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The difference of learning and using English

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As a student, we study English hard and have rich knowledge. However, some of us will be confused when we are put suddenly under the situation that we must use English to native speakers. I think Japanese education tends to focus on English grammar and students study English with a sense of duty. Also, they study it for entrance examination for universities rather than for getting means of communication. Do you have experiences of the situation that you could not use English nevertheless the enough knowledge?

I will introduce one real situation I came across. In March 2024, one visitor from Taiwan asked me the way to a famous tower in Ikebukuro. She showed me a picture of it, but there were full of Chinese words, and I could not understand. Then, the only sentence I could make was, “Can I touch the screen?”. Before that, I wanted to ask her, “Did you come to Japan for sightseeing?”. However, my pronunciation was bad, and I could not convey what I meant to say. I used a lot of gestures and finally she understood what I meant. As a result, I successfully guided her to the tower, and we talked a little about her trip. She showed me pictures of Tokyo tower which she took. The communication with her was fun, but I think if I had spoken English fluently, I could have enjoyed more detailed conversation with her.

From this experience, I learned that not only just studying English but also learning the practical use English is important. I think Japanese education should focus on such aspect. However, in these days, there is a movement putting emphasis on English communication. For example, in Waseda University, there is an English class, Tutorial English. In this class, students can use only English and can learn practical sentences. Also, many elementary schools in Japan put efforts into English classes for young children to learn English conversation. It is effective for children to be exposed to English from younger ages.

Also, the skill of listening English is important. Native speakers add emphasis and variation when they speak English, and it is difficult for me to catch the words pronounced weakly. I’m not good at listening since I was a high school student, and I have an insecure about it now. However, I can see improvement of education of junior high school about listening English. I work for cram school, and I teach English to junior high school students. When I checked their mid term and end term examinations, I was surprised that they have listening tests. When I was a junior high school student, I didn’t have listening tests, and I could not practice listening. Many students I oversee say that they are not good at listening and do not want to have tests. I think that is why students should practice listening. I hope children get skills of catching and speaking English and use English at will.

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