interpreting training methods] (2013), Sekiya's *Anata no eigo benkyouhou ga garari to kawaru: Douji tsuuyakusha no atama no naka* [This will drastically change the way you study: What is going on in a simultaneous interpreter's brain] (2016), and Kudo's *Doji tsuuyakusha no eitango anki mesoddo 111* [111 methods a simultaneous interpreter deploys to memorize English word] (2017)³.

In Japan, therefore, training methods for interpreters seem to have gained enough popularity and credibility among common English learners (if not among learners of other languages) - as opposed to the European context where interpreting training seems to be reserved for candidates selected to become professional conference interpreters - as an effective means to improve their English language proficiency.

2. Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Interpreter Training

Task-based Language Teaching, or TBLT, “adopts meaning-based, communicative tasks as the central unit” in language education (homepage of International Association for Task-Based Language Teaching, n.d.). Nunan (2004) notes the birth of TBLT not as a departure from the communicative language teaching (CLT) but as a development within Communicative Language Teaching, or CLT, which suggests that the primary focus of TBLT is on communication, even though TBLT involves ‘focus on form’ teaching and learning, as will be explained later. When translation, and possibly by extension, oral translation or interpreting, is not generally regarded as a communicative activity in a foreign language classroom, could interpreter training be adopted as TBLT?

2.1 How TBLT helps language learners⁴

The suggestion that a language learner's desire to learn a language and its subsequent success come from their "ideal L2 self" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009) resonates with what most language teachers have long felt themselves. TBLT is one way of providing a context where learners can find their ideal L2 selves when there is no immediate need for them to speak the target language (Matsumura, 2017). While Japan's Ministry of Education, Science and Sports is emphasizing the importance for secondary school students to be able to "communicate" in English, carrying out linguistic activities such as presentations and negotiations (MEXT 2014), those 'activities' remain somewhat vague (Matsumura, 2017). It is difficult for language learners to picture themselves carrying out some real life tasks using the target language and envision their ideal L2 selves without practical activities. If the teacher can incorporate more practical tasks in the classroom, it should help learners find them more 'real', encouraging them to see themselves as more authentic L2 users.

TBLT is not a novelty. It is possible to say that the first concept of TBLT dates back to the 1970s when the communicative language teaching blossomed (Matsumura, 2017). In 1980s, task-oriented teaching became widely adopted in classrooms, as exemplified by David Nunan's *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom* (1989). Then in 1990s, Jane Willis' *A Framework for Task-based Learning* (Willis, 1996) shed a new light on TBLT (Matsumura, 2017). It is also possible that Rod Ellis' *Task-based language teaching and learning* published by Oxford University Press in 2003 and David Nunan's *Task-based Language Teaching* published by Cambridge University Press in 2004 cemented the popularity of TBLT: since 2005, the biennial TBLT conference has been organized at different locations around the world.

Unlike many language classrooms where PPP - 'presentation' of the new words or grammar points are given, followed by students' 'practice' of them and 'production' of those learned words or grammar in a given communication activity - is the standard method, TBLT is more comprehensive in a sense

that it focuses more on how the learners can acquire knowledge and skills that will be expected of them outside the classroom (Matsumura, 2017). In other words, TBLT can provide the learner with an access to what may happen in a real world and what they may have to know and do to deal with probable challenges. It is expected that the learner will also learn to identify those challenges on their own, making them more independent learners.

Matsumura (2017, pp. 19-24) divides the process of TBLT in four steps: pre-task, input, focus on form on the spot, and instruction on points in grammar after the activity. The pre-task activities involve explanation of the activities themselves and the topics concerned, as well as providing background information. Willis (1996) argues that the teacher should not be too kind and helpful at this stage. What is important is for the learner to expand what they can do by actually carrying out the activities and not for them to perform the immediate activities smoothly (Matsumura 2017). Pre-task activities are also for the learner to learn from. In the second step, the learner is exposed to input. The teacher can provide elaborate explanation of certain key points or they can provide enriched input that includes repeated, specific linguistic features (Matsumura, 2017). This allows more 'customized' input (Long, 1981), helping the learner notice those specific features.

Next, during the 'focus on form' interactions, the teacher will be providing corrective feedback while the learner is engaged in an activity, ranging from just giving some hints and waiting for the learner to realize their mistakes to giving explicit explanation (Matsumura, 2017). Finally, there will be additional instruction on grammar points after the activity itself. Some may question why it is necessary if the 'focus on form' has already taken place. There are two advantages to providing further feedback after the activity. First, while the students are engaged in a classroom activity, it may be better to keep the interruption minimum and respect the flow of the activity (Willis, 1996). Second, in a real classroom setting where there are dozens of students, it may not be practical to stop each one of the students during the activity to give them feedback (Matsumura, 2017). It is also possible, as in Hondo's study (Hondo, 2015, cited by Matsumura, 2017), to let the students figure out their

own mistakes.

2.2 Interpreter training as TBLT

On the whole, a learner in a TBLT setting is encouraged to be an active participant in the learning activities. While translation and interpreting activities are not usually regarded as part of communicative language teaching and learning, an interpreting assignment can be an ideal task in that regard, because the students are trained to think and act like an interpreter who has an interpreting assignment, which requires that they be active and independent language learners. Once a topic is given, they have to undertake research to understand the topic and acquire necessary background knowledge, look up words that they think they will need to know and create their own vocabulary notes. Then, they listen to a speech, trying to understand the message and render the meaning in another language using all the resources at their disposal. Sometimes one of the students interprets in front of the class, in which case they receive feedback from the instructor and/or from classmates on the spot. At other times they have their performance recorded, and they will listen to their recorded performance and give self and/or peer review, and try again.

3. Description of classroom practice

The practice presented here took place in a private university in Tokyo for the duration of fifteen weeks from September 2017 to January 2018 and each lesson was 90 minutes long. I was in charge of the class and brought my experience as a conference interpreter as well as that of once being a student at an interpreting school. A total of ten students who speak Japanese as their mother tongue or stronger language, participated. The language of instruction was Japanese, and unless it was necessary for the specific task (e.g., reading aloud a passage written in English), the students would discuss and do research in Japanese. The classroom used for this interpreting course was a CALL room, which allowed recording of their interpreting performance

as well as other exercises such as shadowing and read-aloud exercises. For the main interpreting assignments over the fifteen weeks, the course focused on two themes: guide-interpreting at tourist attractions for high school students from Australia and working at a company seminar for new graduates in Hong Kong.

Every class presented the students with a variety of activities, from routine interpreter training exercises such as paraphrasing, shadowing, oralization, and note-taking practice, to actual interpreting exercises. Paraphrasing helps the learner realize that there is more than one way to express what they need to describe. Shadowing is a practice where students listen to a speech and to overlappingly repeat it. It helps improve the students' listening comprehension skills as well as their speaking skills with their weaker language (Ito-Bergerot, Tsuiuta & Naito, 2009, p.53). Oralization is an exercise using a written passage in rather bookish language and represent the message orally in a more accessible language. This is considered one form of 'interpreting': interpreting of a written text into a spoken text (Ito-Bergerot, Tsuruta & Naito, 2009, pp. 51-52). Note-taking for interpreting is very different from the kind of note-taking the students do in their other university classes so that interpreting textbooks usually devote at least one chapter on it (e.g., Ito-Bergerot, Tsuruta & Naito, 2009; Komatsu, 2005). More than a few books are dedicated to the topic of the art and craft of note-taking, first of which would be Jean-François Rozan's *Note-taking in Consecutive Interpreting*, published in 1956, and the latest Andrew Gillies' *Note-taking for Consecutive Interpreting* (2017). Therefore, the students were engaged in a topic-centered interpreting assignment that ran for several weeks as well as more specific, language-centered tasks such as shadowing and oralization in every class. At the end of each class, the students spend a few minutes to fill in the reflection sheet prepared by the instructor, writing down what they found interesting, surprising, or confusing. The instructor writes some comments and give the sheet back to the students at the beginning of the next class.

In the first lesson, the students were told that the goal of the course was not for them to become good interpreters; instead, they were expected to

learn how to think and act like an interpreter at work, and that they would learn what is expected of a professional interpreter from trial and error. After each exercise in every lesson, the students were asked to talk about what they had learned from the exercise in pairs/groups, which would be then shared with the whole class. They were told to do research for the interpreting task without detailed instruction, and it was expected that they would gradually learn to anticipate what may come up and prepare themselves accordingly.

For the first major interpreting task (Lessons 3-8), which is to function as a tour guide around Asakusa and the Meiji Shrine, students were first given a set of Japanese-English bilingual explanations on some tourist attractions in Asakusa and Meiji Shrine as well as about Buddhism and Shintoism. Then they would start their own research using the Internet and start making their own research notes and vocabulary lists. While the instructor also helped the students navigate possible resources, pointing out some useful Internet sites, the interference was kept minimum. For this Japanese-English interpreting task, the students also needed to improve their fluency in speaking English: therefore, shadowing was introduced. They also needed to learn how to make information presented in Japanese more translatable for them, so oralization practice was incorporated.

The second major interpreting task (Lessons 8-14) was from English into Japanese. The students were expected to interpret at a company seminar for new graduates organized by a Japanese company operating globally. This imaginary seminar was to take place in Hong Kong, inviting students from the East Asian region. While the seminar and the interpreting assignments were a product of imagination, a real company, Uniqlo, was used in order to make the students' learning experience as authentic as possible. It had the advantage of having most of the necessary materials – company profile, message from the CEO, business performance reports, career paths envisioned by their employees from various countries – available to the students from the Internet sources both in English and in Japanese. It was also one of the companies with which the students were most familiar. The students learned how to read charts both in English and in Japanese, as well as how to convert the

three-digit separator (English) into four-digit separator (Japanese) with numbers, and vice versa. They also worked on describing different kinds of charts. Note-taking exercises were incorporated. Towards the end, they were given a copy of PowerPoint slides which were to be used for the assignment so that they could learn how to use the materials for their preparation.

In the final lesson, the students took a Japanese-English and an English-Japanese interpreting tests (each speech was about seven minutes long). The performance accounted for only 10 per cent of their overall grade, while their classroom performance and homework assignments accounted for 75 percent and the term paper, 15 per cent. The emphasis was on the learning process and not the results; it was more important that students learn from experience than become good interpreters.

Below is a table summarizing main in-class activities and the kinds of tasks the students performed including homework. A cursory glance will reveal that there are many pair and group activities where the students are expected to learn without much assistance from the instructor. It is also evident that there is a lot of preparation the students have to do which requires that they act on their own expectations and anticipation as to what knowledge (knowledge of the topic, the genre, the general background, as well as language-related knowledge including vocabulary and certain points in grammar) they may need. In addition, it is also clear that students go through a series of preparation-trial-feedback-revision cycles. In short, from the fifteen-week course, they learn to be independent learners through trial and error and the whole process of acting like an interpreter. It is so that the students will be able to function as active language learners outside the classroom as well, which is essentially the goal of TBLT (Matsumura, 2017).

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| Lesson | Main classroom activities and tasks involved (including homework) |
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| 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor talks about her own experiences as an interpreter and provides a course overview. • Ss talk about what they know about interpreter/interpreting as well as translator/translation. • ‘Pre-task’ in a bigger picture: Ss had the opportunity to think about interpreting and interpreters, and what they have to know in order to interpret successfully. |
| 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ss attempt a sample version of guide interpreter examination. • Ss discuss and learn what a guide interpreter should know and why. • Ss practice shadowing using Severn Suzuki’s speech at the Rio Summit, 1992, retrieved from an online source (We Canada, 2012). • Ss listen to the recording of their shadowing and self-review. They also receive feedback from the instructor. |
| 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ss try the shadowing again: self- and peer-review. • Ss listen to their own and classmates’ shadowing performance and give each other feedback. • Using a bilingual guidebook of Tokyo’s main attractions, Ss compile their own vocabulary lists. • Ss keep asking themselves, “How do I say this in English?” while compiling the vocabulary list. • Ss are also told to do some more research on their own but with no specific instructions. |
| 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ss share their research results and receive feedback . • From the feedback on their own research, Ss learn what kinds of research is required of an interpreter. • There are interactions on what kind of additional research the Ss have done, followed by the instructor pointing at some useful Internet sites for this assignment. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ss are presented with an 'Assignment Sheet' which looks just like the real one a professional interpreter gets for their assignment, with information such as the date and the venue, the client, specific details, etc.• Based on the information on the Assignment Sheet, Ss expand and/or modify their vocabulary list and other notes.• Paraphrasing exercise (Japanese) is introduced.• In the paraphrasing exercise, Ss learn to change the original Japanese utterances easier to be interpreted into English.• Ss engage in a short interpreting exercise introducing Asakusa.• Additional modification is made to their vocabulary list after the interpreting exercise. |
| 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ss perform a seven-minute consecutive interpreting about Asakusa without taking any notes.• Ss' performances are recorded, they listen to the recording and make comments.• Ss give a one-minute speech in English introducing Asakusa to the class, which will be peer reviewed. It is followed by feedback from the instructor.• The feedback on the Ss' speeches includes not only comments on their English but also if the information and wording may be ideal for the target audience (in this case a group of high school Ss from Australia).• Dictation of Ss' own performance is their homework. They also have to come up with better interpreting.• Ss learn note-taking skills for interpreting.• Oralization exercise is introduced.• Dictation of Ss' own performance is their homework. They also have to come up with better interpreting.• For the next class Ss start new research about Meiji Shrine.• From the oralization exercise, Ss learn how to process a chunk of given |

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| | <p>words and sentences and make it their own.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One news paper article is given to Ss as oralization exercise homework. |
| 6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ss compare their dictation results and talk about their weaknesses, followed by the feedback from the instructor. • Ss attempt the seven-minute Asakusa interpreting for the second time and see how the revised version works and again receive some feedback. • Oralization homework is checked in pairs and in class. • Ss share their research they did on Meiji Shrine. • The instructor makes a short speech about Meiji Shrine and the Ss practice note-taking as well as learn what they may have missed in the research. • For homework, Ss do more research on Meiji Shrine and make a better vocabulary list. • Homework also include the Ss reflecting on how they can improve their note-taking skills by reading a chapter on note-taking from <i>Yokuwawaru chikuji tsuyaku</i> (2009), |
| 7 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ss compare their research and vocabulary lists on Meiji Shrine and perform interpreting in class, receive feedback. • Ss try a seven-minute interpreting task, taking notes. This is recorded for further study. • Ss' recorded interpreting performance is used for their homework: they need to dictate their own performance and come up with better interpreting. • Ss are given a new topic: a company seminar for new graduates held in Hong Kong. They receive an assignment sheet for this task, which specifies the time and venue, the client name, the audience and the equipment used, etc. In order to make the situation as authentic as possible, the company the Ss do research on is an actual one operating globally. • Ss exchange ideas and experiences as to what is talked about in |

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| | <p>company seminar and what the objectives are, and start doing research about the company.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ss do their research and make up their own vocabulary list. They have to anticipate what may come up in the speech. |
| 8 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ss share their own evaluation on their Meiji Shrine interpreting performance and receive feedback from the instructor.• Ss share their research and vocabulary list for the Uniqlo interpreting assignment.• Instructor shows the Ss several company websites that are presented in English and Japanese, helping them find what they may find useful.• Ss learn how numbers are used extensively in company reports and how to convert the three-digit separator and the four-digit separator.• Instructor gives a short explanation on the three-digit separator and four-digit separator, or how numbers are differently read in English and Japanese, and Ss try converting numbers given in English into Japanese and vice versa.• Ss are given a copy of a PowerPoint slide with a pie chart with a title (all information provided in English).• Homework includes getting ready to describe the pie chart in about ten sentences. |
| 9 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ss' research on Uniqlo is again checked by their peers and the instructor.• Ss' homework (describing a pie chart) is checked in class and feedback is given.• Ss learn and practice note-taking for consecutive interpreting.• Ss are given a copy of a PowerPoint slide with a bar chart with a title (all information provided in English), then they are told to prepare for an English-Japanese interpreting of the description in three minutes.• Instructor gives a short description (approx. 250 words) of the bar chart in five chunks. Ss take notes and interpret each chunk in pairs. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ss self- and peer-review their own notes and the instructor gives some feedback. • Ss try the same interpreting task, this time one student at a time and the instructor gives feedback, including some comments on linguistic errors. • Homework includes working on how to describe a figure containing more than one chart (all information in English). It is their homework to prepare a description in about ten sentences. |
| 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ss record their interpreting performance of different chart descriptions. They listen to the performance and self- and peer-review. Instructor also gives feedback on some linguistic errors. • Ss are given 12 PowerPoint slides that will be used for their Uniqlo assignment. First in pairs then in class, they discuss what kinds of research they have to do. • For homework Ss prepare a speech in Japanese based on the PowerPoint slides. Using the slides, they assume the position of the speaker. This helps them anticipate what will be talked about and how. |
| 11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ss share their own versions of possible speech scenarios in small groups. • Based on the above exercise Ss revise their vocabulary lists and research notes. • Ss need more practice with numbers, so a couple of interpreting tasks about world demographics involving large numbers in Japanese and in English are given. Ss take notes and interpret. |
| 12 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ss read some of the passages on the website aloud so that they can familiarize themselves with terminology they are not usually exposed to, such as <i>corporate identity</i>, <i>consolidate revenue</i>, <i>same-store sales</i>, <i>year-on-year growth</i>, etc. They are then told to find out the meanings of the terms they did not know. The instructor also helps them with this task, making corrections or adding more information where necessary. • Ss take a small passage from Uniqlo website that they think will be |

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| | <p>useful and work in pairs to interpret from English to Japanese.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ss conduct further research based on what they think they do not know and revise their research notes and vocabulary list. |
| 13 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ss interpret a speech introducing a company and its main products. It is recorded and they will peer- and self-review their own performance. • Ss conduct further research based on what they think they do not know and revise their research notes and vocabulary list. |
| 14 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ss perform a seven-minute interpreting on Uniqlo's company profile and performance, listen to the recording, make comments, receive feedback from the instructor. • In pairs, they come up with a series of 'mock' interpreting test passages. |
| 15 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class interpreting tests (about 10 minutes each) and reflection on what they have learned. • The tests include one Japanese-English interpreting assignment (guide-interpreting in Asakusa and Meiji Shrine) and one English-Japanese interpreting assignment (Uniqlo's company seminar). • Ss take home their recorded performance. Reflection on this test performance, as well as the 15-week worth comments they have written in the reflection sheet, is to be incorporated in their term paper. • An anonymous questionnaire form is given asking Ss what they most found helpful and interesting as well as their thoughts on if the class may have helped them become better learners of English. |

Table 1: The fifteen-week interpreting course description, Autumn term, 2017.

4. Discussion

First I would like to discuss if interpreting training could be an example of TBLT. Then, the question, could interpreter training really help students learn their weaker language, will be answered.

Today's English education programs in Japanese universities often start with English for general purposes, or EGP, in the first and second years and then move on to English for specific purposes, or ESP, where more task-oriented lessons are usually conducted and therefore can be an ideal arena for TBLT practice. Matsumura (2012) and Urano (2017) find such programs are not useful for students who do not continue to study English beyond their compulsory lessons, which usually finish at the end of the second year of their university education because those students will not have chance to experience ESP, losing out on opportunities to find what they have studied can actually be useful in real life. In other words, the students may be deprived of opportunities where they can visualize themselves as 'ideal L2 self', as described by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009). Urano (2017) also mentions the difficulty involved in finding appropriate target discourse and materials that can be used in an ESP class as well as the rarity of finding a group of students who share specific needs. Unlike ESP, however, interpreting training classes do not presuppose that the students have any prior knowledge or shared needs. Just like an interpreter given an assignment, only then the students start to learn the subject from scratch; just like an interpreter given an assignment, the 'need' is born when the students are given an assignment. The target discourse used for interpreting may not be authentic in its purest sense, but it can be real enough if open resources such as company websites and government statistics are to be used as part of the materials. As in the particular interpreting assignments described above, the students' own experiences of going on a guided tour or participating in a company seminar also helps them build background knowledge and anticipate what they need to know.

The preparation-trial-feedback-revision cycle that the students are constantly engaged in the interpreting course also seems to overlap with the four stages of TBLT: pre-task, input, focus on form intervention, and additional instruction on some points of linguistic expressions after the exercise. The students, when preparing for an interpreting task, receive some basic information about the task ahead. They will then actively collect resources on

their own for the input, which is customized for their interpreting assignment. There will be more input as they share their research results and receive feedback from their peers and the instructor. They will then try interpreting a given message, which also serves as a kind of input. Their performance will be evaluated and the instructor may give them some on-the-spot feedback: some will be more explicit (e.g., “The overall sales *grew*, not *grow*, in 2016.”) and others may be metalinguistic cues (e.g., “Wait, you are talking about the sales in 2016. That is in the past. You can’t use the present tense, *grow*. So..?”). Each performance will receive feedback afterwards. If it is recorded, the students will listen to their own performance and dictate it, identify errors on their own and come up with better alternatives; they often listen to their peer’s recorded performance and provide each other with feedback. The instructor also gives feedback to each one of the students, or sometimes to the whole class if there is a common trend in their mistakes. Language-oriented tasks such as shadowing and paraphrasing also involve the pre-task, input, focus on form intervention either on the spot or after the exercise. Overall, interpreting course could provide ample opportunity for TBLT without difficulties mentioned by Urano (2017).

Interpreting courses also could provide opportunities for the students to visualize their ideal L2 selves because the students come to the class prepared on their own and they can feel themselves working towards their own goals. Throughout the fifteen weeks, the students figure out that they need to be active users of English language. Each weeks students come to class with different research notes and different vocabulary lists, ‘customized’, as Long puts it (Long, 1981), to their needs. While the target task is share by all the students – to successfully interpret a given topic – how and what they prepare for it will be different. They learn that there is more than one way to achieve a goal and there are multiple answers. At the same time, they learn their strengths and weaknesses when they compare their notes and lists.

A key question is this: After the fifteen weeks, did the students’ proficiency in English improve? Since there were no opportunities to administer any English language tests before and after the course for comparison, it is not

possible to provide a definitive answer, although the questionnaire survey conducted in the last lesson may shed some light⁵.

All of the nine participants answered 'yes' to the question, 'Do you think that this course has helped you improve your English language skills?' It was followed by an open question, 'What kinds of exercise do you think were most helpful to improve what kinds of English language proficiency?'

Four of them said that, because they had the opportunity to speak English in class, their English speaking skills improved. One of them added that the idea of translation actually helped him/her to be more flexible in speaking in English, while another elaborated on that asking her/himself, 'How should I say this in English?' and learning that there are multiple answers to this question helped her/him speak in English more smoothly.

Three students mentioned that dealing with two different topics using real-world materials such as tourism boards' websites and company websites helped them familiarize themselves with topic-related expressions without having to drum them into their heads. One student added that such course contents were very 'practical'. Two of them identified specific interpreter training methods such as shadowing and oralization as helpful.

Two students specifically mentioned that the exercise of listening to and transcribing their own recorded interpreting performance was effective in improving their English. One of them said that the whole process 'clarified his/her own problems', which leads to his/her own 'awareness' of what s/he should do to improve his/her listening and speaking skills. The other said that, by identifying the mistakes s/he made with sentence structure and pronunciation, s/he 'was able to become aware of my own mistakes and felt ready to make improvements'.

The questionnaire also contained one question related to the students' L2 self. To the question which asked, "Can you now visualize yourself using English for work or for study?", five answered 'yes' and four said 'no'. The four students who answered 'no' to the question added that the interpreting class made them aware what they lack to work in an English speaking environment. Of the five students who answered 'yes', four mentioned the possibility of using

English for work: two students saying that they are now convinced that they can see English is a tool for business communication, one mentioning that they now know how to do research before meeting a client or business partner in his/her future career, and one saying that s/he is now speaking English for her part-time job with more confidence.

In addition, one student came to me after the final lesson and told me that her TOEIC score improved by nearly 100 points although she did not study specifically for the test and she thought it was because of the intensive English study the interpreting course provided. Since it was not the intended goal of the course and also because it is not possible to analyze what about the course may have contributed to her improved TOEIC score (Was it the business-oriented context in the second half? Was it the shadowing exercise that helped? Was it the act of interpreting?) – and don't forget that it was just one student -, it is difficult to pronounce that interpreting lessons can contribute to improving students' English language proficiency. However, if a larger sample of students can be studied and their English skills somehow measured before and after the fifteen-week course, it will yield some pertinent results. At least, it could be argued that most of the students are aware that they learned what it takes to be independent learners, which they should be able to apply to further studying English (or other foreign languages) in the future.

5. Conclusion

On the whole, recent trends in applied linguistics and English language teaching theory do not favor translation – and possibly interpreting as well - to be used in classrooms as a teaching and/or learning method. However, learning interpreting skills and learning how to face and deal with an interpreting assignment seems to help students study English better. For interpreting in particular, the student has to be able to analyze the situation, anticipate what may be said by the speaker, think about how best that can be conveyed in another language to the target audience, and be prepared accordingly,

all of which requires the students to be effective communicators. Moreover, the repeated process of tasks involved in an interpreting assignment, from preparation to feedback and revision and back to preparation, presents itself as a task-based language teaching and learning process. In fact, it seems to suggest that interpreting training can be used extensively in language classrooms as a TBLT practice including a series of tasks that foster students' ability to become independent learners. The fifteen-week interpreting course showed that, when the students have learned what an interpreter would do when given an assignment, they also know what kinds of researching and learning they have to do and how, which gives them more control of their own learning.

Because of the small sample of the study subjects and the short period of the observation, it is difficult to generalize the findings to all possible contexts. However, the students seem to have realized that preparation is the key to successful performance of a task – be it a language-oriented task or an interpreting task, but more so with an interpreting task - and they prepared each week for a new task – or tasks - on their own. It is a big step forward to becoming independent, or autonomous, language learners, and if that can be achieved in an interpreting training course, it can be argued that an interpreting class can serve as an ideal arena for language teaching and learning.

¹ It is perhaps also worth mentioning here that, in most cases in Europe, the interpreter works from their passive language into their active language, which is their weaker language and their stronger language (which is often their mother tongue), respectively (Jones, 2002).

² The titles of Japanese magazine articles are translated into English by the author of the paper.

³ The book titles in Japanese are translated into English by the author of the paper.

⁴ While the term 'learner' and 'student' may be often used interchangeably,

'student' is preferred when referring to a language learner in a classroom context (e.g., many *students* in my interpreting class), while 'learner' is more likely to be used to refer to an individual learning a language outside of formal educational settings (e.g., to help them become autonomous language *learners*).

⁵ The students were specifically told that it is voluntary for them to answer the questions and that neither their participation nor answers would have any effect on grading. The original questions were written and answered in Japanese.

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