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A Relevance-Theoretic Approach to the Effective Use of Lexical Information, Visual Information, and English-Japanese Translation in Cross-Cultural Understanding

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to demonstrate to what degree lexical information, visual information, and English-Japanese translation contribute to the English learners' understanding of cross-culture in the framework of Relevance Theory. We construct two types of questionnaire asking 38 English learners about their existing knowledge of "How pure maple syrup is made," and about how much they understand its production process at the four stages. We conclude that lexical information, visual information, and English-Japanese translation make positive influences on learners' cross-cultural understanding by satisfying the Communicative Principle of Relevance.

Key words: *Cross-cultural understanding, Relevance Theory, Translation, Disambiguation, Saturation*

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to examine how much lexical information, visual information, and English-Japanese translation contribute to the English learners' understanding of cross-culture in the framework of Relevance Theory which originates in Sperber & Wilson (1986, 1995²). First, we will explain Relevance Theory originating in Sperber & Wilson (1986, 1995²) to be applied to English Learners' understanding of cross-culture with special emphasis on translation (Gutt, 2000). Secondly, we will construct and conduct two types of questionnaire on 38 English learners for collecting data; one questionnaire consists of questions about their knowledge of "How pure maple syrup is made," and the other one is to ask how much they understand its production process at the four stages (Dörnyei, 2000). We conclude that lexical information, visual information, and translation make positive influences on learners' cross-cultural understanding by satisfying the Communicative Principle of Relevance.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Relevance Theory is an approach to the field of pragmatics originated by Sperber & Wilson (1986, 1995²). Sperber & Wilson make two fundamental claims in *Relevance*, one about cognition, and the other about communication:

(1) *The First (or Cognitive) Principle of Relevance*

Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of

relevance.

(2) *The Second (or Communicative) Principle of Relevance*

Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance.

A stimulus which explicitly shows the intentions to communicate something, in other words, which has both *informative intention* and *communicative intention* is called the ostensive stimulus, which is defined in *the presumption of optimal relevance*:

(3) *The presumption of optimal relevance*

- a. The ostensive stimulus is relevant enough for it to be worth the addressee's effort to process it.
- b. The ostensive stimulus is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences. (Sperber & Wilson, 1986, 1995)

The communication which takes place based on the ostensive stimulus is *the ostensive communication*, and translation is also considered as a kind of ostensive communication in Relevance Theory.

One crucial notion to translation is the propositional form, which is defined in Sperber & Wilson (1986, 1995²):

(4) *The propositional form of an utterance* is an interpretation of the speaker which is an interpretation of an attributed thought.

Gutt (2000) applied this definition of *the propositional form of an utterance* to translation, because in translation the propositional form of the utterance ('translated text') is an interpretation of

a thought of the speaker ('translator') which is an interpretation of a thought attributed to someone who expressed in another language ('the original author'). To sum up, in translation the propositional form of the translated text is an interpretation of a thought of the translator which is an interpretation of a thought attributed to the original author. The communicator whose utterance the target audience is actually dealing with is that of the translator.

The four pragmatic processes contribute to the formation of *explicatures* in Relevance Theory: *disambiguation*, *saturation*, *free enrichment*, and *ad hoc concept construction*. Recanati (2004) defines *saturation* as follows:

- (5) *Saturation* is the process whereby the meaning of the sentence is completed and made propositional through the contextual assignment of semantic values to the constituents of the sentence whose interpretation is context-dependent (and, possibly, through the contextual provision of 'unarticulated' propositional constituents, if one assumes, as some philosophers do, that such constituents are sometimes needed to make the sentence fully propositional.

The process of *saturation* takes place whenever the meaning of the sentence includes something like a "slot" requiring completion or a "free variable" requiring contextual instantiation. Moreover, *disambiguation* is a crucial notion in this research which Blass (1990) defines as follows:

- (6) It is generally assumed that both sense of an ambiguous word are automatically recovered by the linguistic input system.

The process of *disambiguation* excludes the ambiguity of words and phrases to clarify their meaning in the context, and as a result achieving the optimal relevance for English learners. This means that disambiguation achieves the optimal relevance to increase English learners' relevance.

DISCUSSION

Data Collection

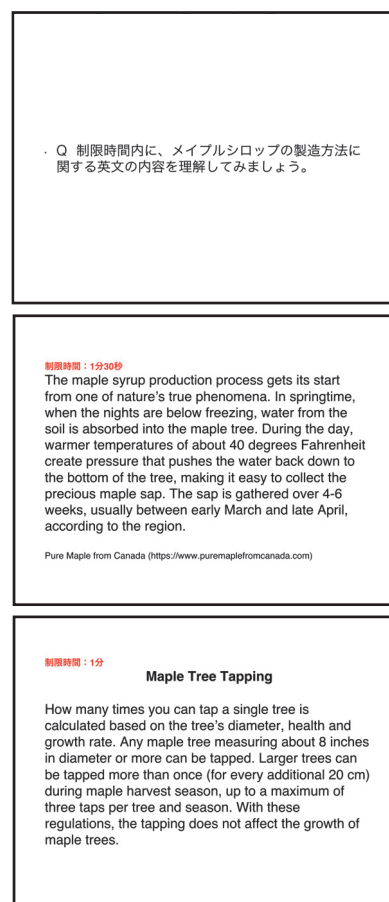
We construct the two types of questionnaire. A questionnaire (A) is about the background knowledge of Pure Maple Syrup, the first question of which is to ask whether English learners know how pure maple syrup is made. If they answer "Yes" to the first question, then they will answer the next two questions; how they came to know it, and how pure maple syrup is made. However, if they answer "No" to the first question, then they will go on to the task of inferring; how they imagine

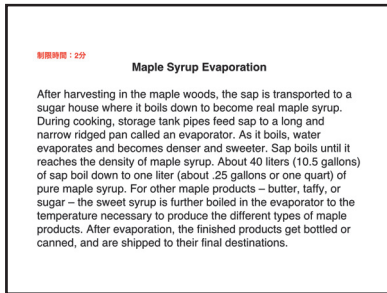
pure maple syrup is made. On the other hand, the questionnaire (B) is composed of the four questions about the degree to which English learners understand the readings of "About Pure Maple Syrup: How It's Made," cited from the official web site of "Pure Maple from Canada" (<https://www.puremaplefromcanada.com/about/how-its-made/>).

We conduct the questionnaire research to collect data on the 38 Japanese freshmen at A University who attend an English communication course focused on the theme of "Living Abroad," especially "Cross-cultural communication in authentic situations in a multicultural and multinational city, Toronto, CANADA." They work on the reading tasks at four stages, and answer how much they are able to understand the production process of pure maple syrup by circling the number on the scale after reading each task, whose numbers show how much they understand the reading task; 0 means "Not at all understood," 10 "Completely understood," and 5 "Average."

First, the 38 English learners work on the timed reading task which consists of three pages of English explanation about how pure maple syrup is made.

Fig. 1 English explanation about how pure maple syrup is made

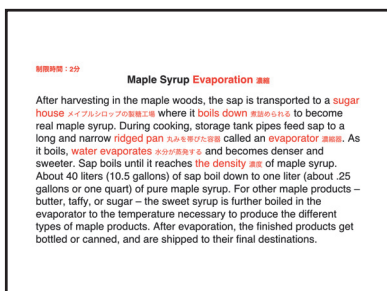
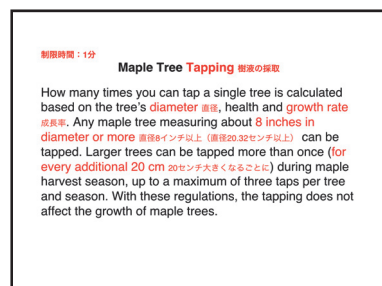
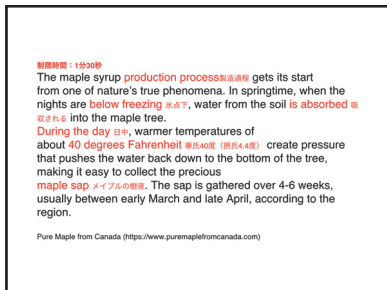
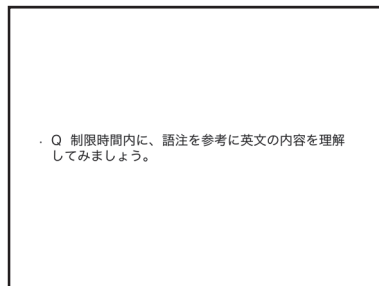




After reading the above pages, they circle the number on the scale to answer how much they understand.

Secondly, they read English explanation accompanied with some annotations of words and phrases with time limitation, and then answer how much they understand.

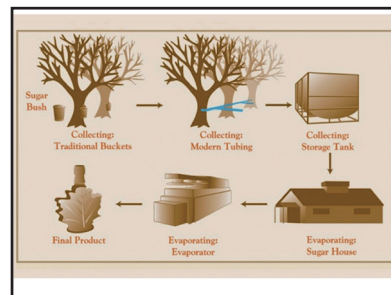
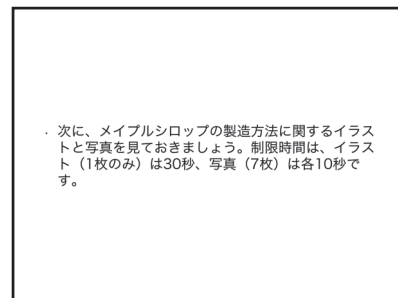
Fig. 2 English explanation with some semantic annotations



Adding semantic annotations facilitate their understanding to increase relevance. Presenting lexical information is regarded as one of the four pragmatic processes contributing to the formation of explicatures, *disambiguation*. The process of *disambiguation* excludes the ambiguity of words and phrases to clarify their meaning in the context, and as a result achieving the optimal relevance for English learners. This means that *disambiguation* achieves the optimal relevance to increase English learners' relevance.

Thirdly, they look through the visual information representing the production process of pure maple syrup: one visual images showing the whole production process of pure maple syrup, and then the seven photographs showing each stage of its production process. Visual information works as *saturation* which is also one of the four pragmatic processes contributing to the formation of explicatures. The process of *saturation* takes place whenever the meaning of the sentence includes something like a "slot" requiring completion or a "free variable" requiring contextual instantiation.

Fig. 3 Visual information





Finally, they read the English-Japanese translation within the limited time so that they can completely understand the production process to satisfy the optimal relevance.

Fig. 4 English-Japanese translation

最後に、制限時間内に、日本語翻訳を読んで、メイプルシロップの製造方法を理解しましょう。

制限時間：30秒
 メイプルシロップの製造過程は、まさに自然現象から始まる。春が訪れ、夜の気温が氷点下になると、土壌の水分がメイプルの木に吸収される。日中、気温が上昇し、華氏約40度（摂氏約4.4度）になると、圧力によって水分を木の根に押し戻そうとすると、そのため、貴重なメイプルの樹液の採取が容易になるのである。樹液は4～6週間にわたって採取される。地域差はあるが、通常は3月上旬から4月下旬である。

Pure Maple from Canada (<https://www.puremaplefromcanada.com>)

制限時間：30秒
メイプルの樹液の採取

1本のメイプルの木から樹液を採取できる回数は、木の直径、健康状態、成長率に基づいて計算される。直径8インチ以上の木であれば、樹液を採取することができる。これよりも大きい木の場合、（直径が20センチ大きくなることに）メイプルの収穫期間に複数回採取することができる。1本あたり、1シーズンに最大3回まで決められている。このような制約があるため、樹液の採取によって、メイプルの木の成長に影響が及ぶことはない。

制限時間：1分
メイプルシロップの濃縮作業

メイプルの森で収穫作業をした後、樹液はメイプルシロップの製造小屋に運ばれる。ここで煮詰められ、ジュアメイプルシロップができて上がる。製造過程で、貯蔵タンクのパイプから、長さがあり幅の狭い、丸みを帯びた容器に樹液を流し込む。これが濃縮器である。煮詰めると、水分が蒸発し、濃縮され、甘みが増す。メイプルシロップの濃度にするまで、樹液を煮詰めていくのである。約40リットル（10ガロン）の樹液が煮詰められ、1リットル（0.25ガロン=1クォート）のジュアメイプルシロップができて上がる。メイプルの製品は他にもある。メイプルバター、メイプルタフィー、メイプルシムゲーである。それぞれの製品を製造するのに必要な温度に達するまで、甘いメイプルシロップを濃縮器ですらに煮詰める。濃縮作業が終わると、でき上がった製品はビンや缶に詰められ、最終目的地に運ばれるのである。

Gutt (2000) insists that translation is communication between the translator and target audience only. In translation the propositional form (‘translated text’) is an interpretation of a thought of the speaker (‘translator’) which is an interpretation of a thought attributed to someone who expressed it in another language (‘the original author’). In this research, we act as a translator to facilitate the English learners’ understanding, and English learners as its target audience. Therefore, the translated text of “About Pure Maple Syrup: How It’s Made” is an interpretation of a thought of the translator which is an interpretation of a thought attributed to its original author of

“About Pure Maple Syrup: How It’s Made.”

Data Analysis

The analysis of the questionnaire (B) presents an interesting result as shown in Table. 1:

Task	degree of understanding
English explanation	5.237
English explanation with semantic annotations	7.158
Visual information	7.737
English-Japanese translation	9.414

Table 1. How much 38 freshmen at A University understand

The questionnaire (B) is composed of the four questions about the degree to which English learners understand the readings of “About Pure Maple Syrup: How It’s Made,” cited from the official web site of “Pure Maple from Canada.

The average point of the degree of understanding at the first stage is 5.237, after they read only English explanation about how pure maple syrup is made within the limited time.

They read the same English explanation with some annotations of words and phrases in the same way, with time limitation, at the second stage, and then the average point increases from 5.237 to 7.158 by 1.921. As I mentioned above, adding some semantic annotations, *disambiguation* excludes the ambiguity of words and phrases to clarify their meaning in the context, and as a result achieving the optimal relevance for English learners. The data analysis suggests that *disambiguation* achieves the optimal relevance to increase English learners’ relevance, leading to the improvement of the degree of their understanding.

However, visual information makes a slight contribution to the degree of English learners’ understanding. At the third stage, they look through not only one visual image of the whole production process of pure maple syrup but also the seven photographs representing each production process, and the average point stands at 7.737. This means that it increases only by 0.579 from 7.158 to 7.737 through visual information.

On the other hand, English-Japanese translation advances the degree of understanding remarkably. The average point stands at 9.414 at the final and fourth stage, increasing by 1.677 points from 7.737 to 9.414 from visual information to English-Japanese translation, and moreover increasing by 2.234 points from 7.158 to 9.414 from English explanation with some semantic annotations to English-Japanese translation.

CONCLUSION

Grammar-translation method has been said to make bad influences on English learning since its earliest days in Japan, but

to make use of translation can facilitate English learners’ cross-cultural understanding in English communication courses, satisfying the optimal relevance for learners.

It is not useful to put emphasis on grammar-translation method for its own purpose, but it is important to consider how to make use of translation in order to facilitate English learners’ understanding. In this research, we facilitate English learners’ understanding of cross-culture step by step: only English explanation at the first stage, English explanation with some semantic annotations at the second stage, visual information at the third stage, and finally English-Japanese translation at the fourth stage. Each stage offers them an opportunity to infer a cross-cultural phenomenon which they have no/little knowledge of, and inference is one of crucial factors in promoting English learners’ motivation and advancing English language learning, and two notions of *disambiguation* and *saturation* in Relevance Theory help their inference. Furthermore, we act as a translator to facilitate the English learners’ understanding in this research so that translation contributes to the English learners’ complete understanding of cross-cultural phenomenon.

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