

*Oral Communication Classes*  
*Focusing on the*  
*Conscious Use of Monitoring*  
Etsuko Toyoda  
(International Christian University)

0 Introduction

It is natural that we reflect on our own behavior and situations, and we confirm or revise our objectives and strategies. In language learning, it is also necessary to confirm or revise one's learning's environmental situation and learning behavior by observation and introspection. These series of behavior will be referred to as "monitoring" in this paper. Firstly, I will discuss the role of monitoring through introduction of some definitions in previous studies, and later report on a class in which I observed students' spontaneous monitoring and another two classes in which I put emphasis on the use of monitoring. Having observed the students, I found that students must realize the necessity of 'monitoring in language learning' to enhance their monitoring abilities. In the following two classes, I tried to make students realize the importance of monitoring while giving them opportunities to monitor regularly on their own speech. The result of the first attempt was not satisfactory, but the second attempt showed some improvement.

I. Definition of Monitoring

I-1-A. Fravell's Definition

Fravell(1979) refers to the behavior such as regulation, adjustment, and judgment at the time of cognition on cognitive behavior or phenomena--metacognition--as cognitive monitoring. Monitoring of cognitive enterprises occurs through the actions of and interactions among four classes of phenomena: a) metacognitive knowledge, b) metacognitive experiences, c) goals (or tasks), and d) actions (or strategies). According to Fravell's definitions, metacognitive knowledge is a segment of one's stored world knowledge which is accumulated through past experiences of various cognitive phenomena.

Metacognitive experiences are experiences of series of actions which cognize various cognitive phenomena. Tasks refer to the objectives of cognitive enterprises, and strategies refer to cognitions or other behavior employed to achieve them.

#### I-1-B. Metacognition

Metacognition is cognition of various cognitive phenomena or cognitive knowledge. It plays an important role in various situations where self-control is needed, such as oral communication of information, oral comprehension, language acquisition, memory, problem solving, etc. (Flavell 1979, Brown 1918)

#### I-2. Morrison and Low's Definition

Morrison and Low (1983) explain that language use depends on both creative and critical faculties. The creative faculty is a faculty which create language expressions using our internal reservoir of stored rules and patterns. At the same time, the critical faculty makes us aware of what has been created, making it possible to check deviations from intention that characterize normal speech. Morrison and Low refer to this critical faculty as monitoring.

#### I-3. Krashen's Definition

Largely as a result of Krashen's work, the term 'monitor' sometimes used in a quite specialized and restricted sense in respect of the performance of second language user. According to Krashen's Monitor Theory, adult second language learners have both acquired language knowledge and learned language knowledge. Adults' second language performance is assumed to be the acquired system, and grammatical correction will be made by the learned system which Krashen referred to as monitoring.

#### I-4. Rubin's Definition

##### I-4-A Learning Strategies

Rubin (1987) explains to us as follows. The Monitoring process appears to be a combination of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. For example, identifying a problem, finding a solution, or making a correction are cognitive, however, deciding on the

action to be taken or evaluating the action are metacognitive.

#### I-4-B Monitoring as Cognitive Strategies

Monitoring refers to strategies in which the learner notices errors, observes how a message is received and is interpreted by the addressee, and then decides what to do about it.

#### I-4-C Monitoring as Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognitive strategies are also called self-management strategies, and are used to oversee, regulate or self-direct language learning. Wenden (1991) explains that there are planning, monitoring, and evaluation in metacognitive strategies. Planning may precede the task, and may also go on while the task is being performed. Learners determine what their objectives are and decide on the means by which they will achieve them. They may change their objectives and means depending on the progress made. Monitoring refers to strategies in which the learner observe and oversee their language learning. Monitoring can involve a narrow focusing on a single event, or be a broad overview of a series of learning activities. When learners evaluate, they consider the outcome of a particular attempt to learn or use of a strategy.

## II. Previous Studies

### II-1. Attempt at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

I defined monitoring abilities as 'abilities to check language spoken whether or not it does not deviate from normal language use.' I made an attempt to, consequently, improve students' monitoring abilities in an intermediate conversation class at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies in 1991. I observed students' spontaneous monitoring by listening to tapes, recording their presentations, reports, and discussions, and then gave evaluations and comments on monitoring to each student. Having giving continuous evaluations and sociolinguistic information to aid their utterance, the students' dull and biased spontaneous monitoring behavior gradually improved. The following three points were acknowledged through the monitoring observation.

① Students with knowledge of language rules and patterns, seem to

be able to enhance their monitoring abilities more easily than those without.

- ② Students with biased monitoring abilities can possibly have well-balanced monitoring abilities if appropriate guidance could be given.
- ③ Without self-recognition on importance of monitoring, students will not be able to gain sufficient monitoring abilities no matter how much evaluation would be given.

## II-2. Other Studies

Takagi (1993) and Tanaka (1993) are among other reports on oral communication classes in Japanese taking in monitoring training.

## III. Classes Focusing on Monitor Use

### III-1. Definition of Monitoring in Language Learning

I redefine monitoring as 'behavior to confirm or revise the learning's environmental situation and/or learning behavior by observation and introspection'.

### III-2. Autumn Term

#### III-2-A. Class

In an intermediate conversation class at International Christian University, I attempted to bring the self-evaluation system into class activity. I was in charge of one of two sections which consisted of 24 students altogether. I showed students objectives of a task each period, and let students practice speaking in various styles. Topics of the tasks were similar to the topics in the reading textbook.

#### III-2-B. Objective and Procedure

The conversation classes were held only once a week for a period of nine weeks not including examination week. Since it seemed to be too short a period to train students' monitoring abilities, the objective of this conversation class was to make students become aware of monitor use by means of self-evaluation using a checklist. On the first day, I talked about successful students using monitoring

effectively, and I mentioned it a few more times when I had the chance.

### III-2-C. Results and Examination

The results of the questionnaire which I had asked the students to fill out after the term were not satisfactory at all. Though the students had good impressions about most of the class activities, 16 out of 17 students answered that the checklist was not useful. The reason given, other than it was't fun or they were reluctant to check it, was because it was difficult to evaluate oneself and was better to be evaluated by the teacher.

### III-2-D. Review

Why didn't it go well? The following reasons were suggested.

- ① There were too many items on the checklist. It was unreasonable to ask students to self-evaluate numerous aspects since it would be difficult to control their utterance while paying broad and balanced attentions to it.
- ② There was no feedback from the teacher's side. Even the students were explained intention of the self-evaluation, they might be feeling uneasy for not receiving criticism from the teacher.

I believe that a monitor should be used equally in all aspects, but I feel that it is necessary to guide students step by step. A student should focus on just one single object (goal) in the beginning, monitor that point thoroughly, and evaluate his/her monitoring behavior in just that aspect. One may then change or spread the object (goal) after the first object (goal) was achieved. Also I feel that the teacher should keep giving some comments to students while asking students to evaluate themselves. It must be very difficult to suddenly change the students' attitude, which has been nurtured through past experiences, that the evaluation should be given by the teacher.

## III-3. Winter Term

### III-3-A Class

The schedule of the intermediate conversation class was the same as the preceding term. I was in charge of one of three sections which held 28 students in total.

### III-3-B Objective and Procedure

The objective was, just as one in the autumn term, to make students become aware of the use of the monitoring system. In the winter term, considering the original experience, I stopped using the checklist, and used an objective setting list and personal cards. On the first day, after giving an orientation on the use of monitoring, I recorded students' free talk, and asked each student to listen to the tape and choose his/her objective among the listed objectives. I then examined if the objective which each student chose was appropriate, then wrote it down on his/her personal card. From the second day, each time I gave the personal card back to the student so that he/she could read the teacher's comments and confirm his/her objective. And in the last five minutes of the class, I asked each student to write down comments on his/her own utterance on the card after practicing the day's task speaking. In some cases when I found that the objective of a certain student should be changed, I, after consultation with the student, revised the objective.

### III-3-C Result and Examination

In the winter term, I asked students to write freely about the objective setting list and the personal card. As for the objective setting, because the question was vague, some students answered whether they had improved or not (11 out of 20 students). Not counting these, most students felt good setting their objectives in order to think about the utterance (8 out of 9). As for the personal card, 11 out of 20 students stated that the cards were useful to reflect on themselves although some students felt that the cards were useful for communication tool between the teacher and students. The results showed that there is a possibility to enhance the monitoring if I continue to guide the students using this method for a longer period.

### III-4. Conclusion

I reported and examined the three trials on the use of monitoring including a failure for the purpose of future reference. At present, the following things can be said even though the research

project is not yet completed.

- ① The use of monitoring should be encouraged by offering necessary information for communication in Japanese, and giving the opportunity and time for students to talk and fulfill the students' satisfaction.
- ② Even though it is ideal to monitor various aspects in balance, it is advised to train students to use monitoring step by step clearly showing their study objectives.
- ③ It is very important to build a strong teacher-student relationship. The training of monitoring can be achieved through mutual trust and cooperation.
- ④ It is necessary to think about long-term training of monitoring since it is not something that a result can be acquired in a short period.
- ⑤ It is difficult to enhance the monitoring behavior without one's self-recognition.

In the relation to ⑤, I felt that it was not easy to change students' attitude which had been created in the past. Wenden (1991) p.49 says; "For without an internal change in consciousness to accompany expertise in the use of self-instructional techniques, true autonomy is not achieved". Smith (1981) p.165 appeals the importance of consciousness reformation by saying; "consciousness raising is not a time-wasting procedure." It seems that more time should be spent for an orientation, but the students' desires for knowledge and speech must be fulfilled at the same time. Teachers must spend plenty of energy and time to satisfy the students' wishes and raise students' consciousness. Hadori and Matsubatake (1990)p.51 say; "it is necessary to practice until students can self-evaluate in a true sense, and until the self-evaluation become routine, and the routine becomes truly yours. An effect will appear after long and diversified practices." I will continue to tackle this matter using trial and error.

Lastly, I must note that the conversation classes at International Christian University were organized with the cooperation of Ezaki sensei.