

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF SIGNED LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION IN A JAPANESE PRIMARY SCHOOL.

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I reported a 3-year project of implementing the signed language into a Japanese regular primary school, where 15 Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (DHH) pupils enrolled. The project consisted of two parts: instructing the signed language to DHH pupils and interpreting in the regular classrooms. I herewith dealt with the signed language interpretation. I observed ethnographically and described qualitatively the challenges and innovations of interpretation. I focused on two things; one concerned the multiple flows of information, and the other concerned 'overhearing' by DHH children. When the information flowed singly, interpretation functioned well. When the learning was constructed socially and dynamically, children talked spontaneously and, sometimes, simultaneously. In that situation, the information flowed multiply, and sharing talks between DHH and hearing children became difficult. Interpreters needed to take a role of controlling the flows of information. In small groups or individual learning situations, teachers moved around and talked individually or to a group locally, which were usually not interpreted to DHH children except that teachers' talk was directed to them. Hearing children could overhear all those talks, and might learn something from them because overhearing would give an opportunity for incidental learning. DHH often missed it without interpretation. If all local talks would be interpreted to them instantaneously, that might interrupt their ongoing learning. Interpreters summarized afterwards what happened in the hearing/spoken world. These episodes showed that a new way of communication and interaction would be needed in the inclusive classrooms for full-participation by DHH children.

Introduction

The numbers of deaf and hard-of-hearing (DHH) children who enroll in the regular schools have increased these days (Antia, Kreimeyer & Reed, 2010; Cerney, 2007). Those inclusive DHH children, however, are reported to experience sometimes various challenges academically, socially, and psychologically (Stinson & Antia, 1999; Cerney, 2007). Even if he or she has a need for signed language and the signed language interpreter is employed in the classroom, he or she is usually the only deaf child in the whole school, and is easily isolated in the classrooms (Ramsey, 1997; Oliva & Lytle, 2014). In addition, in the inclusive situation, DHH pupils generally have no contact with Deaf and/or hard-of-hearing adults, and have difficulty in developing their future self-images when they become adults.

In the present paper, I reported the results and limitations of the 3-year project of implementing the signed language, the natural language of Japanese Deaf Community, into a regular primary school which had the self-contained special classes for DHH pupils. The project was consisted of 2 parts: Instruction of the signed language to DHH pupils, hearing teachers, and hearing pupils, and signed language interpretation in the regular classrooms. Below, I focus on the sign language interpretation.

Methods

School: The primary school had 180 pupils including 15 DHH pupils. Their hearing levels were mild to profound. They all had hearing aids or cochlea implants, and assumed to acquire Japanese as a first language. They learned Japanese and Math at the special classes for DHH, and stayed at the regular classrooms for learning other subjects and for class meeting. In the special class, the special teachers have used not only speech but also signing with speech (simultaneous communication) for these 10 years, though there has been no Japanese Sign Language instruction and no Deaf people's involvement. At the regular classrooms there was also no signed language interpretation.

Interventions: The signed language interpretation was done mainly in the subjects of social and natural sciences. We put the signed language interpreters in 4th and 5th grade's regular classrooms, where 2 DHH pupils seemed to have more needs for interpretation, compared with other DHH pupils. The interpreter stood in front of the classroom, next to the teacher, and interpreted for DHH pupils.

Data collection and analysis: When the interpreters finished each hour-interpretation, they reflected and summarized their job, concerning what they did, what good practices, and what challenges. We collected these records of 73 hours and analyzed them qualitatively. Supplemental observation in the classrooms was also done.

Results

From the interpreters' recordings, we extracted the challenges and innovations of interpretation. Through analyzing the challenges qualitatively, we found we can classify them into 3 categories; ones from DHH themselves, from interpreters, and from the classrooms situations.

The challenges from DHH pupils themselves

There were further two types: one was based on the DHH pupils' limited signed language proficiency, and the other was based on their limited experience in using interpreters. The former concerned that though interpreted, DHH sometimes could not understand the signs. Though they learned the signed language and used signing in their daily lives, the signs of the technical terms used in the academic subjects were unfamiliar to them.

The latter concerned that DHH pupils almost had no experience of using the sign language interpretation. So while interpreted, they sometimes shifted their attention from interpreter to other things (the visual materials, such as textbooks), and they failed to get the whole message. Sometimes some DHH first attended to teachers for trying to understand what teachers spoke, and then gave it up and sifted their attention to the interpreter halfway. In those situations the information they got became into fragments, having no consistent meanings. DHH pupils had to learn how to use the interpretation for improve their learning. Interpreters reported that when interpreted DHH did not watched them. In those situations, they took a strategy, in which while DHH did not watch the interpreter they did not start to interpret, and when watched they start to interpret, though they also confessed that the interpretation would be delayed, and moreover would become summarization, not a full message.

The challenges from interpreters

In Japan, signed language interpretation in school situations was still not so popular,

and the interpreters had little experience in the classrooms interpretation, especially in the primary school. The teacher's talk would be a special register of the language. The contents of the lessons, such as natural sciences, were also unfamiliar to the interpreters, and many technical terms had no corresponding signs. In those situations, the interpreters sometimes asked for a sign to DHH pupils and/or showed written words to them. Those challenges were, however, overcome by interpreters' sufficient preparation and their accumulating experiences. The collaboration between the teacher and the interpreter was also reported to be critical for good practices for DHH pupils.

The challenges from the classroom situations

This category was further classified into 3 types: the whole class teaching situation, the small group situation, and individual learning.

The whole class teaching situation, in which the teacher talked uni-directionally to the pupils and/or asked a question to the pupils, pupils raised hands and answered, and the teacher commented. Those flows of information, we say 'the single flows of information,' were easy for interpretation, and DHH could follow and fully participated in the classrooms' activities. However, some challenges occurred when several pupils talked simultaneously, and/or when some pupils murmured to themselves, or did private talks while thinking and the teacher picked up and commented on that talk, and shared it among the pupils. In those situations, we say 'multiple flows of information,' the interpreters experienced challenges, being difficult to interpret all murmurs and private talks. While heard them, hearing pupils could neglect seemingly unimportant murmurs by themselves, but DHH pupils must be interpreted. The interpreter must choose which murmurs should be interpreted and which not, and would control the information flows for DHH pupils.

The teachers usually implement various visual materials, such as books, videos, real things, projected pictures, etc. for the pupils to understand easily the contents. When teachers talked to pupils while pointing those visual materials, the interpretation became difficult, because the signed language was also visual, and DHH could not watch both simultaneously. Sometimes, some hearing pupils also talked in those situations, and DHH could not find who talked to whom about what, though interpreted. Another situation was observed, in which the teacher or pupils read aloud some parts of the textbook, while the pupils underlined the textbook which was read. Simultaneous works, such as listening to the voice (being interpreted) and doing individual work, such as underlining the text, would be difficult for DHH pupils.

The interpreter usually stood next to the teacher. However, the teacher sometimes walked around in the classroom while she talked to the pupils. In this situation, the interpreter did not move and stood in the front of the classroom. DHH pupils needed to decide which to follow, the teacher or the interpreter. Some DHH had substantial residual hearing and could understand what the teacher spoke with the hearing aids. However, sometimes this did not work and they relied on the interpreters, when, for example, the classroom's sound environment was not good.

In lessons, the teacher wore the FM microphone and her voice easily got to DHH's hearing aids or CI. However, the pupils' voices were difficult to understand without FM. When the teacher asked the pupils one after another to read aloud the parts of the textbook, DHH did not get the pupil's voice and it became difficult for them to follow who

was reading which part of the textbook. Sometimes it was observed that a hearing pupil sitting next to DHH spontaneously supported DHH by pointing at which part of the textbook was being read.

As for the use of the textbook, one day in the natural science lesson, the teacher encouraged the pupils to find the pictures of insects in the textbook as fast and many as possible. There were really many pictures of insects in it. While they scanned the textbook, the pupils shouted 'I found!' one by one and said what kind of insects was found on which page. In that situation, the interpretation did not work, because DHH pupils also concentrated on scanning the textbook and did not watch the interpreter. While hearing pupils overheard what other pupils said with scanning the textbook, DHH missed it all or got it in fragments at most.

The small group activity was used very often in Japanese classrooms recently, because this was thought to support pupils' active and collaborative learning. However, this situation brought challenges to learning by DHH pupils, because the classroom's sound environment would get worse. In addition, sometimes the participants talked simultaneously and it became difficult to find who said what and to participate fully in discussion and interaction. The challenges were also brought to the interpreter's work, because sometimes DHH belonged to separate groups, and the classroom was not so wide for the interpreter to move freely among groups. Except when asked for interpretation by the pupils, the interpreter did not go into groups, and left pupils to support with each other. We observed that some hearing pupils used signing or fingerspelling while talked, or talked very slowly to DHH pupils. A 'culture' or atmosphere to support DHH pupils spontaneously was developing in the classes. However, these supports did not necessarily guarantee DHH pupils' full participation in their group activity. The information conveyed to DHH was often in fragments and only in the final stage, not in on-going process. It was also observed sometimes that DHH pupils themselves asked for an information or clarification to hearing pupils.

One episode was observed in the natural science lesson, in which the teacher asked for group activity, observing how flowers which the pupils planted before were developing and discussing in groups to draw their pictures. In group discussion, the DHH pupil left alone, and only the conclusion was conveyed. Finally, she copied the drawing of the flowers to her note, without knowing what was being discussed in her group. The teacher might think DHH participated fully in the group activity because she finished drawing the flower after all.

The individual learning situation was often implemented, in which pupils could confirm individually what they learned and/or extend it through tackling more advanced questions at their own pace. The teacher moved around in the classroom and supported pupils individually when needed. When the teacher supported DHH pupils, sometimes the interpreter interpreted, sometimes the teacher spoke to them slowly and visually without interpreters.

We found, in those situations, the challenges facing DHH pupils concerned overhearing. When the teacher walked around and gave an advice to hearing pupils individually, other hearing pupils also got some information through overhearing. They could pick it up into their ongoing work, or disregard it because it seemed to be irrelevant to them. However, DHH pupils missed it without interpreted. The interpreter always tried

to give information of what happened in the classroom to DHH pupils, though this sometimes resulted in interrupting DHH's ongoing work. Therefore, the interpreter always thought and judged which information should be interpreted to DHH and which were no relevant at present. This attempt, however, did not work, when there were several DHH pupils in the classroom and when the interpreter did not know well the situation of each DHH pupils learning. The collaboration between the teacher and the interpreter would be indispensable to overcome this challenge.

In this individual learning situation, the interpreter sometimes extended his/her interpreter's role to another one, such as a tutor. Sometimes some DHH pupils asked the interpreter for more detailed instruction, when the teacher's instruction seemed to them rather unclear. As an interpreter, she/he should intervene between the teacher and DHH and support that the teacher him/herself should give more information to DHH. However, this was not always to be available, and the interpreter often gave DHH additional information which needed. In that situation, we can say that a closed space including DHH pupils and the interpreter would be born in the classroom and this would not be shared with other hearing members, being separated with each other. In this regard, the collaboration between the teacher and the interpreter should be needed to overcome this challenge.

Discussion

I reported ethnographically the results and limitations of the 3-year project of implementing the signed language into a Japanese regular primary school which had the self-contained special classes for DHH pupils. Especially, I focused on signed language interpretation in the regular classrooms.

We faced various challenges. As a whole, DHH pupils really loved to learn the signed language in this school. During the signed language lesson, they learned from Deaf teacher not only the language, but also ways of Deaf people, such as Deaf culture. However, DHH children reluctantly used the signed language in the regular classrooms. All DHH children in this school wore digital HA or CI and might acquire spoken Japanese as a first language, though they still had a need for the signed language, depending on different situations. They were learning the signed language as a second language. We need to know more about how to facilitate DHH's using of the signed language in regular classrooms, and how to make the classrooms bilingual?

Below, I dealt with two things among others. One was concerning the multiple flows of information in the classrooms, and the other was concerning overhearing and incidental learning by children.

In the classrooms, when the learning is constructed socially and/or dynamically, such as creative discussion in a small group, children become initiative and active, and they talk spontaneously and, sometimes, simultaneously. In that situation, information flows became multiply, as compared with the single flow of information in the structural teaching. When many hearing children talked simultaneously to hearing teacher and the teacher responded to some of them, DHH sometimes could not follow those talks, even when the interpreter would interpret for them. In addition, interpreted talks would be time-delayed and DHH may lose the opportunity to take a timely turn in the whole class talk. Thus, when the information flows in the classrooms were multiply and unanticipated,

sharing talks among DHH and hearing children became difficult even when the interpreter was working.

While in small group learning and/or individual learning situations, teachers move around in the classroom, and talk individually or to a group locally. Those individual or local talks (not a whole class talk) were usually not interpreted to DHH children if not directed to them. In those situations, however, hearing children could overhear those talks, and they might learn something from them. Children generally learn a lot from overhearing others' talks. Overhearing would give an opportunity for incidental learning, and DHH were often missing this opportunity. In addition, the input of languages to DHH might lessen, compared with hearing children. However, if all local talks would be interpreted to DHH instantaneously, that might interrupt DHH's ongoing learning or activities. Interpreters sometimes need to summarize afterwards what happened in the hearing/spoken world, if DHH seemed to miss it.

I observed another episode; DHH children talked with each other or to the interpreter, being easy to communicate using the signed language. Those signed (individual, and/or local) talks were usually not interpreted into speech, and were not shared with hearing members, just being closed in a signed world. Hearing children and teacher, who were less skilled signers, could not 'overhear' those signed talks. To put two worlds getting together, the interpretation would play an indispensable role. We need to clarify more what, when, and how to interpret in the inclusive classrooms.

References

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