

*Conference report*

## Creative Writing in Language Teaching Contexts 2: Event Report and Reflection

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This report describes the presentations from the LiLT SIG online event on 24th October 2021 and offers some reflections on the potential for using creative writing (CW) as a pedagogical tool. *Creative Writing in Language Teaching Contexts 2* was hosted jointly by the LiLT SIG and Shizuoka JALT on a Sunday afternoon from 2 pm-5 pm on Zoom. All of the presenters are current members of the SIG, and the four presenters discussed their approaches to teaching with creative writing activities in a variety of contexts. Following the presentations, there was a panel discussion which Shizuoka JALT Program Chair Sue Sullivan coordinated.

Learning with creative texts and creative methods occurs at different levels of education: from early childhood through to language arts in secondary education and university. The subject exists in universities for writers planning to extend their knowledge and experience and construct longer pieces of work such as novels and memoirs. CW is also well known as an academic discipline in the field of humanities, although the prevalence of CW courses may vary from region to region. There has been increasing attention towards the uses of creative writing in second language (L2) contexts because of its potential to engage learners and personalise the learning experience (see Disney, 2014 and Zhao, 2015 for recent volumes on L2 creative writing). In the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, 2018), CW appears in the category of written production and is “the written equivalent of *Sustained monologue: Describing experience*” (p. 75) and can include transactional language use and evaluative language use. Furthermore, CW “involves personal, imaginative expression in a variety of text types” (CEFR, 2018, p. 76). This variety and range of possibilities is an appropriate starting point for discussing how to use creative texts and creative methods in the L2 classroom.

Though CW is often advocated as a potential area of practice and research in previous reviews of the field of literature in language teaching (Carter, 2006; Paran, 2008; Fogal, 2015), its teaching may still seem to be under-utilised. This could be because using literature in many contexts still predominantly means reading (a receptive skill) and most language curricula emphasise academic modes of assessment (Maloney, 2019). However, in recent imaginings of contemporary language curricula, teachers use literature with a small “I” (McRae, 1991). This approach inclusively broadens the scope of language learning using literature, including learner literature, collaborative writing, and multimodal storytelling, and facilitates the acquisition and production of language-learning fundamentals such as grammar and vocabulary and encourages the learner to experiment with those forms. Working with a broad range of creative texts is part of what McRae (1991) described as literature with a small “I”, that is, literature beyond the canon. CW occurs in some contexts, with L2 learning (Kamata, 2016; Iida, 2010; Maloney, 2019). Learners who read and respond creatively to literary texts can engage with language playfully, exploring its malleability and limitless possibilities to help them express themselves. In other words, CW can expand the boundaries of learner perception and pedagogical approaches of English communication.

One of the notable areas of interest in this year’s event was discussing contemporary theories of literary response such as Text World Theory (Werth, 1999; Gavins, 2007). Creative writing and reader response criticism are closely interrelated activities in L1 classrooms, and it is to be expected that such theories migrate to L2 learning. However, such theories may not have been widely known until recently. Events like this one can help participants share knowledge about the evolving field of research and practice in CW studies. It

may be that discussing contemporary theories while exploring new areas of interest is a mutually beneficial activity for presenters and audience participants alike.

One additional aim of this report is first to keep a record of the event and also to help connect the perspectives offered here to possible future SIG events. SIG members and readers of the journal may wish to propose or join a future event hosted by the LiLT SIG in collaboration with another JALT chapter. Earlier this year, LiLT SIG members were invited to submit proposals to present at this CW event in the SIG newsletter, *The Word*. Next, Shizuoka JALT collaborated on the theme and the event's focus, and together with LiLT SIG worked out a program for the afternoon's creative conversations. It is hoped that future presenters can continue the conversation by sharing the activities and experiences from the event. Each presenter submitted a summary of their talk for this conference report.

## Speakers (in order of appearance)

### **Rereading, Retelling, Reimagining: Literature and Creative Writing in the Classroom by Mary Hillis**

Mary Hillis is a foreign language instructor at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto and is interested in teaching English through world literature in translation. While planning a humanities-themed university course, she drew on her own experience reading *The Stranger* by Albert Camus as an undergraduate student of French. Her presentation outlined the practical implementation of several creative writing activities to assign alongside Matthew Ward's translation: journalistic articles, spin-off stories, and additional scenes.

To review Part One of *The Stranger*, students choose from a list of types of newspaper articles: feature news story, human interest story, letter to the editor, obituaries, advice column, and others, such as weather, horoscopes, and advertisements. For example, one student wrote an advice column in which the boss asks for help on how to manage his employee Meursault who is indifferent about his work and a transfer to Paris. Students mainly draw on information from the chapters, and any imagined details should be consistent with the story and believable within the context of the novel. If students are unfamiliar with journalistic writing, model articles or stem sentences could be provided.

Drawing on reader response theory (Iser, 1974), which concerns how readers recreate meaning while reading texts, Hillis uses a retelling activity to draw attention to the various experiences that readers bring to the page. Through retellings, perspectives not included in the original can be explored, and new storylines can be created for characters whose stories have been omitted. When reading *The Stranger*, students could invent stories for female characters (e.g., Marie), minor characters (e.g., Emmanuel, Celeste), or unnamed characters (e.g., "the mistress," "the Arab"). By using the novel as a starting point, students can write stories without having to imagine the setting, characters, and plot from the outset, which scaffolds the task for those who might not have creative writing experience.

Furthermore, to compose effective retellings, familiarity with the original work is needed. This encourages students to reread, and in some cases, to research supplementary information, such as the historical background of French colonial Algeria. In fact, two retellings of *The Stranger* have been published: *The Meursault Investigation* by Kamel Daoud, and Leila Aboulela's play, *The Insider*, published in *The Things I Would Tell You: British Muslim Women Write*. As an alternative to writing their own stories, students could compare scenes from the original with these published retellings.

The final creative writing activity presented was drafting additional scenes. In the novel, Meursault describes the changing view from his window over the course of the day. After reading, students draw a picture of what they imagine Meursault sees. Depending on background knowledge and experiences, students' sketches are likely to differ. This process of building mental representations of discourse, text-worlds, has been researched by Werth (1999) and Gavins (2007). The following extension activity, based on text-world theory and adapted from Cushing (n.d.), facilitates experimentation with the connection between writer choices and reader understanding. Students begin by writing an additional scene describing the view from their window, and then have a partner describe it back to them. Based on feedback received from the partner, students revise their writing to include different words or details, and then reflect on the process.

Hillis has recently compiled activities for teaching the novel into a short ebook for teachers, *Camus in the Classroom: Teaching The Stranger*, which will be self-published in 2022.

## Providing Digital Literacy Spaces to Mimic Publication in an L2 Poetry Writing Course

Jared Michael Kubokawa is an Associate Lecturer of English (ALE) in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at Aichi University where he teaches EFL and researches CW pedagogies in language learning. This presentation outlined how implementing digital literacy spaces (publication opportunities) in an EFL university context can complement CW syllabi and extend learning opportunities. Drawing on experience from an L2 poetry writing course, Kubokawa discussed how these digital literacy spaces were used to display

students' creative work to readership both in and outside the course, acted as formative and summative assessments, feedforward agentic engagement, and developed a community of practice by creating a discourse community on campus.

Utilizing fellow L2 creative writers' texts as models can be a powerful learning tool (Spiro, 2014). To do this, L2 teachers can mimic students' writing for publication to increase the impact on learners' sense of self as creative writers, contribute to students' growing agency, and provide a sense of authenticity to classroom writing.

### Figure 1

*Sample Page from an In-Class Newsletter*

Communication Skills
Writing as Communication
June 12, 2021

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# THE WRITER'S READER

**Guess the poet!**

Read the poems and guess who the writer is. Can you get the all correct?  
Hint: One of them is your teacher!

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**Happening On My Way Home**

On my way home,  
riding my bicycle  
and looking for Orion--

Oops! I fell in the rice paddy!  
Orion may have laughed at me

**Lines**

*Kero! Kero!*  
The frogs are ringing  
*Gasagasaga*  
At that time, there was some noise  
And there are no frogs

It became quite all around

The dawn night  
Creatures have begun to wake up  
*Koltukekoltuko-*

**Rainy Season**


sniff sniff--  
I smell damp concrete  
The rainy season has come

ribbit ribbit...  
I find a frog  
I flip the leaves  
I find a snail  
glow by the water  
I find many fireflies

They're all the creatures of the rainy season  
I will find them completely

**Poet's Corner**

Thank you so much for writing your short poems. They were amazing! Also, I was happy to read your reflections and peer observations. Let's get ready for the long poems!



*Jumonjibaru Magazine*

There is a poetry magazine in Japan called Jumonjibaru in Kagoshima that wants to publish your poetry (L2 English Poetry) on their website and in their magazine. There will be other English students who also want to publish their poems in the magazine. I hope you will send your poems here. Please check out their website and send your poetry here:  
[jumonjibaru72@gmail.com](mailto:jumonjibaru72@gmail.com)

<https://jumonjibaru72.wixsite.com/website>

**Jumonjibaru**

A magazine of new writing by  
students in the Asia Pacific

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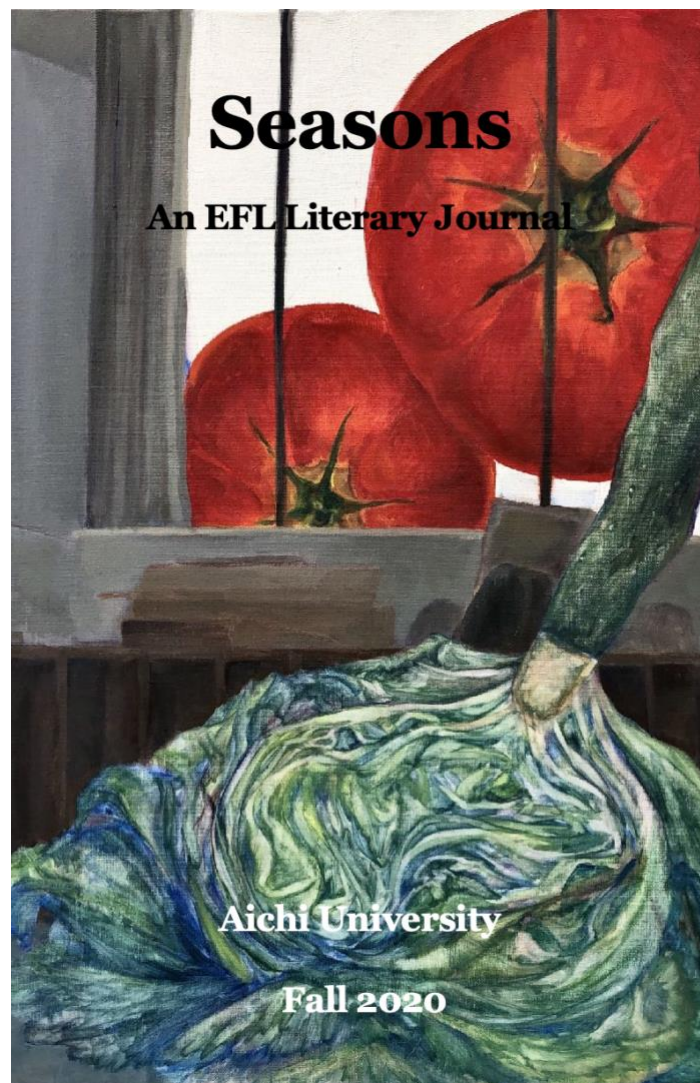
This mimicking of publication can be implemented online as digital literacy spaces. *Digital literacy* is the skills and tools needed to learn and thrive where communication and access to information exists through digital technologies (Bloch, 2021). Gilster (1997) originally popularized the term digital literacy as the ability to use various modes of expression in digital realms. *Digital realms* are the digital spaces utilized for this expression; currently commonly used *digital literacy tools* that exist in digital realms or are digital realms themselves include Zoom, Moodle, Word, Acrobat and so on. Original World Wide Web designer Berners-Lee

(1999) argued that opening the internet as a creative and expressive space could support the design of autonomous *digital literacy spaces*. While Weller (2020) agrees that the internet provides autonomy to its users, and Elola and Oskoz (2017) claim this autonomy can be extended to L2 students in language classrooms. The L2 poetry writing course has utilized several forms of digital literacy spaces that originated outside the classroom. However, inside the classroom there have been two main resources: in-class newsletters (formative) and *Seasons: An EFL Literary Journal* (summative). This summary will address these two digital literacy spaces.

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## Figure 2

Cover of *Seasons: An EFL Literary Journal*, Fall 2020



Note. Visual artwork is also accepted by submission from students on-campus.

The in-class newsletters are “published” in pdf format three times in a semester and act as a review of the unit just completed, a venue for the sharing of exemplary student work, and a platform to feedforward into the next unit, a preview. Moreover, newsletters are the first step in ongoing negotiations between student production and teacher expectations, i.e., grading (see Figure 1).

*Seasons: An EFL Literary Journal* (hereinafter *Seasons*) is the capstone project of the L2 poetry writing course and is a digital literary journal of students’ creative writing, which is published semesterly on Aichi University Language Laboratory website in pdf format (see Figure 2). Issues of *Seasons* are shared as exemplary texts with other students, teachers, administrators, and stakeholders in the community. The journal aids in developing the on-campus creative writing community, artistic community, and discourse community; however, the foremost function is its application as the “textbook” for the course. *Seasons* acts as the model texts for the reading-to-writing cycle in the course and is the material used to teach the students various literacy skills including close reading, literary analysis, and the use of literary devices. Thus, *Seasons* creates a cycle of student-generated texts that retains life beyond the specific cohort (Spiro, 2014) and is an example of Taylor’s (1976) theory of *spiralization* that links the creative work of students across time like a chain.

In conclusion, digital literacy spaces in multilingual writing classrooms can be utilized by teachers in various formative writing assignments sessions as well as post summative assessment. These publications can then feedforward to future courses and support L2 writers in several ways including: a venue for exemplary student work, model texts written by other L2 writers, literary content for teaching, and inspiration for creative spiralization (Taylor, 1976). These digital spaces have widened the audience for students’ writing beyond the teacher and classmates and in turn increased audience awareness for the writers, which can affect their production of authorial voice and learner agency.

### **Activating Scripts: Japanese Literature and Creative Writing in the EFL Classroom by Luke Draper**

Luke Draper is an Assistant Lecturer (ALE) of English at Kwansei Gakuin University’s School of Policy of Studies. He teaches on the streamed English Language Program that delivers academic English courses from elementary to advanced level. At the upper intermediate to advanced level (CEFR B2+), ALEs create and teach

a semester-long “Special Topics” course on a subject of their choice. The courses are designed to facilitate practice and development of the acquired academic skills with a CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) approach. Draper, whose academic background is in English Literature and Creative Writing, designed and taught a course around the theme of English Translations of Japanese Literature. His presentation explored the theory and rationale behind the choice of theme and discussed creative writing activities appropriate for selected stories.

First, it may be argued that Japanese literature in translation may be an unsuitable resource for Japanese students, who should instead engage with literature of different cultures toward a global mindset. However, Draper argues that Japanese learners of English may struggle to engage with this literature due to cognitive barriers that prevent learners from fully conceptualizing the prose. According to Gavins (2007) “we construct mental representations, or text-worlds, which enable us to conceptualise and understand every piece of language we encounter” when reading (p. 2). The way text-worlds are mentally constructed and humans apply conceptualisations is the focus of Text World Theory, which Draper uses as a framework to argue that Japanese learners are more likely to engage with their literature and in turn participate in more meaningful discourse.

When teaching literature, learners should be provided the space to engage in authentic reading toward their own interpretations. Giovanelli and Mason (2018) state that, when a teacher imposes the meaning of a text onto the learner, this is instead a manufactured reading. Bloom’s Taxonomy of Cognitive Domains shows the pedagogical risks of teaching toward the recalling of facts for tests, which manufactured readings may circumscribe. Higher domains such as “analyze” and “evaluate” are areas learners may develop through unmediated interpretation and discussion. The highest cognitive domain is “create”, which is the space where learners can synthesize their reading experiences while playing with the language and taking linguistic risks that are not encouraged in academic composition (Maley, 2009).

The creative writing activity of continuing a story where the author ended it was introduced, and Haruki Murakami’s short story *Concerning the Sound of a Train Whistle in the Night or On the Efficacy of Fiction* was presented as a prime example.

The story begins:

The girl has a question for the boy: “How much do you love me?”

He thinks for a moment, then quietly replies “as much as a train whistle in the night.”

The ‘boy’ character describes waking up alone in the dead of night, feeling isolated and detached from reality, until he hears a very faint train whistle in the distance.

The story ends:

With that, the boy’s brief story is over. And the girl begins telling her own.

General descriptions of learners’ creative additions to the story were given. Learners understood the train whistle as an explicit metaphor for the boy’s love; in turn, they explored their own. Many continued with the rail theme. One story compared the girl’s heart with rail tracks, expanding and contracting under temperatures but with potentially no endpoint like her love. Another used the varying colors of steam from the train to describe fluctuating human emotions. Some stories used the moon and stars to symbolize the boy’s existence as a guide for the girl, and others deftly applied light from the train tunnel and sky and color from a rainbow as comparative metaphor. One story imagined the girl as monochrome in an otherwise colorful landscape. She finds a weed in the ground, touches it and they both radiate color. To compare the boy not to a majestic flower, but to a common weed, was impressively grounded.

Finally, class observations were given. Learners were vocally engaged with the texts provided, and their spoken performances demonstrated development of a range of communicative abilities. By activating their cognitive scripts by reading their own literature, learners were able to create some very rich texts of their own.

**Literary competence, creative writing and CLIL: Textual interventions and beyond by Tara McIlroy**  
Tara McIlroy teaches at Rikkyo University in Tokyo and is interested in curriculum development of courses using literature for language learning. The work of Rob Pope inspired this presentation in his book *Textual Intervention* in which he explored a variety of ways of working with

creative texts. *Interventions* in the classroom, which could be critical or creative responses, open up limitless possibilities for classroom activities. The talk also suggested how Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approaches may be combined with CW pedagogies. The presentation used the CEFR (2018) to contextualise language learning descriptors related to CW from the language perspective. Example activities include writing “engaging stories and descriptions of experience” using “diary entries and short, imaginary biographies and simple poems” as well as “well-structured and developed descriptions and imaginative texts” (p. 76). For example, from the B1 descriptor in CEFR, learners can “write a description of an event, a recent trip – real or imagined” and “narrate a story,” moving on at C1 level to being able to write a more complex narrative or a “detailed critical review of cultural events or literary works” (CEFR, 2018).

The presentation introduced *Textual Interventions*, putting a name to techniques CW teachers are already familiar with. Pope’s approach is to expand on current thinking about how to use literary texts for CW and challenge teachers to come up with other, novel ideas suitable for their particular teaching situations. Examples of such changes are alternative summaries, changed titles and openings, and alternative endings. Fairy tales and classic literature can be used as beginning points and be used for textual interventions, for example. Students could also write missing chapters in novels or stories, using narrative intervention turning points, alternative events, forked paths, reframed narrative focus or imitation, or even parody. In a recent example, Ludwig (2021) discusses how digital teaching with literature may occur in the 2060s. He imagines a possible future in which learners use virtual reality to experience Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, reevaluating gender roles and changing scenes. In this way, the text is reimagined and revitalised for contemporary interpretation. Some of Pope’s more unusual suggestions include hybrid creation (remake using more than one text), genre shift, or changes in modality, i.e., “word to image, word to music, word to movement...” (p. 201). Reflecting on the potentially mixed-level classrooms and learners who may be reticent or unpracticed in creative writing activities, the options selected by Pope allow for diverse interpretations.

Before teaching in the tertiary context in Japan, McIlroy worked as a secondary school English teacher, which includes teaching and evaluating CW used for testing in that context. She drew on her experiences to

discuss the connections between L1 approaches to creative writing in the secondary context and L2 creative writing. One example of the combined content and language approach is the recently published literary competence model (Grit & Ulla, 2019), which refers to a recent attempt to justify the use of literature in language learning contexts. Building on Paran's (2008, 2010) work in looking to apply a model for literature for language learning purposes, the literary competencies approach includes empathetic competence, aesthetic and stylistic competence, cultural competence, and interpretive competence. McIlroy argued that teachers could apply the Four Cs of CLIL (content, culture, communication, and cognition) as described by Coyle, Hood, & Marsh (2010) in language classes using literature. Curriculum planners using CLIL emphasise the need for courses to engage learners with higher-order thinking skills (HOTs), requiring learners to critique and evaluate (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Those working with literature for L2 learning goals can therefore justify applying both language and content approaches.

In the final part of the presentation, McIlroy used a sample text, *Refugees* (2016), by Brian Bilston. Bilston is affectionately referred to as the poet laureate of Twitter, and his work has appeared online and in printed collections. The poem *Refugees* (available on the poet's webpage at <https://brianbilston.com/2016/03/23/refugees/>) should be read at least twice, once from the top and the second time from the bottom, beginning with the line "The world can be looked at another way." The second reading reveals a different message, quite the opposite from the first. Once readers have noticed the way the poem is structured, it could be given what Pope discusses as interventions in a classroom setting. Suggestions from teachers include using the poem to discuss multiple perspectives, writing about new situations using a similar structure, and finding phrases from other news stories to write personal responses to related or other controversial topics.

### Concluding comments

Each talk provided unique perspectives on the teaching of CW in the English language classroom while also exploring similar supporting theories and principles. Hillis and Draper both applied Text-World Theory to explain the cognitive process of their students reading, visualizing the text and producing creative output with their "mysterious and remarkable facility...to be

transported imaginatively to worlds which bear only slight relation to (their) own real world" (Scott, 2013, pp. 136-137). Each speaker discussed their experiences of teaching texts and textual interventions (McIlroy) as a means of scaffolding toward creative writing, with text expansion activities (Hillis, Draper) and mimic writing (Kubokawa) emphasized as effective approaches to facilitate the creative use of language. These types of tasks, as Pope (1995) asserts, encourage learners to 'challenge' the original texts through playful manipulation and co-construction, thus developing both critical and creative faculties.

A common, underlying theme in each talk was the capacity of CW to cultivate learner identity and agency. Zhao (2015) writes "L2 creative writers' cognitive writing activities are *idiosyncratic* performances of the writers' voices rather than *normative* indications of the writer's language proficiency or writing expertise" (p. 7, author's italics). CW then, allows EFL learners to play with the language away from the restrictive obligation of lexicogrammatical and structural accuracy while exploring their individual L2 voice. It is, in this sense, a Freirian pedagogy: dialogic and emancipatory in nature (Kelen, 2014).

While CW may not yet feature in the L2 language curricula across all contexts, there is potential for its further integration. Teachers who have studied toward TESOL postgraduate certificates are unlikely to have experience in CW teaching. Yet as universities in Japan respond to the government's call for greater use of content in language teaching programs, defining and utilising content is an area of increasing focus and renewed attention. From the perspective of CEFR training and developing literary competences, CW presents opportunities for language teachers to exploit. As the presenters at this event showed in their individual talks using a range of strategies and approaches, CW can mean working with creative texts in various different and effective ways.

### Author Biographies

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Luke Draper is an Associate Lecturer of English (ALE) at Kwansai Gakuin University in Hyogo, Japan. He has an MA in Creative Writing from the University of Chichester, UK. His academic interests include the Creative Writing workshop and interactions that occur within them, Literary Linguistics and how stylistic instruction may inform workshop discussions and student-writers' approaches to writing. <lpgdraper@gmail.com>

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