



# 語学力上達のコツ (英語版)



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“Tips on improving language skills”

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(When I was working with Patent Department of Shin-Etsu Chemical Co., Ltd., Japan, the company's Editorial Department started a series called "Tips for Improving Language Skills" on the employee magazine, and I was asked to write for this as the first contributor. I wrote the following and submitted the photo also. This is a translation of the original Japanese text.)

"Mr. Nagamitz, I understand you will read the English version of the manuscripts in your speech, and how long will it take?" Ms. Simultaneous Interpreter asked me while receiving from me the English and Japanese manuscripts.

"Fifteen minutes, exactly" I was confident of the accuracy of this answer. I had not measured during practices, but it definitely would end in 15 minutes.

"Tomorrow you will read this exactly as written?"

"Yes," I answered, for the speech would be exactly in accordance with the manuscript, although I would not "read" it.

Last autumn, in Okayama, I was scheduled to give a speech on the third day (the final day) as one of the representatives of the Japanese side at a regular Japan - US convention regarding intellectual properties. In the past few years, the US side had expressed a desire that Japanese speakers give the speeches in Japanese, for our English was rather difficult for them to catch the meaning of and it would be easier to hear the English of the interpreters through the earphones, so

that so far this year all the Japanese speakers had presented their speeches in the native language.

The US side's speeches skillfully included humor and were overwhelming the Japanese side in terms of power. A US delegate on the first day challenged that the Japanese seemed to write patent claims as a defensive weapon, although in the US it was written as offensive weapons. We felt offended to hear this. My prepared speech was sort of a declaration that, according to statistics, Japanese companies would now actively exercise patents as strategic weapons. I felt this speech should not be thrown to the US side in fluent English of a female interpreter, but it should be in English weighted with my "namari" (Japanese accent), and I thought that even if I speak in English, I should not just read the manuscript without looking at the audience, for that would lessen the power. I should keep fixing my eyes on the audiences'. I decided to use a trick.

On the morning of the third day, as the third speaker, I pushed my earphone into my left ear and went up to the podium without a manuscript. Americans removed earphones from their ears as I would speak in English. I began by saying "Excuse me for speaking...not in Japanese," which was not in the manuscript. Then I started my speech. I was so nervous that my voice faltered at first, but soon I recovered and gave my speech while like a searchlight I swerved my eye lines at the audience evenly. The audience poured curious eyes to me, as I spoke in slow but accurate English without looking at the manuscript. I could afford to drink a bite of water in the middle of the speech. The speech ended in 15 minutes. Applause. At the luncheon, not only from my colleagues but also from the US side some praised my speech and held my hand.

I am not so skilled in English as to show off "tips for improving language skills" to the readers. So, please acquit me of the duty, for I will disclose the secret of the above trick instead.

The English conversation practice method that I have adopted since my university days is called shadowing. It is to listen to a relatively slow English spoken by a native speaker using a player such as cassette tape recorder and say the same English simultaneously as you hear it like a shadow follows a person. It is not the "repeat after me" practice where the voices of the teacher and the student do not overlap. As the voices overlap in shadowing, it is also called overlapping. (In fact I developed this method myself and it was only after several years later that I found the practice method had names.)

Now, at the first night in Okayama, I carefully read the manuscript of my English speech and recorded it with Walkman with recording function. I also provided a silent space for drinking water in the middle. It took an unexpectedly long time and the speech was barely contained on one side of the 30-minute cassette tape. Then, I practiced shadowing with this recording many times to get used to it up until the time of my presentation on the third day.

On the third morning, just before going up to the podium, I pulled out the earphone plug from the mobile receiver for simultaneous interpretation service, and connected the plug to my Walkman in my pocket, and pushed the play button, while putting the earphone into my left ear, pretending as if I intended to monitor the pace of the simultaneous interpreter. After that I merely did the shadowing guided by my familiar voice coming from the earphone in my left ear on the platform.

Photo of me making the speech: [amazon.com/author/nagamitz-kazuhiro](https://www.amazon.com/author/nagamitz-kazuhiro)



The audience poured curious eye

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