

Oral Presentation Practice with a Multi-media Reading Support System:

From an “Eye-oriented” Speech to an “Ear-oriented” Speech

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In recent years, the importance of oral presentation has gained more attention in Japanese universities. One of the most popular presentation styles in undergraduate seminars is “oral book review,” which is to present the summary and critique of a book or an article. However, for non-native speakers of Japanese, this type of presentation frequently invites incorrect pronunciation of *kanji* vocabulary as well as unnatural accents and rhythms of speech (Kudo 2001). One possible reason for this is that the nature of the task easily leads to an “eye-oriented” speech—a speech heavily influenced by visual information from the reading materials. This occurs more in the case of Chinese-speaking students who tend to process information visually without referring to auditory images. Another reason for mispronunciation is that the students are not always motivated to practice speech because they are frequently not aware of their own problems in pronunciation.

In order to solve the problems mentioned above, I designed an oral presentation class using a CD-ROM reading support system, “*Shinsho Library*” (cf. Suzuki 2000). This reading system, consisting of 8 different texts accompanied with reading sounds, seemed appropriate for the students in the study at hand in terms of its difficulty in vocabulary and grammar. At the same time, the sounds of the texts seemed beneficial for them in improving their pronunciation, in particular the readings of *kanji* and the accent of compound words (e.g. “*keezai-seechoo* (economic growth),” resulting in a possible shift in their presentations from “eye-oriented” to “ear-oriented.”

The participants of this study were 8 Chinese-speaking students in an undergraduate program in a private university in the *Kansai* district. Four of them had passed the Level 1 Japanese Proficiency Exam at the time of the study. However, the performance on the test of the readings of *kanji* vocabulary was quite low, even though they understood the meaning of the words. It was highly predictable that they would

pronounce *kanji* words incorrectly during their presentations.

After they finished the outline of their speech, the students gave a “mid-term project progress report,” which was designed to provide the students with a chance to realize their problems in pronunciation as well as to motivate them towards speech practice. Following the feedback on the pronunciation problems in their mid-term presentations, they were guided to practice their speech by listening to the CD-ROM. Parallel to the classroom activities, research data was collected from the following three sources: (1) audio-recordings of the mid-term and the final presentations; (2) study logs automatically saved on a floppy disk while using the reading system; (3) open-ended questionnaires on the oral presentation class.

First, from the analyses of the mid-term and the final presentations, the *kanji* words incorrectly pronounced in the mid-term presentations were all pronounced correctly except for one word in the final presentations. Secondly, the accent of compound words was greatly improved especially in the case of words whose sounds were available in the CD-ROM. However, the accent of compound words which were of Japanese-origin such as “*najimi-bukai*” and “*tachi-fusagaru*” tended to be unimproved. Thirdly, the distinction in voiced and voiceless consonants was also improved in the case of the words practiced according to the instructor’s guidance.

Next, the study logs and the questionnaires showed that the students employed “ear-oriented” strategies in order to achieve the improvements in their speech, such as listening to the CD-ROM for checking pronunciation or practicing pronunciation with the instructor. This indicates that the classroom activities succeeded in motivating the students to practice their speech prior to the final presentations.

Finally, the questionnaires indicate that the students understood well the purpose of using the “*Shinsho Library*” for oral presentations, and appreciated the merits of the system. At the same time, they obtained great satisfaction and confidence through the oral presentation experience.

In conclusion, the oral presentation class using the reading support system could make the students more aware of the importance of pronunciation in speech and motivate them towards speech practice. In other words, how to raise students’ consciousness about pronunciation should be the key to the successful shift from an “eye-oriented” speech to an “ear-oriented” speech.

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