My Reflection on Learning English

My history of learning English began when I entered junior high school. For the next three years, I mostly studied reading and grammar in junior high school and never studied English outside school. I was little anxious about such English learning and my future studies, but I wasted enormous time in the futile study of English. When I went to high school, I had no chance to change my idea about learning English, so I studied English because my teacher told me to do so.

In the third year at high school, however, I started thinking about my future and studying English in earnest for university entrance exams. According to the trend in the tests I wanted to take, I mainly studied grammar and usage. Of course, I studied reading paragraphs logically. So, I mostly read logical articles, but rarely novels.

I entered Chuo University and took the English-English course in the Division of International Law and Business. I took 2 reading classes, 2 speaking and listening classes and I writing class in my first year. In my reading classes, I tried to get used to learning something in English and enriching my vocabulary by reading articles about gender. I also worked hard to improve my writing skill by writing paragraphs logically. In speaking and writing classes, I learned how to research things in English, build my presentations and make my notes clear. Outside university, I tried to read as many articles as I could in order to make my reading speed faster and increase my vocabulary. I frequently read The Japan Times and foreign newspapers.

Now, I think my English skills are insufficient. I can read English sentences quickly, but I'm weak at reading very closely and translating into Japanese. So, I'll try to do accurate translation in my seminar, in which I'll read articles about The Oregon Death with Dignity Act. I also have an opportunity to read novels in this class, and I want to enjoy reading them. In listening skills, although I came to be
able to listen to English well spoken by native speakers, I'm still poor at listening
and writing down what I hear at once. This skill is indispensable for learning
English further, because I cannot remember for long what I hear without writing it
down. This year, in another speaking and listening class, I have a chance to practice
this skill, so I'll make the most of it. As for my writing skills, I'll try to write as fast as
possible, so that I can explain what I want to say quickly, which helps me with my
speaking skill. In order to develop fast writing, I'll write diaries regularly in my writing
class.

The same as last year, I want to focus on developing my speaking skills this year. I
want to work in international business in the future (a trading company, for example),
so this skill will be vital for that type of job. Especially, discussion skills are
important in negotiation with foreigners, so I want to develop this skill. In order to
have a good discussion, I'll have to explain my thoughts clearly, so I must enrich
my vocabulary to be able to say what I want to say. My goal right now is to find a
good way to increase my vocabulary and carry this into action. At the same time, I
want to do active debate in English. By the end of this year, I hope to be able to
have better discussions than now.

Now that I've finished the first semester in this class, I need to reflect on
what I could improve and couldn't. The most remarkable point in my progress is
that I came to use English actively in the class. Through mini-presentations of
Graded Readers and the sharing of the research, I improved my skill of explaining
what I want to say in English. Especially, in mini-presentations of Graded Readers, I
tried to use easy words and phrases to present information, which helped me to
improve my skill of explaining. In addition, my change in the way of learning
vocabulary enabled me to use English actively. Until I changed my way of learning
vocabulary, I had been satisfied with only looking up the meanings of difficult words,
but since I learned about new ways of vocabulary learning, I've increased my new
vocabulary of frequently used words and phrases, and now I use English more actively. Furthermore, I improved my listening skills more than ever in this semester. In my Personal English Learning Project (PELP), I listened to English songs and wrote down the lyrics of these songs. Though this work, I've noticed more clearly how English words are connected to each other.

My continuing theme of English improvement is to use English even more naturally, not to say as naturally as Japanese. In the second semester of this year, I have two focuses for my English learning: note taking with listening and discussion.

To begin with, in my PELP, I started to listen to BBC radio and write down the information I got from it. At first, this didn't work well; I couldn't listen and concentrate on writing at the same time. However, as I continued to do this PELP, my skill gradually developed, and now I am able to catch important words or phrases in speech.

My second focus was discussion skill. To improve this, I made effort to collect as much information concerning the issue as possible, which helped me to think more deeply about the issue. In addition, I made for/against tables in which I organized the arguments, reasons and examples. By doing this, I tried to make my arguments clearer and more persuasive. I also noticed the importance of statistics, because without this arguments are weak.

Through two years of English learning at this university, I've improved a lot of skills. In the next year, the number of English class I must take decreases. In order to keep the skills that I have developed and to improve this further, I will have to make more and more effort all by myself. Especially, the skills of listening and speaking will decline if I neglect them, so I'll try to make time for English every week. I also intend to go abroad and feel 'live English'. This will help me notice the things that lack in my English skills and motivate me to continue to develop my English. I'll do my best in order to prevent my improved skills from getting weaker.