

2014

19(2)

journal
of

interpretation

R E S E A R C H

journal
of
interpretation
RESEARCH

Volume 19, Number 2
2014

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ISSN 1092-5872

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Assessing the Needs of Interpreter Training in Japan

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Abstract

This research attempted to identify the needs present in interpreter training in Japan. Interviews with trainers and interpreters, and questionnaires administered to interpreters were employed to explore (a) the skills and abilities necessary for successful interpreters and (b) the challenges that trainers may experience regarding interpretive training in Japan. The results showed both consistency and inconsistency in the perceptions of interpreters and trainers. Interpretive design, communication and public speaking, and risk management are core subjects recommended for future introductory-level training programs in Japan. Managerial and training skills are suggested for new types of training programs. Several challenges to interpreter training in Japan were also identified.

Keywords

training, needs, training of trainers, Japan

Background to the Study

Interpreter training is considered to be one of the most influential mechanisms for the improvement of the quality of interpretation (Black & Weiler, 2005; Weiler & Ham, 2001b). In concert with the growth of interpretation over the past few decades in Japan, an increased number of interpreter training courses have been offered by a variety of organizations. As the needs of society and the expected roles of interpreters have changed over the past few decades (Merriman & Brochu, 2006), and the demands and expectations of visitors in the 21st century have grown, the skills and abilities expected of interpreters have also evolved, adding to the needs to be incorporated into guide training (Weiler & Walker, 2014). For example, researchers have only recently begun to investigate the roles

and functions of interpreters as tour guides, a topic rarely treated in the literature prior to the 1990s (e.g., Ballantyne & Hughes, 2001; Black & Weiler, 2005; Ham & Weiler, 2002; Randall & Rollins, 2009; Weiler & Davis, 1993). The training of interpreters must anticipate and reflect the dynamic society in which interpretation takes place. Arguably, enhancing interpreters' abilities to understand their potential multiplicity of roles and functions is one of the most significant values of training and education.

This research attempted to identify the needs of interpreter training from interpreters' and trainers' perspectives in Japan. No research to date has reported the subjects required by interpreters or an assessment of existing training programs in the Japanese context. Research on the training process promises Japanese interpretive trainers both practical guidelines and pedagogical insights into designing effective training.

Previous studies have focused on how interpreters have been trained. Lackey (2008), for example, surveyed the status of academic programs in the USA offering interpretation courses. Her findings revealed several issues that needed to be addressed in future university-based interpretive education programs in that country. While Lackey's results uncovered a number of consistent elements among the programs she surveyed, she also discovered inconsistencies in the skills and subjects taught in interpretation courses. Based on the inconsistencies identified, Lackey suggested consistency across programs and determining core competencies through collaborations among multiple groups. An important benefit of studies such as Lackey's is that they cause self-examination and stimulate ongoing discussions about the competencies required by contemporary interpreters, as well as core curricular components needed by training programs that aim to develop these competencies.

The US-based National Association for Interpretation (NAI, 2009) analyzed the standards and competencies required in contemporary interpretive practice and recommended 12 categories into which the standards and benchmarks for interpretation practice should fall. In addition to interpretive practice, NAI identified the standards necessary for interpretive planning and organization. These standards suggest different stages of competencies for interpretive professionals based on a given trainee's experience skill level and needs. Additionally, according to the US National Park Service's (n.d.) Interpretive Development Program, training is divided into five levels (entry, developmental, full performance, specialist, and supervisor) and different competencies are identified at each level. These standards suggest that interpreter training should be offered at multiple levels based on specific required skill sets.

Researchers have argued that these competencies and standards ought to be determined based on evidence available in the interpretation literature and in published research results (e.g., Ward & Wilkinson, 2006) and that training components should be determined based on what the literature has revealed with respect to good and best practices (e.g., Weiler & Ham, 2002; Weiler & Walker, 2014). In a study conducted by Black and King (2002) about the effectiveness of tour guide training in Vanuatu, six training programs were evaluated using a qualitative and quantitative survey with trainees. The authors found that the trainees were concerned about having to communicate with tourists who speak different languages as well as about the unreliability of other staff, poor guide performance, threats to visitor safety and lack of first-aid, and tourists' complaints. Other areas of concern focused on the visitor impacts such as tourists dressing properly and failing to respect local culture and required fees. Black and King also uncovered a number of training needs such as first-aid, guiding skills, handling tourist complaints, language

learning, and basic hospitality. The study underscored the importance of such evaluations toward identifying gaps between what interpretive guides must do and what they currently know. Research of this type must be ongoing in any dynamic profession if it hopes to meet the needs of trainees and maintain high industry standards.

Another study conducted by Weiler and Ham (2002) in Panama, Galapagos Islands, and Argentina offered an example of evaluation research on interpretive tour guides. The authors assessed the training programs in terms of trainees' reactions and self-assessed learning to evaluate the trainees' satisfaction with the training as well as the extent to which specific competencies were either learned anew or improved. They measured seven categories of competencies, some of which may illustrate the areas that interpretive guide training, in general, might address: introduction to tourism and the role of the guide, visitor profiles and expectations, the interpretive approach to communication, customer service, leadership and group management, communicating across cultures, and working with tourists who have special needs. In a study of the success of a tour guide organization in Australia, Carmody (2012) reported that increasing the knowledge pertinent to their guiding practices, discussing guiding-related issues, networking, and developing job opportunities were of paramount importance for the member she studied. According to Carmody, supporting knowledge acquisition and networking skills in training may contribute to meeting the needs of trainees. Focusing on the communicative role of tour guides, Weiler and Walker (2014) studied a tour guide training program in Tonga to identify training content and reported the impacts of the program on the trainees' perceptions. Their findings suggested that programs should include information on visitor expectations, the four domains of experience brokering (i.e., physical, interactive, cognitive, and affective), and the six principles of interpretation (i.e., involving, thematic, relevant, enjoyable/engaging, accurate, and logical) in guide training. According to Weiler and Walker, guide training informed by theory and research can successfully deliver the knowledge and skills required by the guides. Taken together, the above findings help to highlight the advantage of understanding both training needs and trainee satisfaction as input into designing future training courses.

The Current Research

The aim of this paper was to identify and compare the perspectives of interpreters and trainers in Japan with respect to the skills and abilities necessary to become a successful interpreter, and to suggest a framework for interpreter training that accommodates the needs of Japanese interpreters. The research was carried out using three data collection methods: interpreter interviews, trainer interviews, and interpreter questionnaires.

Beginning in winter 2012 and continuing through the beginning of 2013, interviews were conducted with 12 trainers and 12 interpreters. The interviewees were selected using a snowball sampling method through which individuals were required to satisfy the predetermined criteria. Trainers must have engaged in training at least once within the past two years and had more than six years or ten courses of experience as trainers, and interpreters must have participated in training and worked as an interpreter at any time.

The interviews were conducted following a standard protocol involving a couple of orientation questions and several main questions. All of the questions were posed in an open-ended format. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Notes were taken by the researcher during each interview. Following the approaches of Maxwell (1996) and Strauss and Corbin (1998), all of the interviews were transcribed and subjected

Table 1. Summary of the participants in the interviews and questionnaires

	Interviewed trainers Frequency (n=12)		Interviewed interpreters Frequency (n=12)		Questionnaire respondents Frequency (n=54)	
Years of experience as a trainer	5 to 9 years	3				
	10 to 14 years	5				
	15 or more years	4				
Years of experience as an interpreter	Less than 4 year	1	Less than 4 years	3	Less than 4 years	26% (14)
	5 to 9 years	2	5 to 9 years	4	5 to 9 years	17% (9)
	10 to 14 years	3	10 to 14 years	2	10 to 14 years	13% (7)
	15 or more years	5	15 or more years	3	15 or more years	11% (6)
	None	1			No mention	5% (3)
				None	28% (15)	
Numbers of training course attended			1 to 4 times	5	Once	50% (27)
			5 to 9 times	1	2 times	15% (8)
			10 to 15 times	2	3 to 5 times	22% (12)
			On-the-job and course training	4	6 or more times	13% (7)
Sex	Male	11	Male	6	Male	52% (28)
	Female	1	Female	6	Female	46% (25)
					No mention	2% (1)
Age					20s	20% (11)
					30s	39% (21)
					40s	28% (15)
					50s	13% (7)
Work setting ¹	Environmental education and nature experience organization	10	Nature experience center	9	Nature experience center	31% (17)
	Aquarium	1	Environmental learning center	2	Environmental learning center	22% (12)
	University	1	Science learning center	1	Zoo or aquarium	5% (3)
					Museum	2% (1)
					Other than above including not interpretive settings	48% (26)

¹ Some respondents provided multiple responses.

to content analysis to identify categories in relatively short answer responses. Open coding was used to break the texts into discrete elements to examine the similarities and differences and identify recurring themes and concepts. The identified categories and themes were later reexamined for coding checks and adequate agreements between the data and codes. The derived categories and subcategories served as items in an instrument that would be used in the subsequent survey. As such, a questionnaire was developed.

In the spring of 2013, the questionnaires were administered to a purposive sample of interpreters known to have completed at least one previous training course. With the help of three organizations that offer interpreter training, an email invitation letter was sent through mailing lists to approximately 500 past training participants (i.e., trainees) requesting they complete the questionnaire. Two weeks after the first invitation email, another email was sent to the mailing lists to remind the readers about and encourage survey participation. Out of the trainees approached, 54 individuals returned completed questionnaires in one month. This small number of respondents was not representative of all of the training participants and, as such, is a limitation of the research. The main cause of the non-completion was conceivably due to the degree of involvement in interpretation by the trainees because the trainees included individuals with little or no interpretation experiences and/or intention to work as an interpreter. The trainees were registered on the mailing lists simply because they had completed training courses. This situation illustrated a unique aspect of interpreter training in Japan, which will be discussed shortly. The respondents were not randomly selected, but voluntarily self-selected from a select list of interpreter trainees. To reduce these limitations, the results derived from the trainer interviews, interpreter interviews, and interpreter questionnaires were compared for agreement and disagreement. Following the reasoning of Maxwell (1996), the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data allowed for triangulation of the data and increased the credibility and trustworthiness of the researcher's interpretations.

Results and Discussion

A brief description of the research participants was presented in Table 1. The trainer interview participants varied in regard to their years of experience as interpreters: three respondents had worked for less than nine years, three for 10 to 14 years, and five for 15 or more years. One respondent had no experience as an interpreter. Their experiences as trainers also varied from five years to more than 15 years. All but one were men.

The interpreter interview participants varied in regard to their years in the field. Seven of them had less than nine years of experiences, two had 10 to 14 years, and three had 15 or more years. Six of the participants had attended nine or fewer previous training programs, two had attended more than ten, and four had attended on-the-job training and some training courses. Half of the respondents were women.

Out of the 54 questionnaire respondents, half had attended a training course once. Over 70% of the respondents had experience as a full-time, part-time, or volunteer interpreter. The respondents worked for nature experience centers (31%) and environmental learning centers (22%), while close to half of them worked at other settings (48%). (Some individuals worked for multiple settings and, thus, the sum of these numbers exceeds 100%.) Their ages varied from the 20s (20%), 30s (39%), 40s (28%), to 50s (13%). Slightly more than one-half were men.

Table 2. Useful skills and knowledge learned in past training courses

Useful skills and knowledge	Interviews		Questionnaires	
	Trainers ¹	Interpreters	Mean ²	SD
Concepts of interpretation	✓	✓	4.69	0.64
Example interpretation performed by trainers	✓		4.52	0.57
Interpretive design	✓	✓	4.43	0.63
How to conduct and deliver interpretation	✓	✓	4.35	0.78
How to communicate and speak to audience	✓	✓	4.19	0.95
Understanding and analyzing myself	✓	✓	4.17	0.95
Risk management	✓	✓	4.02	1.14
Vocalization	✓		3.96	1.28
Experiential learning	✓		3.96	0.97
Facilitation	✓		3.85	1.27
Knowledge of the resource to be presented	✓	✓	3.83	1.08
Hospitality	✓	✓	3.81	1.24
How to use props	✓	✓	3.80	1.10
Practicing interpretation	✓	✓	3.74	0.77
Communication	✓	✓	3.70	0.95
Understanding the audience	✓	✓	3.67	1.13
Leadership	✓		3.67	1.24
Service manners and behaviors	✓		3.54	1.28
Planning interpretive projects and events	✓		3.48	1.25
Training interpreters	✓		3.20	1.38
Management of interpretation related works	✓		3.07	1.29
Public relations of interpretation	✓	✓	3.06	1.33

¹ Trainers were asked to list the subject areas they taught in their training courses.

² Scale of 5 to 1, where 5=very useful, 3=neutral, and 1=not at all useful.

Useful knowledge and skills learned in past training

The interpreters were asked in interviews to describe the most useful skills and knowledge that they felt they had learned in their previous training. This question was aimed at identifying the subjects that should be included in future training courses and asked only to the interpreters. The responses varied and fell into the following categories: designing and delivering interpretation (n=5), hospitality (n=2), communication skills (n=2), public speaking (n=2), risk management (n=2), the importance of research (n=2), the purpose of interpretation (n=2), and knowledge of interpretive resources (n=1). The trainers were requested to list the subject and knowledge areas they taught in their training. The listed areas served as items for a question in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire respondents were asked to rate the usefulness of the skills, knowledge, and subjects learned in their past training courses. A five-point rating scale was employed, ranging from “very useful” (5) to “not at all useful” (1). Respondents rated all of the items somewhat useful with much variation in the degree of usefulness (Table 2). The results indicated that interpretive knowledge and skills were useful to the respondents, such as concepts of interpretation (\bar{X} =4.69), example interpretation

performed by trainers (\bar{X} =4.52), how to design interpretation (\bar{X} =4.43), and how to conduct and deliver interpretation (\bar{X} =4.35). On the other hand, managerial aspects scored relatively low (\bar{X} <3.5: planning of interpretive projects and events, training interpreters, management of interpretation-related works, and public relations of interpretation).

Table 2 shows the responses derived from the three groups of samples. Some areas were consistently reported as useful: concepts of interpretation, designing interpretation, delivering interpretation, communicating and speaking to audiences, understanding and analyzing myself, and risk management. For example, “I learned not to speak too much, not to give too much information but to provide visitors with experiences and wait for them to think and respond. That point has been very useful.” Another interpreter stated, “Risk management - anticipating any risks is indispensable. We can offer interpretation only after the safety and anxiety of audience are taken care of.”

Skills and knowledge desired to learn in future training courses

The trainers were asked to describe any new subjects that they felt should be taught in future training courses. The responses fell into the following categories: the management aspects of interpretation (n=7), communication skills (n=4), training of trainers (n=2), advanced interpretation skills (n=3), designing interpretation (n=1), and knowledge of the resource to be interpreted (n=1). The trainers also mentioned the following formats of training as necessary in future: on-the-job training (n=4), advanced levels of courses (n=4), on-site training (n=2), and corresponding learning (n=2). They were also asked to state what they would like to learn about or improve upon as interpreters if given such opportunities. They offered various responses: knowledge or experiences of the resources to be interpreted (n=3), training of interpreters (n=3), entertainment (n=3), interpretive design (n=2), and others (e.g., communication, the principles of interpretation, hospitality and service, relevant theories, management, interpretive planning, knowledge of audience, and language skills, n=1 respectively).

The interpreters were requested to list what skills and knowledge they would like to learn in the future. This question aimed to examine whether the trainers’ perceptions were consistent with the interpreters’ in regard to the areas that should be addressed in future training courses. Several similar responses emerged: communication skills (n=6), designing interpretation (n=6), knowledge of the resources to be interpreted (n=5), risk management (n=2), management (n=1), internal training (n=1), and language skills (n=1). The interpreters were also asked to outline the skills and knowledge that they perceived as having been overlooked or insufficiently taught in their prior training courses. This question attempted to explore whether past training courses matched the respondents’ needs and desires. A wide variety of responses were given: designing interpretation (n=3), risk management (n=3), practicing individual skills (n=2), experiencing a variety of interpretive programs (n=2), on-the-job training (n=1), a scientific view of interpretive resources (n=1), the purpose of interpretation (n=1), and nothing (n=1). The responses provided by the trainers and interpreters served as items for another question in the questionnaire.

In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to rate the skills, knowledge areas, and subjects that they would like to learn about in future training courses as well as how they would like to learn this information. A five-point scale was used, ranging from “want to learn very much” (5) to “do not want to learn at all” (1). Of the 23 items,

Table 3. Skills and knowledge desired to learn or be taught in future training courses

Skills, knowledge, and subjects	Interviews		Questionnaires	
	Trainers	Interpreters	Mean ¹	SD
Management of interpretation-related works	✓	✓	4.70	0.76
Planning of interpretive projects and events	✓		4.70	0.60
Understanding the audience	✓		4.67	0.55
Interpersonal relations	✓		4.65	0.62
How to communicate and speak to audience	✓	✓	4.61	0.71
Public relations of interpretation	✓	✓	4.59	0.69
Design of guided walks and talks	✓	✓	4.57	0.62
Evaluations of interpretation	✓		4.57	0.72
Facilitation	✓	✓	4.56	0.84
Non-personal interpretation	✓		4.52	0.75
Interpretive planning	✓		4.48	0.77
Risk management		✓	4.44	0.66
Design of interpretation other than guided walks and talks	✓	✓	4.43	0.79
Hospitality and services	✓		4.43	0.72
Entertainment	✓		4.37	0.85
Leadership	✓		4.35	0.70
How to use props		✓	4.33	0.85
Work ethic	✓		4.26	0.89
Training of interpreters	✓	✓	4.24	0.85
Learning theories	✓		4.17	0.82
Product knowledge	✓	✓	4.15	1.11
Interpretation in a different language	✓	✓	3.94	1.11
Examples of interpretation		✓	3.54	0.86

¹Scale of 5 to 1, where 5=want to learn very much, 3=don't know, and 1=don't want to learn at all.

Table 4. Desired training format in future training programs

Training formats	Interviews		Questionnaires	
	Trainers ¹	Interpreters	Mean ²	SD
On-site training	✓	✓	4.48	0.67
Practical designing and delivering interpretation		✓	4.46	0.82
Receiving feedback on one's performance		✓	4.39	0.77
On-the-job training	✓	✓	4.22	0.98
Video and corresponding materials	✓		3.26	1.18
Distance learning	✓		2.93	1.03

¹Trainers listed necessary format of training.

²Scale of 5 to 1, where 5=want to learn very much, 3=don't know, and 1=don't want to learn at all.

21 received mean ratings of greater than 4.0, indicating substantial interest (Table 3). Management of interpretation-related works ($\bar{x}=4.7$) and planning of interpretive projects and events ($\bar{x}=4.7$) scored the most favorably, which potentially indicated the high priority of having managerial skills taught in future courses. This potential is underscored by the similarly high ratings received by public relations ($\bar{x}=4.59$) and program evaluation ($\bar{x}=4.57$). Communication skills, such as understanding the audience ($\bar{x}=4.66$), interpersonal relationships ($\bar{x}=4.64$), how to communicate and speak to the audience ($\bar{x}=4.61$), and facilitation ($\bar{x}=4.55$), were likewise highly rated. Skills used to design guided walks and talks ($\bar{x}=4.57$) and non-personal interpretation ($\bar{x}=4.51$) were also highly sought.

The respondents also rated their interests in various training formats for future courses (Table 4). They were most interested in on-site training ($\bar{x}=4.48$), followed by practical designing and delivering interpretation ($\bar{x}=4.46$), receiving feedback on one's performance ($\bar{x}=4.38$), and on-the-job training ($\bar{x}=4.22$). They were primarily interested in face-to-face learning as opposed to vicarious alternatives such as distance learning ($\bar{x}=2.92$) or video and correspondence educational materials ($\bar{x}=3.25$).

Tables 3 and 4 present the responses derived from all three groups of respondents. Several responses were consistently reported as desirable among the three samples: managerial skills, communication skills, interpretive design, knowledge of the resources to be interpreted (often called "product knowledge"), and training skills. For example, "I want to learn how to design program that engages people - that can attract and hold people's attentions," one interpreter said. Another example on training skills included: "I want to learn about training of interpreters and see how others train interpreters at other sites," mentioned by a trainer, while "I want to learn about internal (on-the-job) training to train others. By showing my interpretation, I teach others and myself," described by an interpreter. Inconsistencies, however, were also identified. While currently offered in some training courses, interpretive design, practicing individual skills, and risk management were perceived by interpreters to be lacked, and they expressed a desire to learn or spend time more about these areas in the future. According to one interpreter, "I wanted to practice my skills and know how well I can perform them. There were few opportunities for each of us to practice and perform in the training." Contrary to the trainers' suggestions, the interpreters preferred receiving training on their performances to distance or correspondence means of learning.

Problems and challenges that interpreters face in their workplaces that may have implications for future training

The trainers were asked to describe the main concerns or problems that interpreters experienced while doing their work. This question was aimed at revealing subjects that could be addressed in future training courses to help interpreters better cope with the issues identified. Diverse responses were obtained and grouped into the following categories: not understanding their role in overall management (n=5), insufficient social recognition of interpretive profession (n=3), being more informational than interpretive (n=3), a lack of experiencing interpretation in other places (n=2), a lack of internal training (n=2), a lack of opportunities to perform interpretation (n=1), and the lack of an established training system (n=1).

The interpreters were asked to describe any interpretation-related issues or problems that they had encountered in their workplaces. Their responses varied as shown in the

Table 5. Problems encountered while working as an interpreter

Problems encountered while working as an interpreter	Interviews		Questionnaires	
	Trainers	Interpreters	Mean ¹	SD
Insufficient evaluations of the effects of interpretation		✓	4.11	1.05
A lack of skills of public relations of interpretation	✓		4.11	1.03
A lack of experiencing interpretation at other places	✓	✓	3.97	0.94
A lack of skills of planning interpretive projects/events	✓		3.95	1.08
A lack of skills of managing interpretation-related works	✓		3.92	1.33
Little social recognition of interpretive profession	✓	✓	3.87	1.13
A lack of interactions with interpreters at other sites	✓	✓	3.84	1.04
A lack of research on the resources to be interpreted	✓	✓	3.61	1.17
Insufficient on-the-job training	✓	✓	3.61	1.32
A lack of feedback from coworkers and supervisors	✓	✓	3.47	1.33
A lack of interpretation skills	✓		3.45	1.20
A lack of skills of evaluating interpretation		✓	3.42	1.04
A lack of first-hand experiences of interpretive resources		✓	3.34	1.17
A lack of attractive, role-model interpreters	✓		3.26	1.38
An insufficient shared understanding with the managers		✓	3.16	1.55
Not knowing many kinds of 'pre-designed' interpretation		✓	3.03	1.26
A lack of opportunity to practice	✓	✓	3.00	1.33
A lack of work opportunities		✓	3.00	1.46
Insufficient understanding of interpretation	✓	✓	2.92	1.23
Not knowing how to design activities		✓	2.79	1.26
Difficulty of maintaining my sense of wonder	✓		2.66	1.12
Not knowing how to speak and deliver for different types of audiences		✓	2.63	1.30
Not knowing how to speak to the audiences		✓	2.58	1.13
Not remember any problems			1.47	1.60

¹Scale of 5 to 1, where 5=very problematic, 3=don't know, and 1=not at all problematic.

following categories: internal training (n=4), public speaking (n=3), interpretive design (n=3), evaluating interpretation (n=2), a lack of research on resources to be interpreted (n=2), a lack of performance opportunities (n=1), a lack of interaction with other interpreters (n=1), risk management (n=1), the purpose of interpretation (n=1), a low value placed on interpretation by management (n=1), and insufficient social recognition of interpretive profession (n=1). The problems identified in the interviews were used as items for the other question in the questionnaire.

In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to rate the magnitude of the problems they had encountered while engaged in interpretive work. This question was only asked of those participants who had previously performed interpretation in order to explore problems actually encountered by front-line interpreters. Consequently, the sample size for this question was smaller (n=39) than that for the other questions (n=54). The five-point scale for this question ranged from "very problematic" (5) to "not at all problematic" (1). As Table 5 shows, the respondents encountered moderate degrees of problems with insufficient evaluations on the effects of interpretation (\bar{x} = 4.11) and a lack of skills in regard to public relations (\bar{x} = 4.10). On the other hand, they reported

that they didn't experience problems in five subjects: insufficient understanding of interpretation (\bar{x} = 2.92), not knowing how to design programs (\bar{x} = 2.76), difficulty of maintaining or improving my sense of wonder (\bar{x} = 2.66), not knowing how to deliver for different types of audiences (\bar{x} = 2.63), and not knowing how to speak to audiences (\bar{x} = 2.53). Overall, the respondents tended to view managerial skills as being more problematic than interpretive skills. These results appear to corroborate those in Table 3 in terms of the importance interpreters placed on learning managerial skills, such as management, planning, public relations, and evaluation of interpretation.

Table 5 shows the responses derived from all three groups of research participants. A problem consistently reported by the three groups was insufficient social recognition of interpretive profession. According to one trainer, "Almost no one knows the word of interpretation here. Interpreter hasn't yet become a profession here. Interpreter and interpretation haven't been recognized yet." One interpreter was disappointed at the climate in which "people around here don't pay money for interpretation to experience nature." Another consistent response was a lack of experience other interpretation or interactions with interpreters at other places. "When there are restrictions in conducting interpretation, I think a lot, try to get a solution for it, but often can't come up with a good idea because I'm working alone," one interpreter said. One trainer pointed out, "Those interpreters don't get experiences outside of their sites. Because they don't see better interpretation, their interpretation isn't improved or stays the same." Inconsistency was also found. Insufficient evaluations of the effects of interpretation was reported as problematic only by the interpreters. One interpreter stated, "I don't know how to evaluate the effects of my interpretation. I tried but didn't know how to measure them, so I haven't evaluated. I can't know how my audiences have changed after my program."

Useful academic subjects and experiences for interpreters to have

Interpretation has not been a subject of formal education in Japan. Considering that only a few courses are available for students, the respondents were asked to list any academic subjects and experiences that they think are most useful in regard to becoming a successful interpreter. A variety of responses were listed by the trainers, including communication (n=2), the Japanese language (n=2), visual arts (n=3), the science behind the interpretive resources (e.g., ecology, biology, environmental sciences, and history, n=5), psychology (n=2), moral education (n=2), and hospitality (n=2).

The interpreters were asked to describe useful subjects they learned about outside of their training courses. Their responses were grouped into four categories: nature experiences (n=4), on-the-job experiences (n=4), musical performance and arts (n=2), and others (e.g., business, outdoor experiences, computer skills, and language skills, n=1 respectively). The interpreters were also asked to list skills and knowledge necessary for successfully conducting interpretation. Similar views were reported and grouped into the following categories: product knowledge (n=7), psychology and understanding of the audience (n=5), communication skills (n=5), first-hand experiences with the interpretive resources (n=5), and interpretive design skills (n=2).

In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked in an open-ended format to list up to five academic subjects and experiences that they considered most useful in regard to becoming a successful interpreter. Their responses were grouped into five categories: product knowledge, interpretive skills, understanding of audiences, supplemental skills,

Table 6. Academic subjects and experiences important to becoming an interpreter

Subjects and experiences	Interviews		Questionnaires Frequency ¹
	Trainers	Interpreters	
<i>Product knowledge</i>			
Nature experiences (including outdoor experiences)		✓	42.6% (23)
Natural sciences (e.g., biology, ecology, sciences)	✓	✓	38.9% (21)
Curiosity/sensitivity about resources		✓	22.2% (12)
Knowledge/expertise in regard to resources		✓	14.8% (8)
History and culture	✓		13.0% (7)
Research skills			7.4% (4)
<i>Interpretive skills</i>			
Communication	✓	✓	38.9% (21)
Arts (e.g., arts, crafts, music)	✓	✓	22.2% (12)
Interpretive techniques and experiences		✓	18.5% (10)
Public speaking			18.5% (10)
Japanese	✓	✓	16.7% (9)
Facilitation skills			9.3% (5)
Hospitality	✓	✓	7.4% (4)
<i>Understandings of audience</i>			
Psychology	✓		16.7% (9)
Understanding of the audience		✓	11.1% (6)
<i>Supplemental skills</i>			
Managerial skills		✓	13.0% (7)
Risk management		✓	7.4% (4)
Problem solving and critical thinking			7.4% (4)
Morals/ethics	✓		5.6% (3)
Physical education			5.6% (3)
<i>Miscellaneous</i>			
(relevant laws and regulations, interpersonal relations, experiences with people in a variety of fields, knowledge and experience of a wide variety of fields, reading books, group activities in the outdoors, etc.)	✓	✓	22.2% (12)

¹Note: n=54. Multiple responses exceed the total percentage of 100 since respondents could mention more than one category.

and miscellaneous (Table 6). The results indicated that respondents especially valued product knowledge. Around 40% of the respondents reported that nature experiences and natural sciences were important in regard to becoming an interpreter. Most of the respondents worked at nature experience or environmental learning facilities and, therefore, were likely to view nature experiences and natural sciences as important subjects. Close to 40% of the respondents reported that communication was important, while 20% considered arts to be important.

Table 6 illustrates the responses derived from the three groups of respondents. Similar views were reported across the three groups: natural sciences, communication, arts, Japanese language, psychology, and hospitality. These findings are similar to those findings in Lackey's (2008) study in regard to communication skills, arts in interpretation, and learning and communication theories, and are consistent with the views about professional development advocated by other authors (Ham, 2013; Ward & Wilkinson, 2006; Weiler & Ham, 2002).

Table 7. Trainees' perceptions of important areas of knowledge and skills for interpreters/tour guides

Areas of knowledge and skills	Ballantyne & Hughes (2001) ¹ (Ecotour guide in Australia)	Black & King (2002) ² (Tour guide in Vanuatu)	Weiler & Walker (2014) ³ (Wale tour guide in Tonga)	This research (2014) ⁴ (Interpreter in Japan)
Product knowledge	✓	✓	✓	✓
Safety/risk management	(✓)	✓	✓	✓
Communication/speaking skills	✓	✓	✓	✓
Audience knowledge			✓	✓
Interpretation skills	✓		✓	✓
Enhancing audience experience	✓		✓	
Regulations			✓	
Stimulating visitor interests	✓			
Minimal impact techniques	✓			
Language skills		✓	✓	
Complaint handling		✓		
Better tour handling		✓	✓	

¹Tour guides were asked about their most important functions.

²Tour guides were asked about their aspirations.

³Tour guides were asked about the most important things for guides to do in their job.

⁴Trainees (interpreters) were asked about useful and necessary subjects, skills, and knowledge for successful interpreters.

Interpretation is a fairly new subject to higher education institutions in Japan and only a limited number of universities offer interpretation courses. It is suggested that individuals who wish to work in interpretive profession study the subjects described above. It is also suggested that managers who wish to recruit interpreters should look at these subjects as candidate qualifications.

Subjects Recommended for Future Training

One interpretation of the results of this research is that the consistently mentioned subjects should be the core subjects for interpretive training in Japan, while the identified discrepancies might be addressed in a different type of training course that would be offered in future. Two major staged training programs are needed. The first program should cover the core subjects in introductory-level training courses, which focus on communication, public speaking, risk management, and interpretive concepts, techniques, and design. These subjects should be taught in a workshop format that allows trainees to practice their individual skills and receive feedback on their skills.

The findings of this research are consistent with previous studies (Ballantyne & Hughes, 2001; Black & King, 2002; Weiler & Walker, 2014) that reported that tour guides viewed risk management, product knowledge, and communication/speaking skills as the most important aspect for a tour guide (see Table 7). Risk management should be paid more attention than trainers currently think it should be, as it was repeatedly listed as important only by the interpreters. Product knowledge varies from place to place and from individual to individual, and thus, might best be learned elsewhere (such as on the

job, talking to experts, and through independent research). Instead, as suggested by the interpreter, trainers may opt to emphasize the importance of scientific views as well as the need for research on resources.

A mastery of interpretive concepts and precepts (i.e., what uniquely defines interpretation) is necessary to perform interpretation, but the question for most interpreters probably is much more applied: *How* do I make a product “interpretive”? This question is underscored by a number of findings. The interpreters reported in their interviews that they would benefit from being able to look at professional-quality interpretive products already in place elsewhere. The interpreters and trainers alike recognized the need for experiencing interpretation and interacting with interpreters at other sites to enhance interpreters’ skills. In addition, both the interpreters and trainers listed designing interpretation as a necessary skill for interpreters, a point that has been repeatedly emphasized in the interpretation literature (e.g., Ham, 2013; Ward & Wilkinson, 2006). As one interpreter in this research stated, “They (interpreters) seem to be able to conduct interpretation when they are given a prepared program, but have difficulty in designing a program, explaining it to a supervisor, and performing it by themselves.”

A second training program might focus on managerial skills and target individuals who have a certain amount of experience in interpretation. The managerial skills suggested by the results include the management of interpretation-related works, evaluation of interpretation, planning interpretive projects and events, and public relations of interpretation. Particularly, evaluation skills were requested by the interpreters in this research, which makes sense in regard to previous research that has shown that a shortage of evaluation skills among interpretive professionals in the Japanese context has been reported (Yamada & Ham, 2004). Training events need to be tailored to different needs and designed for multiple-staged interpreters from entry to specialist and supervisor. A reasonable model might be NAI’s, which offers two categories of training, including six certification programs: “one designed for interpreters who have little or no experience in interpretation and another targeting interpreters with four or more years of education or experience in the field” (2009, p. 7).

Challenges to Interpreter Training and Recommendations

When trainers encounter difficulties during a training program, it may be because a gap exists between the trainees being targeted by the program and the trainees who are actually attending the program. The trainers were asked to describe any difficulties that they encountered during past training courses. Almost half of the trainers reported an issue created by the diversity of the participants in one training program in terms of their experience and training needs (n=5) and the participants’ inadequate understanding of the subjects taught in the training (n=5). Fewer trainers identified an inadequate training facility (n=2), motivating to perform quality interpretation (n=2), and a low motivation to learn in training (n=1) as challenges. When asked whether the trainers perceived any shortcomings, challenges, or obstacles related to interpreter training in general, the following categories of responses were offered: quality of the training provided (n=6), wide diversity of the participants in each training course (n=3), insufficient on-the-job or on-site training (n=3), a lack of opportunity for interpreters to practice interpretation (n=2), and low recognition of the interpretive profession (n=1). According to these results and those derived from the interpreter interviews and questionnaires, four major challenges were identified.

Quality Assurance of the Training

The most frequently mentioned challenge of interpreter training by the trainers was in ensuring the quality of the training. One trainer suggested that a certification system should be put into place that would guarantee the quality of the skills acquired from the training program and allow recruiters to assess the qualifications of potential interpreters. Otherwise, “anyone can say I’m an interpreter regardless of their abilities.” This issue was also discussed by Black and Weiler (2005) and Huang and Weiler (2010) as a disadvantage of training (i.e., current training programs are not informed by research and theory and do not guarantee minimum standards of achievement). In the interviews, the trainers pointed out the disadvantages that stemmed from not having a nationwide training system, as this lack has contributed to the insufficient advancement of interpretive profession and little enhancement in the quality of interpretation. Such views imply that the training programs currently available in Japan contribute little to improving the skills and abilities of interpretive professionals. According to one interpreter, “the interpretive techniques taught there weren’t so helpful and I thought I’d be able to learn such things myself.”

The development of a nationally accepted training standard is needed—one that articulates the skills and abilities necessary for interpreters. Certifications are one recommended mechanism by which to assure the standards of interpretation performance (Black & Ham, 2005; Randall & Rollins, 2009). It will be practical for a non-profit organization to serve as the certification provider, such as NAI, in order to coordinate multiple profit-making organizations that currently offer interpreter training in Japan. Another recommendation is offering a training-of-trainer course to enhance or maintain the quality of training. Currently, no training for trainers is offered in Japan, and training events have been designed based on trainers’ intuitions and experiences. Trainers need to be informed by relevant literature and predecessors, such as NAI’s and USNPS’s training programs.

Diversity of Trainees’ Interpretive Experiences

The trainers were concerned with whether they met the trainees’ needs and wants because of the trainees’ diverse levels of interpretive experiences. According to one trainer, “it’s very difficult to decide on what level we should focus. Some are planning on starting a career from now. Some have experienced informative interpretation, while others have experienced only experiential interpretation. I’m afraid we can’t meet their various needs.” Another trainer mentioned, “not all training goes well because there are no promised subject for successful training.” This diversity issue seemed contributing to the trainees’ insufficient understanding of the subjects taught in training, as noted by the trainers, as well as little learning for trainees who have already gained some interpretive experiences, as reported by the interpreters. Training events should target individuals grouped by their previous experiences and conceptual skills to avoid the difficulties of teaching widely diverse groups of trainees in the same course. It should be noted, however, that although the diversity of trainees in one program can indeed become an issue, such diversity might actually be advantageous in a training program that is designed to promote collaborative learning (Weiler & Ham, 2001a).

This diversity of the trainees’ interpretive levels illustrates, in part, “a culture” of the interpretation training in Japan—trying to collect as many trainees as possible in one course to increase profitability for the training provider, which results in assembling

trainees with diverse levels of interpretive experiences, needs, and motivations. One trainer explained the situation like this: “We must seek the greatest number [of participants] for drawing customers, as widely as possible. If we don’t target a wide range of people, we wouldn’t get enough number of participants [in one training course].” According to two trainers, interpretation is promoted as a means of communication that can be applied to any workplace and even within the daily lives of those taking the course, rather than a profession at parks, protected areas, and other free-choice learning settings. The small number of questionnaire respondents in this research probably indicated the inclusion of individuals in the courses who did not work as interpreters and may have lower levels of engagement and importance in interpretation.

Insufficient On-the-job Training

Another challenge mentioned both by the trainers and interpreters was the insufficiency of on-the-job training. Repeat exercises help improve the performance quality of interpretation, and appropriate feedback from co-workers on an interpreter’s performance is of much help to subjectively assess what and how to improve. For example, “I wish there were opportunities like a teaching practice to conduct interpretation in front of actual children and adults and then receive advice from a trainer,” one interpreter said, while a trainer said, “I’m concerned as to how we’d be able to follow up with the participants after they attend our training.” Another trainer illustrated the situation this way:

I feel the number of interpreters who don’t get internal (on-the-job) training is increasing. They don’t have anyone to report to, a superior who teaches and advises them, or someone who takes the time to give feedback on their daily performances. That’s why they come here (the training course) to learn.

In order to offer on-the-job training, relevant individuals would need to be trained—a need for a training-of-trainer course. One trainer mentioned, “I think the OJT (on-the-job-training) is more effective and efficient (to train interpreters), but should be offered more systematically.” On-the-job training would allow trainers to better relate to problems that interpreters actually encounter and help enhance the specific skills they should acquire. Applying the NAI’s Certified Interpretive Trainer program (e.g., skills of facilitating training sessions, evaluations, and coaching) to the Japanese context may help meet the needs and problems encountered by trainers and interpreters in this research.

Interpretation as a Management Tool

The contributions that interpretation can make to an organization or agency need to be demonstrated, so that recognition and support for interpretation will increase. One interpreter in his interview was concerned about his performance’s contribution to accomplishing one of his organization’s final goals. Another interpreter mentioned that the purpose of interpretation in his organization seemed to be unclear. A concept of the “use of interpretation to accomplish management objectives” (2013, p. 8), one of the NAI’s Certified Interpretive Manager’s skills, seems to be missing from interpretation in Japan. According to another interpreter, “the importance of interpretation isn’t acknowledged in my organization.... No matter how well we perform, we aren’t

appreciated.” With no plan or strategy to articulate interpretation’s role in the organization, its purposes and functions are hardly visible. Lacking a legitimate place in an organization’s mission contributes to little social recognition of the interpretive profession, a problem raised by both the trainers and interpreters. Notably, this issue was raised more than a decade ago in the Japanese context in order to improve the quality and recognition of interpretation (Yamada & Ham, 2004).

What Ward and Wilkinson (2006) described as “meaningful interpretation” has not largely occurred in Japan. Meaningful interpretation, in their view, is conducted with clear goals and objectives to meet the needs of both management and visitors. In this way, its benefits not only flow directly to visitors (e.g., increasing visitor enjoyment of the resource), but also closely align with the goals of the management (e.g., protecting the resource and visitors). Interpretation connects visitors to resources and protects and makes sense of that connection within the mission and management mandates of the organization. A similar view was discussed by one interpreter in this research: “I’m always concerned about whether I’m providing the audience with new views or changing their ways of thinking and then, contributing to a sustainable society, rather than offering mere entertainment.” According to Ward and Wilkinson, “if interpretation is not purposefully done to somehow address the mission or goals of the place, it becomes simply entertainment” (2006, p. 24). Ham (2013) called this type of interpretation “fact-based entertainment” without a purpose and destination. To integrate a management role into the current practice of interpretation in Japan, training in interpretive planning should be offered, so that it could cover skills for master plans, exhibit plans, conceptual plans for individual sites (see Ham, Housego, & Weiler, 2005), and comprehensive plans. If interpretation is perceived as a communication tool with the purpose of protecting resources and visitors, and of promoting the agency itself, then a larger number of professionals in free-choice learning settings may be attracted to interpretation training. Such a chain of events would almost certainly contribute to enhancing the social recognition of the interpretive profession in Japan.

Conclusion

Weiler and Ham (2002) suggested that “training efforts must be systematically evaluated and lessons learned from these evaluations must be documented and disseminated widely and used to inform future training efforts” (p. 63). In this spirit, this research has attempted to add a Japanese perspective to the literature on interpreter training by identifying both consistencies and inconsistencies in the perspectives of Japanese interpreters and trainers related to professional growth and development in this field. It provided a basis for a suggested general framework and the contents of interpreter training in the Japanese context. Offering training for multiple-staged interpreters and trainers is needed. However, with a small number of not-randomly selected participants in the questionnaires, this research may have offered incomplete views. Future research will need to include a larger number of systematically selected interpreters to assess representative needs. For a training program to coincide with the needs of multiple stakeholders, as claimed by Lackey (2008), future research should also investigate the perspectives of managers, agencies, and other free-choice learning organizations. Evaluation of the effectiveness of existing training programs is another area waiting for attention. Such studies would not only help to improve ongoing training programs but would also add needed insight into the design of future programs (Weiler &

Ham, 2002; Weiler & Walker, 2014). In Japan, routine ongoing evaluations of training programs will keep trainers in touch with what is happening around them, helping not only to maintain and enhance the quality of interpretation in Japanese society, but also contributing to the social recognition of the interpretive profession in this country.

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Acknowledgment

The author gratefully acknowledges Sam H. Ham, professor emeritus at the University of Idaho, USA, for his editorial assistance and critical review of an earlier version of this manuscript.