

## **Report on LiLT SIG events in Spring, 2018: PanSIG Forum and Yokohama JALT**

**Tara McIlroy**

*Meiji University*  
*mcilroy@meiji.ac.jp*

**Simon Bibby**

*Kobe Shoin Women's University*  
*sbibby@shoin.ac.jp*

In this report, we discuss two recent events organised and attended by members of the Literature in Language Teaching Special Interest Group (LiLT SIG) in the spring term of 2018. The presentations described here help to frame the SIG's place as a source of information for others wishing to teach with literature, in all of its various forms. Literature teachers (or perhaps "teachers using literature") in Japan may be working within literature departments, or may be teaching proficiency classes within second language (L2) programs. We encourage readers of this journal to consider joining us for a future event, reporting on their teaching of literature, or possibly also giving a presentation at a future event. As a SIG, we aim to support and offer publishing and presenting opportunities to all our members, and we particularly welcome submissions and participation from "new faces," and are able to offer necessary support to those who are relatively new who have ideas to share, but who may be somewhat new to academic publishing and/or presenting. Events at which members can present about literature are the two big events of the year, JALT International (usually held in November) and the PanSIG Conference, usually held in May. There are other local events as we describe below, where the SIG works with local chapters. Readers may have their own ideas for local events, perhaps with their local Chapters, or at their university, and different types of events can be made to happen. Do contact us at: [liltsig@gmail.com](mailto:liltsig@gmail.com).

First, we report regarding the forum at the PanSIG conference, held at Toyo Gakuen University, Hongo Campus, Tokyo from 19th-20th May. Toyo Gakuen's Hongo Campus in Central Tokyo was ideal for attracting a presenters from various corners of Japan, including the speakers for this year's forum. Several of the panelists travelled from Kansai for the event. In the second part of the report, we describe the talks given by two LiLT members at a special day with Yokohama JALT. In both presentations, a key theme was the interaction and involvement with the audience in

building and negotiating meaning with texts. Even though both presenters worked with different types of texts, varying from movies to short stories and poems, or to narrative in a general sense. In the tasks, these were all used in highly interactive ways and could be adapted for the benefit of students in different contexts. We look forward to more events through which SIG members can share their teaching experiences and methods with others.

### **LiLT SIG forum**

The LiLT SIG forum at the PanSIG conference was held from 10:30-12 noon on Saturday, 19th May, 2018. In this Literature in Language Teaching SIG interactive forum, panelists discussed the opportunities and challenges of using literature in the language classroom here in Japan. The format was in two parts, the first of which was a talk from our 2018 recipient of the LiLT SIG conference grant, Vicky Richings. Following this, the forum was made up of a discussion by five LiLT SIG members. Paul Hullah, a tenured associate professor of British poetry and culture, works at Meiji Gakuin University in Tokyo. Anna Husson Isozaki is based in Tokyo, and teaches at Juntendo University and researches second language literacy-building and aural literature's role in L2 learning. Vicky Ann Richings teaches English, Japanese, and cultural studies at Kwasei Gakuin University. Tara McIlroy is a co-coordinator of the Literature in Language Teaching SIG. She is teaching literature and academic skills at the School of Global Japanese Studies, Meiji University in Tokyo. Simon Bibby is a tenured faculty member of the English Department at Kobe Shoin Women's University, teaching a mix of language skills classes, business English and culture classes.

The forum began with a talk by Vicky Ann Richings entitled *Literature in JFL*. Richings noted the paucity of literary texts to be found in Japanese as a foreign language (JFL) textbooks. Richings notes that while there has been some research conducted into texts used in English as Second / Foreign language textbooks, there appears to be minimal (if any!) existing research into literary texts in JFL textbooks. Richings explained her research in this regard, for which she has received both JALT and LiLT research grants in 2017 and 2018.

The panel discussion began with a consideration of what may be meant and understood by the term "literature." This may be a typical approach when introducing the topic of literature in language teaching, but there remain differing opinions, even amongst seasoned professionals who are teaching it. Hullah suggested that it is not always immediately clear what is meant by literature and that teachers of literature should be careful about what they present to their learners. Are the texts suitable, presented with the learner in mind, and are these texts useful for their learning goals? If so, then the learner should be able to work positively with literature and teachers should feel

confident about its inclusion. In attempting to define the slippery term literature, panelists posited a number of characteristics of something that is inherently “fuzzy,” notably its “creativity” and ‘arbitrariness.’”

In a connected digression, the panelists also considered the various opinions that teachers may have about literature, and that to some degree the topic may have negative connotations for some. This could be from teachers’ own perspectives, learners’ perspectives, or both. In a certain sense, the term “literature” can sometimes be off-putting for some people, for both teaching staff and for students, and has something of an unfortunate perception of being taught looking down from on high, by the already-cultured to the yet-unknowing (see the stage play and movie *Educating Rita* for an amusing example thereof). Hullah explained the ways in which teachers can consider their position, and argued that teachers should do their best to try to stay humble about the teaching of literature, knowing that it can provoke reaction and response in learners that should be managed carefully. Panelists appeared to agree on the need to be open to student opinions, and to welcome their input in reading, deciphering and seeking surface and deeper understanding. Next, each panelist discussed with the audience three questions which are important considerations for teachers using literature in language learning contexts. Each speaker responded in some detail to of these:

1. *What has been your experience of literature in your language teaching context, and why do you recommend it to others?*
2. *How can we engage language learners using literature?*
3. *What role may literature have in the future in teaching contexts in Japan, in your opinion?*

In their answers, panelists offered examples, and described their own choices and uses of literature in their respective teaching contexts. Richings noted the usefulness of literary texts in teaching Japanese honorific language (*keigo*), providing illustrations of real contexts for language learners in which they can see the correct use of the appropriate language forms. Husson Isozaki described using memoirs and popular best sellers, and the power of using moving texts. Bibby noted a range of texts he had used when teaching a Dystopia-themed literature-infused society and politics class in higher level tertiary classes. McIlroy described her current teaching context working with trainee teachers reading a class novel over one semester. In spring 2018 the class text was *The Curious Incident Of The Dog In The Night Time* by Mark Haddon. Her method of creating an active learning environment in order to encourage engagement with literature is to require the trainee teachers to prepare and deliver a lesson using the class text. Through sharing these various ways of teaching literature, we aimed to encourage others to do the same. A discussion with the

audience followed on from the panel talk, with several members of the forum audience sharing their own stories and experiences.

### **LiLT SIG at Yokohama JALT**

Once again, the LiLT SIG worked with the Yokohama JALT Chapter in organising this event on the afternoon of 30th June, 2018. Just as in 2017, two presenters delivered workshop style talks on literature-related themes. In the next section, we provide a short summary of our impressions from these two talks. The first speaker of the day was Donna Tatsuki from Kobe City University of Foreign Studies. Professor Tatsuki is the director of the Graduate School for English Language Education and Research at Kobe City University of Foreign Studies. Her areas of speciality include storytelling and narrative, as well as narrative inquiry and cross-cultural pragmatics. Additional themes which are related to her main areas of focus include English as a Lingua Franca and interaction in multiple languages. Her talk was entitled *Teaching Narratives: Intentionally Ambiguous* (see this issue), and from the title we could already predict that it would ask questions, as well as search for answers while telling a few stories along the way. In the first part of this presentation, Tatsuki explained three different ways to teach narrative:

- 1) The structural approach to teaching narrative, which includes the dramatic arc
- 2) Story grammar approach, which includes the setting, theme, plot, and resolution
- 3) Structural components approach using questions throughout while considering point of view

In each of these ways of teaching, we could see examples and think about ways to use them in our own contexts. One consideration when thinking about which one of these might be best suited for the class and setting would be which of these methods could be considered to be more suitable than the others, if any? In answer to this query, our presenter replied that all are equally useful and can be adapted to suit the group. The students may favour one over another, but that is simply an interesting aspect of this type of teaching which the teacher may like to consider. Tatsuki then went on to explain some specific ways in which various approaches available for the teaching of how to write and perform narratives. Story starters, for example, could be a way to get creative activities started with various possibilities. A linked idea could be to use the retelling of a story, or by using methods such as transformation to build new ideas into well-known stories. We also heard discussion of the uses of the seven basic plot lines approach, which can help to make connections between texts. Participants discussed the value of building in background activities, which can help support the understanding needed for today's young adult learners. Tatsuki emphasised the value of

storytelling as a life-skill, and one which could be useful for learners in different contexts, from interviews to work experience.

In the second half of this presentation, we could examine the ways, meanings and outcomes of the acts of sharing narratives on teaching, resulting in greater opportunities for L2 learning also. We considered these topics by evaluating narratives about teaching from three perspectives: 1) Student narratives, 2) Teacher-based narratives, and 3) Popular/Media-based narratives. The popular/media-based narratives included movies which present a particular type of person, which may be limited or two-dimensional, and without nuance. The examples given were all from movies where teachers were seen in different ways. Through these examples we could consider some dangers of uncritical acceptance of teacher-learner narratives. In the current issue of this journal, more details about Tatsuki's talk is given in a separate conference report. Finally, more details of Professor Tatsuki's work is available at <[kobe-cufs.ac.jp/institute/faculty/tatsuki.html](http://kobe-cufs.ac.jp/institute/faculty/tatsuki.html)>

In the second talk of the afternoon, Atsushi Iida of Gunma University introduced *Teaching English-language Haiku: Articulating Voice in the Target Language*. Professor Iida has extensive experience as an L2 writing teacher, the pedagogy of which he extends to the L2 poetry-teaching classroom. This talk was one of praxis - part theory and part practice, with a focus on thinking and active participation. By the end of the session participants had all written their own *haiku*, using guiding principles from the talk, and using ideas which could be adapted to various contexts. One expressed aim of the presentation was to expand our knowledge on the teaching of *haiku* writing in the second language (L2) classroom. The presentation addressed the issue of voice in L2 writing and discussed how poetry writing helps to construct and develop voice. In particular, we could see how the use of poetry in L2 writing was an example of meaningful literacy learning in the Japanese EFL university classroom. Iida illustrated his theoretical approach in some detail and then went on to show exactly what is meant by *haiku*, and how the poetic form can be taught to Japanese students, making use of their prior learning of the topic. We could see examples of short poems written by students, and also some written by Iida, which we discussed with session participations. Participants in the session all learned something new through our discussion of how teachers can help students to make their L2 learning personal, meaningful, and humanistic. In the workshop section of the presentations, we were asked to follow the same processes which learners could also follow in a writing lesson of this type. These were 1) to make a list of memories of the season (spring, summer, rainy season). Through this we could select ideas for the next section. Next, 2) choose one memory and describe the situation. Put the detailed (visual and sensory) information of the moment in the text. In this section, I wrote the following:

*In a summer trip to Aomori, my son wanted to swim in the lake. He had no swimming costume but went in the water anyway. But my daughter was too shy and instead caught a dragonfly at the edge of the lake. She just learned how to do that, and was amazed that these huge, flying insects would simply land on an outstretched finger so easily. The dragonfly was so easy to catch - it had no idea it was going to get caught after landing on her finger. The dragonfly had rainbow colours. I listened to them laughing. The lake was blue and it was beautiful.*

While the story is not formed in much detail, the memory was remarkably clear for me. My own engagement with the task at the time of writing was high, due to the positive association of a memory which returned to me in detail. The encouragement to consider senses was useful here. Following on from this, we were asked in the next step 3) What was your state of mind at the time? Although this was difficult to do in a short session, we could make notes in this section also. Finally, we were asked to 4) write a haiku poem. My idea, taken from the memory above, became:

*The dragonfly lands -  
Those oversized blue wings are  
So easy to catch*

We could see, through this example of a guided task, that poetry writing can be broken into manageable and smaller chunks and we can begin to enjoy writing in a short time. Learning the guiding principles of *haiku* held our interest and was engaging. Several of us wanted to share our poems with one another after the session, which in turn helped to illustrate the meaningfulness of this type of writing. Poetry can be a useful activity for us as teachers as well as for our students. Many Japanese students are likely to have positive experiences of *haiku* writing from their childhood experiences, which can help to hook them in from the beginning. We left this session knowing more about the L2 writing sub-field of poetry writing, and could visualise more closely the use of haiku in our own particular contexts as a result. More details of Iida's work is available at <[atsushi-iida.com](http://atsushi-iida.com)>.

Our collective SIG thanks are offered to presenters and participants at these recent LiLT SIG events, and to organisers from the PanSIG and Yokohama chapters respectively. Alerting readers to forthcoming events, JALT International Conference is in Shizuoka this November, and LiLT are working together with the Nara chapter for an event in December.