

Merci, XieXie, Spasibo

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When you give an oral presentation in front of the people whose mother tongue is neither yours nor English, it is a good idea to start your talk with a short greeting speech in their language. Then, you will immediately attract the audience's interest. Their feeling is similar to yours when you meet a person from overseas can speak your language a little. This speech helps you much more if you are little-known by the audience.

I'm interested in knowing a bit of various languages although my English skill is still to be improved. Even though being busy in preparing my presentation in English, I never feel guilty about spending some time to learn a new language because it may be helpful for promoting international exchange during my business trip. The followings are the results of my silly efforts.

Spring of 2001 in France

I was unexpectedly dispatched to two universities in Bordeaux and Rennes. I had three weeks to prepare for my talk about my research and made up my mind to add a greeting in French. I started to learn French by myself and asked a French post-doctoral fellow to write a manuscript for me.

For my generation, the ABC of learning a language before graduation had included transcribing illustrative sentences in longhand. After many years, this was my first time to learn a language using a personal computer. First of all, I mastered how to type, browse and print a French file on my Linux PC. In fact, I spent most of the time for it with enjoyment. It may seem a situation of "putting the cart before the horse", but I think that it is a good strategy for keeping my motivation.

The manuscript that I received contained only three sentences as shown in Fig. 1, but it took much time to understand their grammatical structure and to pronounce them

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http://www.geocities.jp/tokyo_1406/

correctly. I had only one chance to make my pronunciation checked by the postdoc just before the departure.

Figure 1: The manuscript of my greeting speech in French.

On the day of the presentation in front of the audience of about twenty researchers, I made my short address trying to avoid seeing the manuscript as much as possible. Then, I received a warm applause. I continued my talk with a feeling of togetherness among people who have to communicate with English as the second language.

Autumn of 2002 in Shanghai

I was invited to an international symposium. Since I had learned Chinese for one month in my teens, I thought I would manage to do the same thing in the same way. As I arrived the airport in Shanghai, I found two young postdocs waiting for me. We took a taxi to go to the venue of the symposium. After talking for some time, we were caught in a traffic jam. Utilizing this occasion, I asked them to check my pronunciation of the speech and practiced a lot.

Figure 2: The manuscript of my greeting speech in Chinese.

In the following morning, the symposium began at eight o'clock and my talk was scheduled to start just before noon, when the audience felt hungry and tired. As soon as I went on the platform and spoke the first sentence, I received a thunder of applause from over one hundred Chinese audience. Getting momentum from it, I continued my talk in a vigorous mood.

At the banquet in the following day, the young postdocs and their friends called me to join in taking a souvenir picture in a scrum. On a city excursion in the following morning, we talked a lot and they took care of me very much.

Spring of 2005 in St. Petersburg

I was invited to a small symposium held as a part of a large conference. Although I had never learned Russian, I aspired to continue this activity to receive attention. As soon as I made up my mind, I realized the difficulties of leaning Cyrillic letters with their pronunciation, some of which are the letter "C" corresponds to S in English, "H" to N, and "P" to R.

Figure 3: The manuscript of my greeting speech in Russian.

Even after typing and printing the Russian manuscript with my PC, I still had problems to pronounce it. Moreover, I lost a chance to make my speech corrected by the author of the manuscript. After the arrival at the hotel in St. Petersburg, I transcribed the manuscript to a notebook and speak it loud many times everyday. I gained confidence when I found to be able to hear the first sentence of the opening address of the conference. It had been just two days before my presentation when I become to speak my greeting speech fluently and renewed the importance of physical learning processes.

On the same day, I joined a city excursion and dropped into a souvenir shop. Then, a friendly young shopman spoke to me. He said that he had been in Osaka Japan for one and half years and his wife was a Japanese. I asked him to hear my speech for practice. A salesgirl came closer to us to watch the funny situation where a Japanese gentleman were delivering an out-of-place address in Russian to a native young man.

In the room of the symposium, I disappointed a little to find the number of the audience was far less than expected. But they were very kind to give me an applause for my effort.

After a long time, seeing these manuscripts once again, I found that I completely forget to read them. However, I don't think that my efforts were waste of time. There are thick walls between non-native speakers of English whose mother tongues are different. Once they communicate a little with one of their native languages, their English skills are accelerated.

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