

**Report on the 2014 LiberLit Conference, February 10th, at Meiji Gakuin University,  
Shirotane Campus, Tokyo, Japan.**

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The 5th Liberlit conference was held at Meiji Gakuin University, Shirotane campus, on February 10th. This year's theme was *Content with Your Content?* which was explored in a range of ways in twenty-three presentations. The aim of this year's theme was to discuss from the teacher's perspective what content the student should learn, and for what purposes content can be adapted. Again, as has become the norm at Liberlit, the quality of the presentations was high, ranging from practical suggestions on teaching historical subjects such as the Chartists movement and Second World War narratives through literature to discussions on how technology such as audiobooks can aid students in comprehending texts. Some stand-out themes in this conference were a) the diversity within types of literature used by teachers b) technology in literature teaching and c) content-based instruction and how it is being re-imagined by different teachers in different contexts.

**Plenary and Selected Presentations**

The plenary, *English department: What's in a Title?* was delivered by Robert A. Lee, formerly of Nihon University, Tokyo, and the University of Kent at Canterbury, UK. In his talk Lee celebrated the role of literature as a tool for critical thinking and for understanding the human condition, whilst bemoaning how literature teachers in Japan are often forced to teach language skills in addition to literary studies. He argued against the role of English language teaching as an automatic given in Japanese universities, and instead recommended that language

teaching be taught externally in a specially created language centre by highly qualified linguistics instructors. Lee then discussed the role of theory in literary analysis, and maintained that the inclusion of more literary criticism in a literature curriculum would in turn engender the growth of scholastic criticism amongst Japanese literature students. Nevertheless, whilst maintaining a deliberately polemical position in discussing how literature teaching models could ideally be transformed in Japan's future, Lee stopped short of offering concrete or practical methods for literature teachers working within the current educational dynamic to employ in terms of explicating complex L1 literature for L2 students.

One of the most illuminating and relevant presentations was delivered jointly by Barnaby Ralph, of Tokyo Woman's Christian University, and his two students Azusa Miyazaki and Miyuki Mura. *Great Textpectations: Insider/Outsider Perspectives on the Teaching of Literature* addressed issues of textual perception, and prejudice from both teacher and student perspectives. Firstly Ralph discussed from a literature teacher's professional viewpoint how texts by different writers from the canon such as Shakespeare, Chaucer, and Somerset Maugham should be included on an English literature curriculum, yet also observing how such curricular and textual selections are to a great extent informed and shaped by the definitions of the canon. Azusa Miyazaki and Miyuki Mura then offered a fascinating insight into how students often choose literature courses for very different purposes of language acquisition and cultural familiarization, whilst desiring the inclusion of a wider selection of contemporary texts which may differ from their teacher's canonical definitions. The contrast between the two perspectives neatly illustrated some of the problems teachers face in encouraging students to read classical literature, and also highlighted the possible need for a more dynamic process of teacher-student negotiation.

Joff Bradley's presentation embraced the popular understanding that movies and their narrative styles are firmly placed within the field of literature. His talk, *Sustaining the literary*, offered ways of seeing the typical models of literature teaching in universities. According to Bradley there is something missing from curricula which only approaches content-based instruction without problem-solving and challenging students with the use of important and interesting discussion, for example in posing existential dilemmas. He uses the canon of Hitchcock as *extensive viewing* in a class at Meiji Gakuin using an overview method of introducing texts to students. With a specific focus on the non-linear puzzle of movies using different ways to help ask key questions about time, memory, identity, Bradley encourages

thinking and problem-solving. His particular approach is from a Deleuzian perspective of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, which centralises identity as a process of becoming, and is thus in constant change. This makes the content and the problem-solving nature of the lessons interesting for students.

Iain Lambert from Kyorin University presented *Japanese learner creativity and non-standard forms in literature*. Iain Lambert is interested in World Englishes and teaches reading classes which features Englishes with features such as creoles and pidgins, and he does this by introducing texts from different parts of the world where these non-standard forms are the norm. His research over a period of years has been particularly focused on attitudinal studies of non-standard versions of English in the field of *perceptual dialectology*. He asked pairs of speakers to look at different types of readers, Native English speakers, bilingual Japanese-English users and Japanese students. This can help to find out about attitudes towards non-standard Englishes, and also attitudes towards non-standard Japanese. Using Scottish texts in Scots written by James Kelman and Irvine Welsh he reports on written annotations and picture responses to show students' creativity from students. Some students had knowledge from their other languages, for example, understanding the meaning of the Scots word "ken" (know) if they had studied German. Some questions were raised about the types of linguistic creativity students show through the understanding of non-standard Englishes, just as they might have attitudes about non-standard forms of Japanese also.

### **Presentations by Members of the LiLT SIG**

As in previous years, Liberlit was strongly represented by members of the LiLT SIG and continues to make an impact on the presence at the conference. We offer some views of the presentations done by LiLT SIG members here.

Quenby Hoffman Aoki introduced practical ideas for teachers of literature in her presentation *Three birds, one stone: Writing skills, literature, and diversity in an EFL classroom*. A comprehensive guide to approaching writing skills through literature was introduced with notes on how to focus on positive examples and use activities such as freewriting for lessons. Aoki discussed in detail some texts which introduce gender diversity and racial diversity, such as writings from nobel prize winning women and members of minority groups. The use of this material in turn leads to critical thinking around topics, as was explained by Aoki using examples

from her classes. A useful list of possible texts was provided to accompany the talk along with quotes from students who recognise the value of including these topics for discussion.

Atsushi Iida presented on *Humanizing EFL Pedagogy: Expressing voice through haiku composition in a foreign language*. Iida is working in the field of L2 literacy and is interested in developing teaching methods within the existing teaching pedagogy in Japan. His particular focus is on the teaching of literacy for Japanese students who have learned English in Japan using the grammar-translation method or audio-lingual method. Looking particularly at haiku, Iida gave a definition of traditional Japanese haiku and talk talked about some reasons for using haiku in the language classroom. Some reasons for using haiku are to involve students in the process of writing, to include autobiographical events in writing and to help students to extend their awareness of the target language through writing. A lively discussion around the use of titles with writing and ways of seeing haiku in English involved participants in the session.

Hugh Nicoll presented on *Exploratory practises for teaching literary texts and contexts*. Nicoll teaches literature to English students at Miyazaki Kouritsu Daigaku, and his session explored ways in which learners can gradually be led towards both literary texts and socio-cultural knowledge. Using the adapted the principles of Allwright and Hanks` (2009) *exploratory practice* within the context of an American Studies Seminar, and used texts by writers such as Mark Twain, Langston Hughes and Booker T. Washington to explicate a deeper student understanding of African-American history from emancipation to the Harlem renaissance. Nicoll`s presentation was of particular interest for teachers looking to enliven the literature classroom, and prompted a lively post-presentation discussion on scaffolding content.

Neil Addison discussed two ways to scaffold literary content in the classroom. Firstly, in his *Realizing Ideas in Shakespeare`s Hamlet* presentation he illustrated how universal themes specific to the human condition can be explicated through teaching short bite sized chunks of Shakespeare`s plays. In *Literary Content and Post-Colonial Criticism* he examined how, whilst literature contains such universal themes, it also re-presents cultures tendentially, creating divisions of insider and outsider. Practical examples were then given of how students can be guided towards reading a wide selection of literature such as *Sredni Vashtar* by Saki, *Dead Men`s Path* by Chinua Achebe, and *Kokoro* by Natsume Soseki with a more critical and culturally comparative approach.

Tara McIlroy used examples from a reading class to discuss aspects of texture in the talk

*Is There a Texture in this Text? Applications of the Cognitive Poetics Approach.* Using Peter Stockwell's (University of Nottingham, UK) ideas on cognitive poetics a description of some possible applications of the approach to classes was explained. Some examples from class material, using Mark Twain's memoirs and *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel encouraged discussion on the uses of Hallidayan theory and notions of coherence in practical teaching situations.

### **Future directions**

The Liberlit conference is now a firmly set event in the year's conference calendar, and promises to be around continue in the foreseeable future. There will be the beginning of a new venture this year, under the direction of Myles Chilton, in the form of a literary journal. More information can be found at <[liberlit.com](http://liberlit.com)> In the closing comments at the end of the day, Michael Pronko and Paul Hullah invited everyone to return again next year, and warmly thanked all literature-related groups for their support. We at the LiLT SIG look forward to the next event with enthusiasm.

### **Notes on the Authors**

Neil Addison has a BA in English Literature from the University of Kent, an MA in Applied Linguistics from the University of Southampton, and is currently undertaking his PhD at the University of Birmingham. His research interests reflect his passion for using literature in the language classroom to improve students' critical thinking abilities.

Tara McIlroy is the co-coordinator of the Literature in Language Teaching SIG. 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.