

Report on the Japan Writers' Conference in Okinawa

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This year Simon Bibby, Gavin Brooks, John Roberts and Tara McIlroy from the Literature in Language Teaching SIG were able to attend the Japan Writers' Conference (JWC) at Okinawa Christian University in Naha. This was the seventh year for the annual conference, which is held at different locations around Japan each year. It was our first SIG presentation at the conference and first time for the JWC to visit Okinawa. This short report gives some details of some of the literature-themed events at the conference and highlights some of the shared interests of conference attendees and presenters. A particular focus on publishing open-access journals is given here also.

Literature-themed presentations

Many of the presenters and attendees at this conference are writers themselves, and, as such, newly published materials of participants are available for purchase at the conference site. Other than that, however, the conference is non-commercial, and is free for anyone to attend. Perhaps as a result of the non-commercial aspect and the differing overarching conference theme, the atmosphere of the conference is different from JALT and other commercial TESOL conferences typical in the field of language teaching.

Some workshops at this conference are closed workshops, and required registration before the day of presenting. Other sessions are run as writing workshops and are open to all, with the writer in mind rather than the language teacher.

John Wolfgang Roberts presented a short lecture

with Q&A, on metafiction and how its self-reflectivity can be used in narrative to challenge the assumptions we make regarding textual and social conventions. In covering some metafictional devices and plots, as well as various metafictional samples, he demonstrated how the blurring of the boundaries between fiction and reality, author and reader, can help reinvigorate the novel.

The conference took a charmingly participative turn for the creative with Sean Lotman's haiku/photography discussion and workshop. The presenter described his dual creative process, starting with a single preferred camera, an aged and unreliable machine. He works from the (occasionally!) yielded images to write haiku. He showed images which had successfully provoked his creative output, and read the resulting haiku. Audience members were then invited to exchange images they had brought with a partner, and then write haiku based on these images.

Setting up open-access journals

There were three joint presentations on the topic of setting up open-access journals at this conference. In order of appearance these are described briefly, including our own presentation on behalf of the LiLT SIG.

On Saturday, 2nd November, Carol Begg, Jo Mynard and Tim Murphey talked about setting up two journals at Kanda University of International Studies. Some reasons for going open-access were described, including the principles of open-access, issues of cost and philosophical justification for

sharing academic findings freely online. The two journals each have a different niche. SiSAL (Studies in Self-Access, <<http://sisaljournal.org>>) is a journal in the specific field of language teaching which relates to principles of autonomy. Jo Mynard explained that there was a need for a journal in this field since the only other one was in Mexico, and in Spanish. The journal was set up in 2010 and is now listed in several major databases including DOAJ and EBSCO. The principles of 'peering', that is learning from others who are peers and connected with each other was introduced by Tim Murphey. The metaphor of stepping stones on the journal website is used to illustrate the principle of peering. His interest in writing a journal for educators comes from his use of student work spanning a period of 20 years. The journal Peerspectives (<peerspectivesonline.org>) is now completely online and encourages submissions from first-time writers as well as students. Carol Begg is an editor of Peerspectives and has been involved managing the move to open-access for the journal. The presenters finished with a Q & A session with the attendees.

In the LiLT SIG presentation also on Saturday, Simon Bibby, Gavin Brooks and Tara McIlroy talked about setting up the Journal of Literature in Language Teaching (JLiLT). The context of JALT and the SIGs within JALT was explained to the audience, who were editors and writers rather than being exclusively connected with language teaching. Simon Bibby began the presentation by telling the story of the SIG and the journal, and the justification for setting up both. There was a distinct absence of literature-themed groups and opportunities to publish within Japan, and this served as motivation to set up the journal. The JLiLT also works alongside open-access principles and has been created with similar guidelines to the JALT journal. Gavin Brooks introduced the design and layout principles being utilised for this journal using the software InDesign. He compared the different considerations for online publications with those for print publications such as the OnCUE journal which he co-edits. Gavin offered advice to attendees who had specific questions about InDesign and its suitability compared with other

software packages, such as Word. Tara McIlroy talked about the journal's growing readership and the uses of social media such as Twitter, Google+ and Facebook in getting the word out about the journal, which can be found at <liltsig.org>.

James Crocker, Gareth Jones, Kelly Quinn and Steve Redford talked about setting up a new literary publication, The Font, in which teachers could write of their personal experiences of language learning and language teaching. Published writers Kelly Quinn and Steve Redford both gave entertaining and well-received readings of recent creative work, which have been published in abbreviated form in The Font. Gareth Jones discussed how creative work can be considered research, and how it may be professionally presented as such for hiring purposes. James Crocker explained his reasons for setting up such a publication, his hopes for the publication and the multiple avenues for publication within the new periodical. The Font can be found at: <thefontjournal.com/>.

Marketing and self-publicity

Bob Tobin herein offered advice regarding marketing of written product and of self, suggesting technological tools, and offering useful general tips for getting one's name out there and getting noticed. Perhaps the most useful advice within the session, and one which applies to all, is the statement from a book publisher present in the audience. Upon receiving a proposal, publishing staff immediately check the individual on various social media. Herein is a nugget of advice for us all, as writers and as teachers, we need to be in control of our web presence, and we need to create a positive, professional online impression using the range of media tools available to us.

Overview

Overall, we found this to be an enjoyable and convivial conference, and a refreshing change from the more standard TESOL fare that we have been used to as language teachers. Particularly welcome was the Saturday night meal, a very friendly affair, wherein a number of conference participants gave literary readings to assembled peers. The next conference is projected to take place in 2014, tentatively to be held

in Iwate Prefecture. Perhaps we may see you at the next Japan Writers' Conference!

About the JWC

The Japan Writers' Conference is an annual event organised by a group of volunteers based in different locations around Japan. As a group of writers and editors their interests are broad and their conference has featured varied presentations by a range of authors over the years of the conference's existence. It is the primary event for writers and those interested in publication around Japan.



Notes on the authors

Simon Bibby founded the Literature in Language Teaching SIG in 2011. He was using literature in classes, looked around for a relevant JALT group to discuss with like-minded folk, but couldn't find one. So he decided to start up a new SIG, and here we are! In addition to being a qualified school teacher, he has an MA in Educational Technology and is currently an EdD candidate at the University of Liverpool, UK.



Tara McIlroy is the co-coordinator of the Literature in Language Teaching SIG. She has an MA (Applied Linguistics) from Victoria University of Wellington, NZ and and MA (English) from the University of Aberdeen, UK. She is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Birmingham, UK. Her interests include literary reading, investigating

uses of creative texts and uses of world literature in the language classroom.



Gavin has a Masters of Applied Linguistics and is currently researching the rhetorical structures Japanese students use in their L1 and L2 academic writing. He is co-editor for the Journal of Literature in Language Teaching as well as assistant editor of the OnCue Journal and the JALT Pan-SIG proceedings.



John Wolfgang Roberts has a background in literature and creative writing, and is interested in their function in second language acquisition.

Publication websites

The Font. <thefontjournal.com/>

The Journal of Literature in Language Teaching (JLiLT). <lilt.org>

Peerspectives. <Peerspectivesonline.org>

Studies in Self-Access Learning (SiSAL). <SiSAL.org>

Japan Writers Conference (JWC)
<japanwritersconference.org>