

# **Translation and Interpreting Education at the Undergraduate Level**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the translation and interpretation program at Kanda University of International Studies. The primary goal of the program is to educate the students on various topics in humanities and in competitive abilities in English as well as Japanese. In order to examine how the students perceive the program, we surveyed and interviewed the students. The findings suggest that students are generally satisfied with the program contents, but there are areas that can be improved by making the program structure more flexible. To meet the students' needs, we made several changes in the structure and contents of the course and we hope this will increase the visibility of translation and interpretation education in Japan.

Although translation and interpreting education at the postgraduate level is achieving steady results, the counterpart at the undergraduate level does not yet have structural visibility. In this paper we try to explain the contents of the survey we conducted in order to determine the direction we are heading in and the various measures we adopted.

## **Translation and Interpreting (T&I) education in Japan and other countries**

### *Research on T&I*

The main venue for T&I education and theoretical research is postgraduate schools in many countries (Beeby 2004, Kim 2008). However in Japan, private companies that often provide T&I services have been the main educators of T&I, and theoretical research has not been the target of academic research for a long time until the Interpreting Theory Research Group, the predecessor of the Japan Association of Interpreting and Translation Studies, was established early in the 1990s.

The situation in Japan has been changing recently, and the number of theoretical research studies as well as education conducted at the postgraduate level have been increasing (Tsuruta & Murata 2000, Iwamoto 2007, Uehara 2008, Barada 2008, Someya et al. 2005). There is some research on T&I at the undergraduate level, but so far they have been only at the stage of collecting basic data (Naganuma 2008, Mizuno et al. 2008). As the only Japanese university that provides an undergraduate level T&I program, we have to determine the teaching curriculum that best suits the needs of the students as well as the academic objectives (Shibahara, Kosaka & Park 2010).

The main purpose of the students taking interpreting or translation classes at the undergraduate level is to build up competence in English (Tanaka et al. 2007). It is a fact that most interpreting or translation classes are introduced at the undergraduate level because they are expected to be effective in English education (Nakajima 2010).

*T&I Program at Kanda University of International Studies*

The T&I program in the English department at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) was established in 2009 targeting such goals as improving English proficiency and career education. As of July 2010 when we conducted our survey, 15 freshmen and 20 sophomores were studying in the program. As of November 2011, 45 students are studying in the program.

The students are required to take 82 credits to finish the course. In addition to those compulsory subjects, students are required to acquire a certain level of English proficiency (STEP 1st grade, over 600 points in TOEFL, or over 900 points in TOEIC), study abroad for at least half a year, experience interpreting and translation on the job training (OJT), and finally pass the end-of-program examination. Table 1 shows the compulsory subjects of the T&I program at KUIS.

**TABLE 1: List of compulsory subjects (As of March 2011)**

English Public Speaking	To build up persuasive communication competence in English
English Debate I	To build up competence in debate and critical way of thinking
Japanese Presentation	To build up research ability and competence to effectively convey information
Japanese Debate	To build up critical thinking and competence in debate in Japanese
Communication Theory I, II	To study basic concepts of communication and its basic models
Media Communication I, II	To understand and utilize various media
Rhetorical Communication	To study rhetoric and related areas
Intercultural Communication I, II	To study the role of culture in communication
International Business Communication I, II	To study international business communication after the IT revolution
Communication Between The US and Japan	To study the communication between the US and Japan both on state level and individual level
Japanese Expression I, II	To improve Japanese writing competence

Japanese-English Translation (current affairs)	To improve translation competence through translating the current affairs
English-Japanese Translation (current affairs)	To improve translation competence through translating the current affairs
Interpreting I, II, III, IV	To acquire basic interpreting competence and background information
Audio-visual Translation	To improve translation competence through translating audio-visual material
Community Interpreting	To provide opportunities to experience OJT in interpreting
Theory of Interpreting & Translation	To study major interpreting and translation theories
Current English II	To study current English and its relevant background information
Interpreting studies	To improve interpreting and translation through combining theoretical study and practice
Interpreting & Translation Portfolio	To review what interpreting and translation students have conducted through theory

The most distinctive feature of the T&I program is that it not only aims to have students acquire interpreting and translation skills, but it also regards the training as both “an effective language training” and “an effective liberal arts education.” Unlike postgraduate students who often have a sufficient level of target language ability, T&I education at the undergraduate level has to provide language education in tandem with interpreting and translation training.

In order to deal with these requirements, the T&I program at KUIS combines English classes conducted by native English-speaking teachers and interpreting or translation classes taught by Japanese teachers. In training interpreting and translation skills, a grammar translation method is also utilized to provide students with “scaffolding” to better understand spoken or written English. The program coordinator believes that interpreting and translation education can be expressed in the following formula:

Interpreting or Translation competence=

English Competence + Japanese Competence + the amount of General Knowledge

In other words, the T&I program aims to provide a strong liberal arts education together with high linguistic skills.

In order to achieve the above goal, it is believed to be very effective to apply an “all-round education” approach utilizing extracurricular activities, study camps, and special lectures from prominent interpreters and translators. According to the survey we conducted, this area received the strongest support from the students, indicating a strong desire for this form of education.

### **Student Survey: results and analysis**

#### *Survey Methodology*

Since the T&I program was established, the course has proved to be very effective in educating students. However as the teaching continued, it also became clear that there are some areas that should be improved. The purpose of the survey is to pinpoint those problems and improve them so that the program is able to serve as a platform to provide “language education through interpreting and translation education,” “liberal arts education utilizing language education” and “all-round education based on the liberal arts education”.

We were able to have a full contribution from all the 35 students who were studying in the program (9 male students and 26 female students) at the time of the survey.

We conducted our survey through questionnaires and interviews. The former

aimed to evaluate overall student satisfaction with the course. Questions were asked using a 5-point Likert scale:

- 1 I strongly think so.
- 2 I think so
- 3 I neither agree nor disagree
- 4 I do not think so
- 5 I do not think so at all

The aim of the interviews was to collect information on as many additional aspects of student satisfaction as possible.

### *Survey results and analysis*

- *Commitment toward the T&I program*

Section 1 of the questionnaire deals with the commitment toward the T&I program. We asked the following three questions:

- Q. 1-1 I am working hard to absorb the contents of the course
- Q. 1-2 I have high motivation to study
- Q. 1-3 I am satisfied with the T&I program

As for the first question, when answers 1 and 2 are combined, more than 90% students answered that they are working hard to study. Out of 35 students, only two answered “I do not think so” to this question. Likewise, many students answered that they are highly motivated in the second question.

Q. 1-3 received a rather mixed result. 31% of the students answered “I strongly think so” and 53% answered “I think so”, while 16% or 5 students answered “I do not

think so”.

- *Contents of the Classes*

In section 2, we asked the following five questions:

Q.2-1 They are exactly what I expected

Q.2-2 The number of the compulsory classes is appropriate

Q.2-3 The number of the teachers is appropriate

Q.2-4 The requirements for finishing the program are appropriate

Q.2-5 The program is effective in improving English proficiency

The answers for Q2-1 showed a clear contrast between the freshmen and the sophomores. While all freshmen answered “I strongly think so” to the first question, 40% or 8 sophomores answered either “I do not think so” or “I do not think so at all.” The same reaction was shown towards Q2-2, 2-4, and 2-5. Freshmen generally answered those questions positively but many sophomores answered “I do not think so.”

As for Q2-3, both freshmen and sophomores answered positively. This is quite understandable, given the fact that there are only 15 freshmen and 20 sophomores.

- *Study environment*

In establishing the T&I program, we have made sure that students can study in a good environment, not only in terms of facilities but also relationships among the members of the T&I program. We asked the following five questions to determine whether we achieved our objectives:

Q.3-1 We have a good environment for study

Q.3-2 We have an appropriate number of students

Q.3-3 We have good CALL facilities

Q.3-4 We can learn from other T&I students

Q.3-5 Extracurricular activities (study camps, interpreting contest, etc.) are effective incentives to study

As for Q3-2, 3-4, and 3-5, we received 100% positive answers. It is understood that the students welcome an environment where they are able to learn from each other.

Most of the freshmen answered positively in Q3-1, while 15% or 3 students answered negatively.

As for Q3-3, 13% of the freshmen and 5% of the sophomores are not satisfied with the CALL facilities.

- Study abroad

Since the T&I program requires study abroad for at least half a year, we asked the following two questions to roughly grasp their overall impression. This was followed by interviews to have a closer observation.

Q.4-1 There is no concern over studying abroad

Q.4-2 The criteria for the selection of the exchange students is appropriate

In contrast to the answers for the previous questions, most of the answers on these two questions were negative.

As for the Q.4-1, 87% of the freshmen and 80% of the sophomores answered either “I do not think so” or “I do not think so at all.”



20% of the freshmen and 55% of the sophomores answered either “I do not think so” or “I do not think so at all” to the Q.4-2.

The follow-up interviews revealed that many students are worried about two main things:

Not being able to graduate in four years

Starting out late in the job hunting

As for the criteria for the selection, many students were worried about the fact that they do not have sufficient TOEFL scores to be selected as exchange students. This should not pose a serious problem as many of them had just started preparing for the exam at the time of the interview.

## **Discussion**

Questionnaires and interviews revealed that students have overall satisfaction toward various aspects of the T&I program such as curriculum and classes. However, they also showed that many students have concerns over study abroad. This issue needs to be addressed promptly.

### *Challenges the T&I course faces*

From the view point of the program coordinator, the challenges that the T&I program faces can be divided into two categories:

A) Curriculum and facilities

B) Attitudes of the students toward study

As for category A, the coordinator believes there are too many compulsory classes, resulting in the students merely juggling various assignments. Students are diligent, but many of them are so stressed out that they do not have enough

time to read books or indulge in studying topics they are interested in.

Facility-wise, the installment of simultaneous interpreting facilities is strongly needed. Since KUIS offers interpreting education classes in many languages, we could have opportunities to practice “relay interpreting” using English or Japanese as the pivot language.

The video conference system is another facility which can broaden the range of study for the students. It allows in-class communication with students from other universities whether they are in Japan or overseas. It could provide many opportunities for the T&I students to have OJTs in either consecutive or simultaneous interpreting.

As for category B, T&I students have mainly two problems:

- A Limited intellectual curiosity
- B Lack of motivation for active learning

The highest barrier that prevents students from conducting effective interpreting tends to be the lack of intellectual curiosity. We need to find ways to encourage the students to expand their world knowledge, including history, geography, science, and current events.

As for category B, students are inclined to look for the “model answer.” Unlike the education they received until the end of high school, there is no such thing as a “model answer” in interpreting or translating. Just as one stimulus can result in very different drawings, students have to judge how they can best convey the message of the source language.

It is essential to conduct research prior to the interpreting task, but since there is no clear-cut “work objective” like other assignments, students sometimes seem to be at a loss. Therefore, there should be a careful guidance given so that they can

actively seek the information they need for interpreting.

## **Conclusion**

### *Changes made to the T&I course*

Since the survey was conducted last year, there have been several changes made to the curriculum of the T&I program. The most drastic change was the decrease in the number of compulsory subjects. As a result, the required number of credits decreased from 82 credits to 68 credits, providing much more time for independent study for the students.

In order to address the issue of not offering enough translation classes, new translation classes are planned to commence in the next academic year. There also will be a new introductory class for interpreting and translation, also starting from the next academic year.

As for studying abroad, students achieved a splendid result in being selected for the university exchange programs. There are currently 10 students studying abroad, with one of them studying at an Ivy League university.

The students are also organizing independent study groups, and currently two study groups are in operation. Thanks to this study group activity, the attitude of the students greatly improved.

### *Areas for further improvement*

The curriculum should be more structured to be a “model” for undergraduate level interpreting and translation education. This requires further surveys of the students and discussion among the teachers, which is planned to take place early next year.

Simultaneous interpreting facilities and a video conference system have not been introduced yet, but plans have been made to introduce them in the near future. We will continuously make efforts to improve the study environment for the students.

Based on these measures, we would like to liaise closely with other universities in Japan and overseas to provide better interpreting and translation education for the students.

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