

The Advantages of the Transition from Intensive Reading to Extensive Reading

— Based on my experience of the Restudy of English —

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Abstract — It has been three years since I first came down with a disease. As I was repeatedly in and out of the hospital, I have lost a lot of English knowledge, which is my specialty at work. I have felt strongly shaken and irritated seeing that my knowledge of English has dried up from my memory like sand flowing through the open spaces between my fingers. To tackle this problem, I had chosen to work on reading. In the first stage of this task, I had decided to read English newspapers intensively by using a dictionary and a reference book diligently. And then with the TOIEC test in mind, I started to deal with the reading problems of the TOIEC test extensively without the help of a dictionary and a reference book. This transitional drill from intensive reading to extensive reading has turned out to be very effective for me. I believe from this experience of mine that changing from intensive reading with full use of a dictionary and a grammar book to extensive reading with a quantity of guess work could be applicable to the college students' English study. In this article I would like to introduce the transitional learning method, which is from intensive textbook reading to an extensive Eiken-problems reading. And I hope that this method will become a desirable example for the Kushiro Kosen students' English study.

KEYWORDS: intensive reading, extensive reading, transitional work

1. Introduction

It has been three years since I first came down with a disease. As I was repeatedly in and out of the hospital, I have lost a lot of English knowledge, which is my specialty at work. I have felt strongly shaken and irritated seeing that my knowledge of English has dried up from my memory like sand flowing through the open spaces between my fingers. I have also forgotten a lot of Japanese words and can not even write simple kanji characters as though I have a memory disorder, much less English words, phrases and grammar. My shock was beyond description. I was hospitalized twice, further aggravating my memory disorder. And then I was in the hospital for the third time for the fractured thighbone. The rehabilitation work began the day right after the operation on the broken bone.

In line with the physical rehabilitation, I became determined to rehabilitate my dried-up brain while I am on leave of absence. I have opted to intensively read English newspapers, diligently checking words, phrases and sentence structures with a dictionary and a reference book. I have gradually begun to regain the lost English knowledge without sparing the use of the dictionary and the reference book. After I had worked on this drill for a while, I shifted the task from intensive reading to extensive reading in which I read English materials without the use of a dictionary and a grammar book, trying to roughly understand the given stories. I chose to do this transitional practice with the TOEIC test in mind.

This flow from intensive reading to extensive reading seems very effective for me: building up fundamental English knowledge with a lot of use of a dictionary and a grammar book, and then moving onto

the task of reading English materials for a limited amount of time, guessing the meaning of words and phrases that I do not know or have forgotten. This transitional method could be applicable to the Kushiro Kosen students' English study: they are expected to learn basic English vocabulary and grammar as first graders, and then take the pre-second Eiken test when they become second graders. It is a requirement for them to read fast and, at the same time grasp the content of the given stories in the test.

In this article I would like to introduce my method to recover from the loss of English knowledge, believing that it could apply to Kushiro Kosen students' English study and help them develop English skills.

1. Do's and Don't's of Intensive Reading

1-1. Do's of Intensive Reading

The purpose of intensive reading is vocabulary building and the learning of English sentence structures. One can acquire basic skills necessary for English translation by making full use of a dictionary and a reference book to learn English words and phrases in given materials. I myself read English newspapers, closely checking a dictionary and a grammar book. Even if the reading speed is very slow, I could sense that my lost memory is gradually returning and I have started to retrieve vocabulary and how to build English sentence structures. The task of consulting a dictionary and a grammar book is indispensable for English study. It is very much regrettable that the Kushiro Kosen students, who were educated under 'the so-called 'relaxed education'', are not aware of the importance of this basic practice.

One can gain the habit of using a dictionary and a grammar book by reading intensively. He/She can also learn what context English words and phrases are used in by comparing an English story with a Japanese parallel translation. In addition one can know English

set expressions and rich wording by referring to Japanese translations. As he/she further reads English materials, he/she encounters words and phrases of high frequency and has them effortlessly absorbed into his/her mind.

It is much better to use authentic materials than pre-determined materials that are made for the purpose of intensive reading. However, taking into consideration a set of English materials with Japanese parallel translations, the students' levels and the availability of materials, English reading textbooks used in English classes at college would be most appropriate. The English textbooks carry words, phrases and grammar items students are expected to learn, and their subjects cover a wide range of topics: culture-based, biographical stories, environmental problems and so on. As one continues to read, he/she comes across words of similar spelling: for example, adapt and adopt, affect and effect et al.. Such pairs of words are different in meaning with only one letter different. It is advisable for the students to write down in a notebook the sentences containing such words of different spellings, which helps to beef up vocabulary effectively and acquire a sense of the English language.

1-2. Don't's of Intensive Reading

It is conceivable that one may lose track of the flow of a story because he/she concentrates too much on checking words and phrases that he/she does not know. So it is important that he/she read over the story once more after checking words and phrases.

It is recommended to make full use of a grammar book to absorb English structures. However there are many students who do not know how to use it effectively. English textbooks bear, at the end of each lesson, grammar items for the students to learn. He/she just opens the pages of the grammar book to look through the suggested grammar items in the textbook. It is of significance for them to put down

what they have learned about the grammar in question. Going through this process would expedite his/her consolidation of grammar rules.

2. Do's and Don't's of Extensive Reading

The method of SSS (Start with Simple Series) is considered as mainstream in extensive reading. In extensive reading one does not look up in a dictionary words that he/she does not know, and skips the parts of the story that he/she does not understand, and stops reading if a reading topic is not engaging. In this section I would like to introduce an original extensive reading method that might be interesting for the Kushiro Kosen students.

2-1. Do's of Extensive Reading

Most of the college students presumably do not know how much they should read. It is a good idea for them to set up a limited amount of time to tackle the task of extensive reading. For instance, as they are required to take an Eiken test, they work on its reading sections for five to ten minutes per reading problem in one Eiken test. Perhaps better that they set up one hour or longer for reading, and then try a few rounds of the reading parts of the Eiken test. Seventy five minutes are given for the reading section of the TOEIC test. So I set up seventy five minutes for myself to solve the one hundred reading questions. It is a tough job to handle one hundred questions within seventy five minutes. Accordingly I had to do due practice to acquire a sense of time so that I could complete all the questions fast enough. There are three parts in the reading module: one sentence-level questions, one passage-level questions and then two passage-level questions. Virtually I had no time to stop reading to think over the meanings that I did not know, but still had to understand the content of each text relying on guess work.

I, of course, noted down the words and phrases

that I did not know or forgot in a notebook after finishing the reading practice, and tried to read the passages again to consolidate the words and phrases, because I thought that I could meaningfully learn how to use them and what context they were used in.

2-2. Don't's of Extensive Reading

As mentioned in the prior section, the purpose of extensive reading is to read as many books as possible. To this end, one should not check words and phrases one by one. It is understandable that he/she likes to consult a dictionary and a grammar book, especially when he/she has formed the habit of the troublesome task of using a dictionary and a grammar book. Nonetheless, extensive reading necessitates skipping the parts whose meanings he/she can not understand, and rather guessing the meanings from the contexts.

It is only natural that he/she should not completely understand the whole story, as there are some parts that he/she does not know. In a nutshell, do not try to grasp the story perfectly. He/She can imagine from the story what is written in the text. The title of the story sometimes gives a precious clue of what the content will be. It is often impossible to completely understand novels, specialized books, certain specification papers and so on written in the Japanese language, still less readings written in the English language. It should be sufficient that he/she capture seventy to eighty percent of the story.

3. Conclusion

I chose a reading drill as a means to recover from my blanking brain owing to a long period of illness. I have suffered a loss of the English knowledge I had acquired and felt strongly an urgent need for regaining that loss. Reading is a good practice since it requires a lot of vocabulary, sentence structures and grammar.

I did not choose random reading which requires comprehensive English knowledge and is of high level practice. As I have forgotten even simple words and phrases, I do need to get back to the basics of English study. So I have decided to work on intensive reading first and then systematically move onto extensive reading. Intensive reading makes readers fully use a dictionary and a grammar book, which helps to consolidate what they learned in the past. I adopted newspapers for intensive reading material since it covers a range of current topics that I should know, offering a large amount of vocabulary and set phrases. It also requires readers to figure out English sentence structures which are imperative in order to translate. As I kept reading newspaper, I was shocked by the extent of the loss of my command of the English language, which spurred me to reading carefully and diligently. As I proceeded doggedly, I began to sense the nuances and hidden meanings of English vocabulary and sentences.

I have made it a rule to write down what I looked up in the dictionary and reference books. The task of writing is a great help in retaining what I had learned previously from reading. From this experience of mine I suggest that the Kushiro Kosen students make full use of a dictionary and a grammar book as much as possible and write down without fail what they have learned. The students do not have a habit of using a dictionary and a grammar book and think it troublesome to write words down because they did not have to do so under the so-called 'relaxed education'. However, I would like to strongly suggest that they make full use of a dictionary and a grammar book and write down important words and phrases in their notebooks, especially when they have good practice material: English textbooks.

The transition to extensive reading involves wider choices such as a series of books, magazines, newspapers et al in English – as many as possible. One does not have to worry about consulting a dictionary and a reference book in extensive reading.

The aims of extensive reading are to read as much English material as possible and to capture some information thereby. The SSS (Start with Simple Series) method, a mainstream method of extensive reading recommends that one should read one million words in a year. To attain this goal he/she should not stop here and there in the reading process so as to check words and phrases.

The object of my extensive reading is to obtain high marks on the TOIEC test. There are one hundred questions in the reading part of the test, and I have seventy five minutes to do the task. Of course I am not allowed to use a dictionary or any reference book in the real TOEIC test. Therefore I try to solve reading problems as fast as possible. Intensive reading practice has become very meaningful and effective for me to prepare for extensive reading. Without checking the words, phrases and sentence structures I have checked, I could not have coped with such a hard task efficiently. This transitional process from intensive reading to extensive reading seems very much workable not only for me but also for the college students. They have done intensive reading with abundant use of a dictionary and a grammar book. It is about time they moved onto the extensive reading phase, given that they have already drilled themselves in the intensive reading exercise. Then they should be ready for reading English with no assistance of a dictionary and a grammar book, just attaching their mind to grasping the content of their reading material, which is an important part of the Eiken test. There are three reading problems in each round of the Eiken test. It usually takes around twenty five minutes or so to resolve one round of the reading problems, so it might be adequate to allow at least one hour and a half to two hours to tackle three or four rounds of the reading problems at one time. If they want to do more, all the better, of course

To summarize, I would like to suggest from my own experience that one takes advantage of the transitional reading pattern: intensive reading to

extensive reading if he/she hopes to improve his/her English skills. I have implemented this transitional reading method and found it very useful and valid. I would like the college students to seriously follow this transitional method to see tangible success in the pre-second grade Eiken test. I greatly hope this suggestion of mine will be beneficial to the Kushiro Kosen students' overall English study.

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