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Introduction

Welcome to the 2023 issue of *The Journal of Literature in Language Teaching*.

After a few years interrupted by the Coronavirus, things have gone back to some semblance of normality, at least in the academic sphere if nowhere else. Classes are back on campus, masks are a personal choice and, thankfully, conferences are once more face-to-face with all the professional development and social interaction that entails. LiLT was well represented at the JALT PanSIG conference at Kyoto Sangyo University of May 2023, and at the main JALT conference in Tsukuba, this past November. In addition, many familiar faces were to be seen at the Japan Writers' Conference in Nagoya.

For better or worse, the last few years have taught us the necessity of critical thinking skills, and it is this area that **Keita Kodama** focuses on in our *feature article*. He examines how literature can be used as a tool to develop and strengthen critical thinking through the close reading and analysis of short stories.

In our *literature in practice* article, **Joshua L. Solomon and Megumi Tada** also concentrate on reading but shift the emphasis onto cultural familiarity as a strong grounding for language study and increased motivation. By focusing on folk tales both known and new to their students, they show how familiarity with stories and their context in a student's own background can lessen perceived difficulty in English-language texts. At the same time, their study suggest that unfamiliarity need not be an obstacle to understanding or enjoyment.

It really has been a social year, and this is reflected in the three interviews in this issue. In the first **Michael Larson** talks to **Soichiro Oku** about their new textbook *Notes on Brotherhood: English Literature in the Classroom Vol. 1*. As discussed in Kodama's article, short stories are an excellent tool for the classroom, but Larson and Oku have taken the process one step further by building an entire textbook around a series of stories written specifically for the textbook by Larson.

Moving more directly into creative writing, **Andy Decker** interviewed Darryl Whetter, LiLT's featured speaker at the JALT PanSIG conference in May. Providing an overview of Whetter's career and experience of teaching creative writing to L2 learners, it provides many interesting insights into both the philosophy and practice of creative writing instruction.

Tara McIlroy interviews Paul Sevigny who has recently published his first graded reader. Like Larson and Oku, Sevigny has been actively involved in developing original literary materials for students of multiple levels through YAMS—Young Adult Multicultural Stories—a project that produces bilingual short stories in order to bring literature into the classroom and to better facilitate cultural exchange and understanding.

Finally, **Ian Willey** reviews David McMurray's *Teaching and Learning Haiku in English*, a subject that is close to our hearts in LiLT and which has graced the pages of this journal on many occasions.

The peer-reviewed *Journal of Literature in Language Teaching* accepts submissions from around the world. Submissions are accepted at any time on a rolling basis. Submission details are given on the final page of this journal and can also be found on the LiLT SIG website <http://liltsig.org>. Submissions can be sent to liltjournaleditor@gmail.com. You can also contact the LiLTSIG at liltsig@gmail.com

The Literature in Language Teaching Special Interest Group (LiLTSIG) is part of the Japan Association of Language Teaching. LiLTSIG was formed in 2011 to encourage and promote the use of literature in the language classroom.

LiLTSIG produces a newsletter and a peer-reviewed journal, as well as organising various literature-themed events.

Although based in Japan, the group and the journal welcome contributions and cooperation from around the world.

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Feature Article

The Effects of Using Literature on EFL Students' Critical Thinking: Fostering Critical Thinking Skills in Foreign Language Learning

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Abstract

The use of literature in education can help students develop their critical thinking skills by encouraging close reading and analysis, promoting interpretation and evaluation, providing diverse perspectives, and developing communication skills. However, little research has been done to explore the benefit of using literature in English language teaching in Japan for the purpose of fostering students' critical thinking. In response to this, the present study investigated the effects of using literature to foster students' critical thinking skills in an EFL classroom with 35 non-English major students at a Japanese university. The participants were enrolled in an English reading class which incorporated literary texts as the reading materials. For 15 weeks, they participated in classroom activities centered around the reading of a different short story during each class. The results of pretest and posttest questionnaires indicate that using literature in English reading classes had a positive impact on students' overall critical thinking skills. The results also suggest that the ability to make inferences was the most developed critical thinking skill among the abilities gained by the students in the study. Additionally, students reported that they enjoyed participating in group discussions and had fun reading and analyzing literature in the classroom. The findings of the study suggest that using literature in English language teaching in Japan can be beneficial for fostering students' critical thinking skills.

Key words: critical thinking skills, reading, literature

Although developing critical thinking skills has been seen as a primary goal in higher education for decades (MEXT, 2008, 2018), opportunities to acquire these skills are limited and Japanese undergraduate students tend to possess inadequate critical thinking skills (e.g., Tanaka & Yutaka, 2016). The causes for such problems are largely due to Japan's social character, reinforced by its current educational system. Japanese students in general are accustomed to a collectivist society where individual thoughts and opinions are often not appreciated when compared with the reception of the same within a western society (Winfield, Mizuno & Beaudoin, 2000; Laskar, 2007; McDaniel & Katsumata, 2012; Kawabata & Barling, 2020).

English language teaching (ELT) in Japan focuses mostly on skill practice and grammatical understanding. Moreover, most textbooks employed at the secondary education level tend to focus excessively on basic reading comprehension skills and were not originally intended as a means of fostering critical thinking (Mineshima & Chino, 2013; Tanaka & Yutaka, 2016; Baker, 2018; Jones, 2019).

As a result, Japanese students seem to have very limited critical thinking skills by the time they reach university. According to Sugimura (2015), individuals who lack critical reading skills may struggle to identify issues in a text, form their own perspectives on it, or express their opinions coherently. Rather than engaging actively with the material and generating original insights,

they may adopt a passive approach of seeking a singular “correct” interpretation.

Thus, altering students’ learning habits and mindset by developing critical thinking skills and nurturing attitudes towards critical thinking is of great importance. Developing the ability to think critically and independently in a structured manner is a critical issue in higher education, representing the final frontier in preparing students for success in their academic and professional lives (Tanaka & Yutaka, 2016).

One means by which these skills could be fostered is through the application of literature in the EFL classroom (e.g., Nance, 2010). Literature has long been considered important in cultivating critical thinking and is effectively used in the EFL / ESL classroom (e.g., Kramersch & Kramersch, 2000; Kaowiwattanakul, 2021; Ouhiba, 2022), including countries in Asia where English is widely used in education, such as Singapore (Ministry of Education: Singapore, 2013). With these examples in mind, incorporating literature into the Japanese university EFL classroom could present a possible solution to the aforementioned problems.

However, there is little research on the application of literature in Japanese ELT for the purpose of fostering students’ critical thinking skills. Therefore, it remains unclear to what extent reading literature can develop the critical thinking skills of Japanese EFL students. For this reason, this study aims to explore the extent to which a group of students’ critical thinking can be influenced by using literature in a Japanese EFL classroom.

Literature review

While various definitions of critical thinking have been proposed, Fisher (2011), in his oft-cited book, *Critical Thinking*, defines it as “skilled and active *interpretation* and *evaluation* of observations and communications, information and argumentation” (emphasis added, p.11). This definition is particularly relevant for this study as it focuses on the ability to interpret and evaluate (e.g., written texts) as a fundamental trait of critical thinking, an ability that is intrinsic to reading a literary text (Widdowson, 1983). Thus, the use of literary texts in the EFL classroom could make a significant contribution to developing critical thinking.

Lazere (1987) claimed that “literature is the single academic discipline that can come closest to encompassing the full range of mental traits currently considered to comprise critical thinking” (p. 3). Being

engaged in reading literature is a complex process that requires readers to reflect on their own thinking to make sense of a text (Tung & Chang, 2009). Readers of literature need to develop competencies to assist with

hidden or implied meanings, separate facts from opinions, examine characteristics of the narrative from multiple points of view, reconstruct images from details and apply what they have learned to other aspects of their daily life (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016, p. 680).

This is reflected in McRae’s (1996) idea of the components of literary competence, which include the ability “to make connections and cross-references, to quote and summarise constructively, to balance arguments and reach conclusions, to take subjective standpoints and relate them to objective criteria, and to contextualise” (p. 37).

In brief, all these components are regarded as critical thinking skills, and readers of literature are practicing what critical thinking theoreticians called “interpretation”, “analysis”, “inference”, “evaluation”, and “explanation” (Laskar, 2007; Fisher, 2011). On the basis of these insights, reading literary texts and critical thinking are closely interrelated. Hence, it seems reasonable to assume that literature serves as material for “training of critical thinking” (Kramersch & Kramersch, 2000, p. 567) in the EFL classroom.

Previous studies have investigated the effectiveness of using literature to develop students’ critical thinking skills in EFL settings. Tung and Chang (2009) investigated the efficacy of developing critical thinking through literature in the EFL context with 12 non-English major students at a university in Taiwan. The results of a pretest and posttest Chinese version of California Critical Thinking Skills Test to measure critical thinking skills, a standardized test showed that the use of literature improved overall critical thinking, particularly those in analysis of a literary text. Among all student-directed activities, the survey results showed that the participants found that guided in-class discussion was the most effective method in developing critical thinking.

Sugimura (2015) explored the use of literary texts (short stories) as a means to develop critical thinking skills in the EFL setting in Japan with 15 non-English major volunteer Japanese university students in a group he named the ‘book club’. The survey results demonstrated that reading literary texts promoted the

students' critical thinking skills in terms of being able to form opinions based on the evidence in literary texts through group discussion as an intervention.

Despite the findings from the previous studies demonstrating the effectiveness of the use of literature in the EFL classroom, there remain some issues to be addressed. Tung and Chang (2009) demonstrated that the use of literature improved university EFL students' critical thinking. However, further research is needed to confirm the validity of their findings in the Japanese EFL context.

Sugimura (2015) also reported that the use of literature with Japanese university EFL students is effective. However, the participants in her study were students who voluntarily gathered in the 'book club', so it remains unclear whether the effects could be applicable to students who enrolled in a required course. In addition to the first point, both Tung and Chang (2009) and Sugimura (2015) showed that employing discussion is a very effective way of developing students' critical thinking. However, more research is needed to explore potential applications of the proposed method by the previous research in a different context.

The Present Study

The purpose of the present study is to explore the effects of using literature to help develop Japanese EFL students' critical thinking in an English reading class based on group discussion. The research questions (RQs) are as follows:

RQ1: Does the use of literature in the English reading class help students develop critical thinking?

RQ2: Which critical thinking ability is best developed by reading literature?

RQ3: What do students think about the literature component English reading class?

Method

Participants

The participants of the present study were 35 first-year Japanese EFL students in a private university in Japan. They were all non-English majors enrolled in a general English reading class, one of the required courses for first-year students. It was a mixed class of law, economics, and business administration majors. The English reading class was divided into three levels for first-year students: basic, intermediate, and advanced, based on the university's independent grading system. The participants were at the intermediate level. The present study was conducted over four months from the

beginning of April to the end of July in 2021, and all the classes were taught by the researcher.

Materials

The textbook used in the present study was *Donald J. Sobol: Solve the Mystery 3 and Improve Your English Skills*, (Yoshimura et al, 2019). It is a collection of fifteen complete short mystery stories. Each story includes a vocabulary exercise, true or false questions, and comprehension quizzes. All stories are original works of detective fiction, not abridged for EFL / ESL learners, and are about 200-300 words long. Readers attempt to solve the mysteries with the clues and evidence in the stories. The participants were expected to read one story per class.

Content of the lesson

The lessons undertook the following stages: warmup, pre-reading activity, while reading, post reading activity, and group discussion. As a warmup, the teacher explained the cultural background and verbal expressions specific to the context of the story. Before reading the story, students were engaged in completing a vocabulary exercise as a pre-reading activity. Next, they individually read a story, and then engaged in the reading comprehension activities by scanning for information to answer the true or false questions and quizzes set as a post-reading activity. For group discussion, students were divided into groups of three to four and were expected to solve the mystery together. As they discussed the story, they exchanged their viewpoints. Subsequently, individual students from each group summarized their own opinions on their respective worksheets based on the results of their discussion. Finally, the representative of the groups presented the group's view to the entire class in turn.

Additionally, the students were asked to write a short paragraph in English about their views on solving the mystery, using the worksheet that contained relevant vocabulary, discussion questions, and prompts as a guide. This paragraph task was assigned to students after every lesson. Both the writing assignment and worksheet were collected in the next lesson. The teacher checked and returned both during the following lesson, then shared a model paragraph, gave feedback to the participants, and provided analysis on the content of the story.

Data Collection and Analysis

Pretest and posttest questionnaires were used for data collection to investigate whether the use of literature in an English reading class had any impact on students' critical thinking. In the pretest, the directions were: "Looking back on the English reading classes you took in high school, how well do you think you developed the following abilities? Please circle the one that best applies." Whereas in the posttest, the direction was: "Looking back on the English reading classes you have taken, how well do you think you have developed the following abilities? Please circle the one that best applies. *Do not include English reading classes taken before high school." The questionnaire statements were categorized into five sections: (1) Interpretation, (2) Analysis, (3) Evaluation, (4) Inference, and (5) Explanation. The questionnaires consisted of a five-point Likert scale as follows: 5-*strongly agree*, 4-*agree*, 3-*neither agree or disagree*, 2-*disagree*, and 1-*strongly disagree*. The following are the translations of the original Japanese form.

(1) Interpretation

Q1: I was able to develop the ability to decide the intended meaning of something.

(2) Analysis

Q2: I was able to develop the ability to examine in detail, to develop my opinion.

(3) Evaluation

Q3: I was able to develop the ability to judge the quality, importance, amount, or value of something.

(4) Inference

Q4: I was able to reach an opinion from available information or facts.

(5) Explanation

Q5: I was able to make something clear by describing or giving information about it.

Included in the questionnaire, open-ended survey questions were presented in a free comment column in order to examine students' views as to the use of literature for the English reading class. The open-ended survey questions for the pretest and posttest are as follows: "What did you think of your high school English reading class? (Pretest questionnaire)", and "What did you think of this English reading class? (Posttest questionnaire)".

The survey procedures of the pretest and posttest questionnaires are as follows. In Week 1, the pretest

questionnaire was administered, and all the participants were asked to complete the questionnaire. From Week 2 to Week 14, the participants received the lessons once a week for thirteen consecutive weeks. In Week 15, the posttest questionnaire was administered to all the participants in class. Consent to use the survey results for research purposes was obtained from the participants. The responses to both the pretest and posttest five-point Likert scale questionnaires were analyzed, and descriptive data was processed by SPSS. Additionally, the responses to the open-ended survey questions were examined and summarized by the researcher.

Results and Discussion

The pretest and posttest questionnaires

RQ1: Does the use of literature in the English reading class help students develop critical thinking?

Table 1 (see next page) shows the results of pretest and posttest questionnaires: the number of participants of the four groups (n), mean scores (Mean), standard deviation (SDs), and difference in points between the pretest and the posttest (Gains) for the five questions asked.

The results of the pretest and posttest questionnaires show that the mean scores for all five questions were found to be higher than those of the results of the pretest as follows: In the results of the question about students' ability of interpretation (Q1), the pretest mean score was 3.00, and that of the posttest was 4.00. Compared to the pretest, the posttest mean score increased by 1.00 point. In the results of the question about the ability of analysis (Q2), the pretest mean score was 3.28, and that of the posttest was 4.42. Thus, the mean score increased by 1.14 points. In the results of the question about the ability of evaluation (Q3), the pretest mean score was 3.28, and that of the posttest was 4.31. Accordingly, the mean score increased by 1.03 points. In the results of the question about the ability of inference (Q4), the pretest mean score was 3.25, and that of the posttest was 4.50. Consequently, the mean score increased by 1.25 points. In the results of the question about the ability of explanation (Q5), the pretest mean score was 3.31, and that of the posttest was 4.39. When compared to the pretest, there was an increase in the point by 1.08.

Table 1
Results of Pre-test and Post-test Questionnaires

| | Pretest (n=35) | | Posttest (n=35) | | Gains |
|--------------------|----------------|------|-----------------|------|-------|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | |
| Q1. Interpretation | 3.00 | 1.07 | 4.00 | 0.83 | +1 |
| Q2. Analysis | 3.28 | 1.06 | 4.42 | 0.73 | +1.14 |
| Q3. Evaluation | 3.28 | 1.00 | 4.31 | 0.82 | +1.03 |
| Q4. Inference | 3.25 | 1.11 | 4.50 | 0.61 | +1.25 |
| Q5. Explanation | 3.31 | 1.01 | 4.39 | 0.69 | +1.08 |

Note: 5-strongly agree, 4-agree, 3-neither agree or disagree, 2-disagree, and 1-strongly disagree.

Regarding research question 1 (RQ1), as reflected in the overall mean scores, the results seem to indicate that the use of literature in the English reading class contributed to the development of these Japanese university EFL students' critical thinking. The findings of the present study seem to confirm Lazere (1987), who claimed that the process of reading literature involves the abilities necessary for critical thinking. Moreover, the results of the present study seem to suggest that the assertion by Tung and Chang (2009) and Sugimura (2015) that the use of literature fosters students' critical thinking skills is applicable to the Japanese EFL classroom environment. Hence, the findings of the present study seem to suggest that literature serves as material for "training of critical thinking" (Kramsch & Kramsch, 2000, p. 567) not only in EFL classes overseas but also EFL classes in Japan.

RQ2: Which critical thinking ability is best developed by reading literature?

As shown in Table 1, the findings revealed that the question for the ability of inference (Q4) had the highest mean score of 4.50 and the question for the ability of analysis (Q2) had the second highest mean score of 4.42, followed by the question about the ability of explanation (Q5), with that of 4.39. This was followed by the question about the ability of evaluation (Q3) (4.31). The question about the ability of interpretation (Q1) had the lowest score in the posttest (4.00).

Although the overall mean scores improved, the ability to infer was found to be the most developed among the skills. It is assumed that this is mainly due to the characteristics of literary texts. As Bobkina and Stefanova (2016) claim, the readers of literature are likely to be put in a position where they must decode "hidden or implied meanings" and "reconstruct images from details" (p. 680). This is to say, unlike expository texts

such as *New Horizon English Course*, literary texts are written in a way that requires the readers to "read between the lines", which means here to infer. In literary texts, messages are not explicitly written, so the readers of literature must use their imagination to the fullest in order to reach and express an opinion of their interpretation and evaluation of the texts (Fisher, 2011; Widdowson, 1983) and to also 'contextualize' the text (McRae, 1996, p. 37), which is specific to fully understanding literary texts.

Open-ended survey questions

Responses to the pretest questionnaire

According to the results of the open-ended survey question in the pretest inquiring about students' perception of their high school English reading class, most participants reported that they had received grammar and translation type lessons. These mostly comprised of basic reading comprehension exercises, in which students translate reading passages in the text into Japanese and answer questions about the contents, followed by teacher explanations. Findings also showed that most of them perceived the English reading texts as materials for entrance examinations, so they never read the text with the purpose of engaging deeply with the content. In summary, their reading experiences in high school English classes were teacher-centered and did not involve meaningful interaction with the text or peers beyond achieving extrinsic goals.

Responses to the posttest questionnaire

RQ3: How do students feel about the literature component English reading class?

According to the results of the open-ended survey question in the posttest inquiring about students' perception of the English reading classes they had taken

in the present study, most participants reported that, unlike simply answering reading comprehension questions, they were able to think logically and consider things from various angles, based on limited information. Moreover, most of them reported that through group discussions, they were able to reflect on their own ideas based on the opinions of others and think things through in depth. They also reported that this learning experience was different from a *juken*-type of reading class (a preparation class for the entrance examination) where they are expected to find the one correct answer for a test purpose. Hence, findings of the present study may seem to confirm the benefit of the applications of group discussion for literature-oriented lessons as put forth by Tung and Chang (2009) and Sugimura (2015). Additionally, most students reported that it was their first time to read mysteries in English and that doing so in the English reading class was enjoyable.

In summary, in contrast to the students' high school English reading class, the reading experiences of the students in the present study were most likely more student-centered and interactive. Regarding RQ3, the findings seem to indicate that the use of literature in the Japanese EFL class had a positive impact on the participants' critical thinking.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the effects of using literature on Japanese students' critical thinking skills in an EFL classroom in a Japanese university. Regarding the first research question about whether the use of literature helps students develop critical thinking, the findings obtained from the study suggest that the use of literary reading materials was effective within the study group, as indicated by the overall mean scores for critical thinking improving in the posttest questionnaire as compared to those of the pretest questionnaire. Thus, it seems that the application of the study of literature maybe effective to foster students' critical thinking in the Japanese EFL classroom in this case, and possibly more widely. With regard to the second research question inquiring about which critical thinking ability is best developed by reading literature, the findings of the present study show that the most developed ability reported by the students in the study was inference. It seems that reading literature could provide students with opportunities to be engaged in the process of analyzing a text beyond its literal meaning, and to interpret the underlying messages or subtext. As for the third research question asking about the perception of a literature

component in an English class, it was found that the use of English-language short mysteries provided a critical reading activity in which learners thought deeply about the content and interpreted it logically and thoughtfully. Furthermore, the findings show that through group discussions, literature was able to provide a proactive learning experience in which the participants were able to think for themselves rather than passively search for a set answer.

However, there are some points to be addressed for a further study. A limitation of this study is that while the study group was sizable, it was not huge, which means that the findings of this study may not be generalizable to all populations. In addition, although the sources used in this study provide valuable insights into the topic of critical thinking and literature in the EFL classroom, more recent references would help to ensure that the findings are up-to-date and reflective of current research in the field. As the field of EFL education continues to evolve, it is important to consider the most recent studies and publications in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Therefore, future studies could benefit from including a wider range of recent references to ensure the most current and relevant information is being used. It should also be noted that the present study has not investigated the acquisition of learners' critical thinking by measuring their abilities. Thus, more research is needed to assess the effectiveness of developing of critical thinking using literature by using standardized tests. Moreover, it should also be noted that the present study has not investigated the effects of using literature against a control group. Hence, more research is needed to compare the effects with the control group in its design using non-literary texts. Further examination is needed to clarify these issues with more recent studies in a different learning environment in Japan.

Author Biography

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Literature in Practice

Culturally-Familiar Folktales and Intralingual Translation for English Education

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Abstract

This pilot study examines a combination of intralingually-translated (literary English to simple English) culturally familiar materials for use in EFL. 24 college freshmen were presented with either a local or a foreign folktale several times over the course of three weeks. Some participants were given folktales which were intralingually translated into simple English, whereas others read only the original literary English. They provided written and oral responses about comprehension, emotional investment and enjoyment, perception of difficulty, and awareness of textual literariness. The findings corroborate extant research demonstrating an increased emotional investment and enjoyment in culturally familiar readings. However, the present study also suggests that the benefits of using culturally familiar materials may depreciate through repeated contact with the texts. In addition, it also shows that modulating reading difficulty in a mountain-valley pattern through a prolonged contact with the text correlated with greater desire to continue engaging with the reading.

Key words: literature, reading, culture

This report presents part of a pilot study addressing the use of English-language folktales as teaching materials for liberal arts English classes in a Japanese university. Our initial broad research question was, “What are the effects of cultural familiarity, textual difficulty, and literariness on learner comprehension and emotional engagement with the materials?” As detailed below, we analyzed learners’ reactions to a South African folktale and a local (Tsugaru, Aomori) Japanese folktale through repeated encounters with the same story, but adjusted to different levels of linguistic difficulty.

Background

This experiment was seeded by another project which was focused on the collection and analysis of folktales told in the local Tsugaru vernacular. An inspiration for that project was the university’s emphasis on promoting “glocal” education, defined as combining a global perspective with local action. Given this mission, the authors are seeking to develop English language

teaching materials using local resources. However, they realized a need to first test the effective use of folktales as EFL materials.

The concept of culturally familiar contents in EFL has gained interest in recent years. Culturally familiar contents refer to teaching materials derived from language learners’ cultural contexts, such as local news or literature that is written or translated into the learners’ L2. It is hypothesized that such materials activate learners’ schema, scaffolding comprehension, and stimulating emotional investment. As seen in the work of Segni & Davidson (2016) in Ethiopia, Tous & Haghghi (2013) in Iran, Sheridan, et al. (2019), and Carson (2019) in Japan, this is a topic of interest to researchers and educators around the globe. Tous & Haghghi (2013) and Carson (2019) demonstrated the effective use of culturally familiar materials for listening comprehension while Sheridan and his colleagues have focused on reading texts. Sheridan et al. (2018) examined the effect of replacing culturally familiar markers (names,

monetary units) with Arabic and Kenyan terms in newspaper stories. Their tentative conclusions point to a positive impact on both vocabulary recall and content comprehension. Sheridan et al. (2019) confirmed these findings and supplemented them with the claim that cultural context has significant implications for students' engagement with the texts. Other work (Sheridan & Condon 2004, Sheridan et al. 2018) also demonstrated a strong preference for Japanese students to choose materials concerned with local rather than foreign topics when given agency over their own learning.

On the other hand, intralingual translation has yet to receive much attention in the field of language pedagogy. This term was first introduced by Jakobson (1959) as equivalent to “*rewording*...an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language,” in contrast to interlingual translation (between languages) and intersemiotic translation (between verbal and non-verbal communication) (p. 233). The definition of intralingual translation has subsequently become heterogeneous within the field of translation studies, where it is sometimes even rejected as an acceptable paradigm of “translation” (Zethsen 2009, Luo 2019, Hill-Madsen 2019). Typically, it involves translation between dialects, such as British English and American English (Denton 2007, Hill-Madsen 2019) or Flemish Dutch and Netherlandic Dutch (Brems 2018). Another form of intralingual translation is simplification into “easy language,” sometimes subcategorized into “plain English” or “accessible English.” Typical extant research into easy language has investigated the accessible communication of medical information (Hill-Madsen 2015, Hill-Madsen 2019, Muñoz-Miquel 2012, Muñoz-Miquel et al. 2018). However, more recent studies have expanded the purview of intralingual translation and easy language studies to encompass their application to second-language speakers, children's language learning, and textual adaptation (Luo 2019, Hansen-Schirra & Maaß 2020). Ahrens (2020) in particular argued for the instrumental use of easy language for second language users against the conclusions of several German-language studies (p. 93). Unfortunately, the specifics of the German critiques against easy language have not been made available in English, nor has research begun to evaluate the application of multiple textual forms—the combination of original and intralingual translation—in an EFL environment.

This background guided our research questions:

1. To what extent can the use of local folktales as a form of culturally-familiar materials increase student engagement and comprehension?
2. How may a combination of easy English and literary English be received by learners during sustained engagement with a literary text?

The Study

Participants

The experiment was conducted over the course of four weeks in July 2022 with 24 university freshmen. The participants were recruited from advanced and upper-intermediate level English classes and had Visualizing English Language Competency (VELC) Test scores ranging from 534–741 (according to VELC Test student score profiles, approximately equivalent to 500-700 TOEIC). Participants were divided into four cohorts with roughly equal proficiency score distributions. Each cohort underwent the same procedure, but with different combinations of texts at different stages.

Materials

We utilized two public domain texts: the Japanese text “Monta the Monkey” (*Saru no Monta*) and the South African text “Who was the Thief?”. The former provided by Satō Tsurei of the Wa no Mukashi-ko storyteller group and the latter written by Sanni Metelerkamp (1914). After intralingual translation, a total of four texts were utilized during the experiment. The texts were categorized in two ways: by culture of origin and by linguistic difficulty. Two versions were based on “Monta the Monkey” as translated into English by the authors; the other two used “Who was the Thief?”. The Japanese text is referred to below as the “JP” text, in contrast to the “foreign” (F) text. Both original texts contain non-standard vocabulary and oral language, “marking” the texts as oral and literary. We refer to these two versions as marked English (ME). These were then intralingually translated into simple English (SE), reducing or eliminating oral interjections, nonstandard vocabulary, and significantly reducing sentence complexity. Table 1 compares the four prepared texts: F ME, JP ME, F SE, JP SE:

Table 1*Comparison of the four texts*

| | F ME | JP ME | F SE | JP SE |
|--|------|-------|-------|-------|
| Word count | 1122 | 1017 | 785 | 749 |
| Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease | 86 | 85.49 | 97.26 | 95.48 |
| High frequency vocabulary (%) | 85 | 81.8 | 91 | 89.3 |
| Medium frequency vocabulary (%) | 10 | 16.5 | 10.1 | 13.6 |
| Low frequency vocabulary (%) | 2 | 2.7 | 1.3 | 2.6 |
| Academic vocabulary (%) | .3 | .2 | .1 | .1 |
| Non-English, non-standard, or names (total instances) | 63 | 53 | 2 | 30 |
| Non-English, non-standard, or names (unique instances) | 24 | 20 | 1 | 3 |
| Oral language / interjection instances | 14 | 5 | 2 | 0 |

As the table indicates, while the F ME text was somewhat longer than JP ME, they were otherwise comparable in terms of reading ease and vocabulary level. Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease is mathematically calculated by using the average sentence length and average syllables per word. According to this formula, both ME texts are at 6th grade level, whereas the two SE texts are 5th grade level according to *Text Compare* (<http://www.textcompare.org>). The texts were then checked using the *Longman Vocabulary Checker* software (<http://www.longmandictionariesusa.com>), which can assess the percentage of text comprised of 9,000 commonly-used English words, broken into three tiers of high-, mid-, and low-frequency words. This tool was chosen as it is intended for English learners (Longman Dictionaries U.S.A.). The final three items refer to vernacular and oral language, elucidating the number of non-dictionary vocabulary words, non-English words, and names; as well as aspects of the text, particularly interjections, which give them a distinctly oral character. These items were eliminated or reduced as much as feasible for the SE versions. Note that the 30 instances of nonstandard English in the JP SE text are the result of the repetition of the two characters' names. When considering only unique nonstandard words, the number for that text drops to 3.

Procedure

The stages of the experiment were divided into a preinterview, three reading and writing tasks, primary

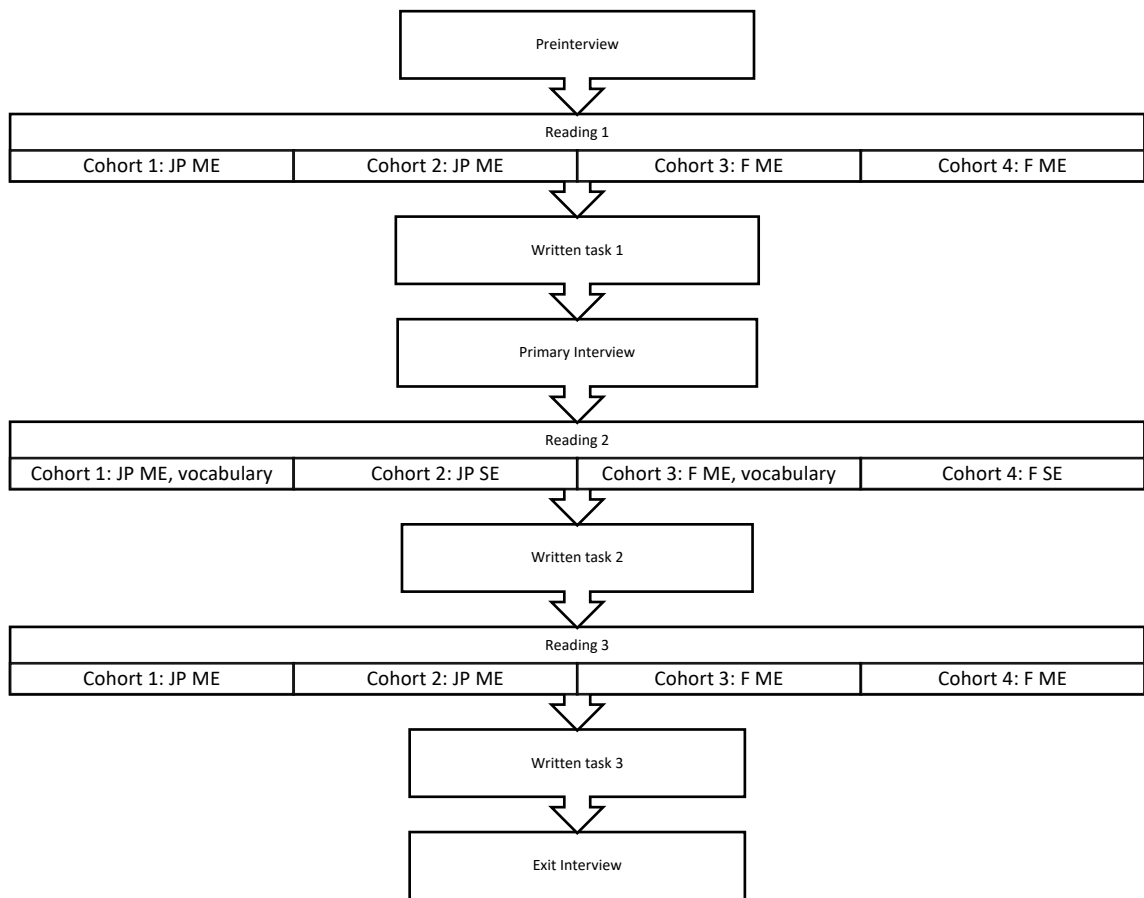
interview that came after the first reading and writing tasks, and an exit interview (see Figure 1).

The preinterview was conducted in person the week before the first reading session. Then, once a week, participants were given 30 minutes to read a short story, followed by 30 minutes to respond to a written survey. The primary and exit interviews were conducted over video chat. Both researchers participated in the semistructured interviews, one taking on the role of interviewer and the second writing notes. These roles were alternated throughout the process. The written surveys were completed using Microsoft forms. Both interviews and surveys were conducted in the participants' L1, Japanese.

Participants in the experiment gathered in a classroom over the course of three sessions. Each meeting consisted of 30 minutes of reading followed by 30 minutes to complete the written task. During the first stage, two cohorts received JP ME and two received F ME. Throughout the experiment, JP readers would only read JP texts and F readers would only read F. In the second stage, each cohort received either the ME or SE version of the story they had read during the previous week. The two ME texts were supplemented with Japanese translations for difficult vocabulary words in the margins of the page. In the third stage, all participants read the original ME text without any additional support. No dictionaries or other reference materials were permitted during the experiment.

Figure 1

Experimental procedure



Both the interviews and written surveys covered a range of topics. The primary purpose was to ascertain the participants' immediate reaction to the texts' difficulty and appeal. The surveys also dealt with general comprehension (including plot summary, identifying protagonist(s)), understanding of the story as a literary text (regarding the role of the narrator, moral of the story, humor), and their ability to recognize literary language. The interviews helped the researchers to interpret the quantitative responses. Pertinent to the present report were scores given to perceived difficulty of the texts (1-10 points) and enjoyability (1-5 points) after the first two readings. After the third reading, participants reported their overall change in enjoyment (positive, negative, unchanged) and the number of times they desired to read the text.

Results

Enjoyment

The quantitative data revealed an overall positive change in enjoyment in reading the texts as measured over three sessions of engaging with the same story. After each of

the first two sessions, participants were asked to rank their enjoyment (Jp. *omoshiroi, yomu igi ga aru*, En. interesting/funny, worthwhile to read) of the text on a scale of 1–5. Ratings for both the first readings (F and J) were mostly favorable (Figure 2), with only 12.5% of total respondents with a score of 2, versus 16.7% scoring 3, 37.5% scoring 4, and 33.3% scoring 5.

When comparing scores after the first and second readings (Table 2), participants assigned the Japanese texts saw an overall neutral (50%) to negative (41.7%) change in enjoyment scores, whereas readers of the foreign text saw neutral (50%) to positive (50%) changes. When divided between readers of simple English (SE) and readers of marked English (ME), the results were much more divided, with a balance of positive and negative changes for both.

As the scores in Figure 2 reveal, the narrow five-point scale resulted in a number of scores hitting a ceiling after a single reading. To address this shortcoming, participants were asked to reflect on their enjoyment compared with their previous readings qualitatively, describing a positive, negative, or neutral

change following the third reading session. The results can be seen in Table 3.

Figure 2

Enjoyment of first reading, by VELC Test score and country

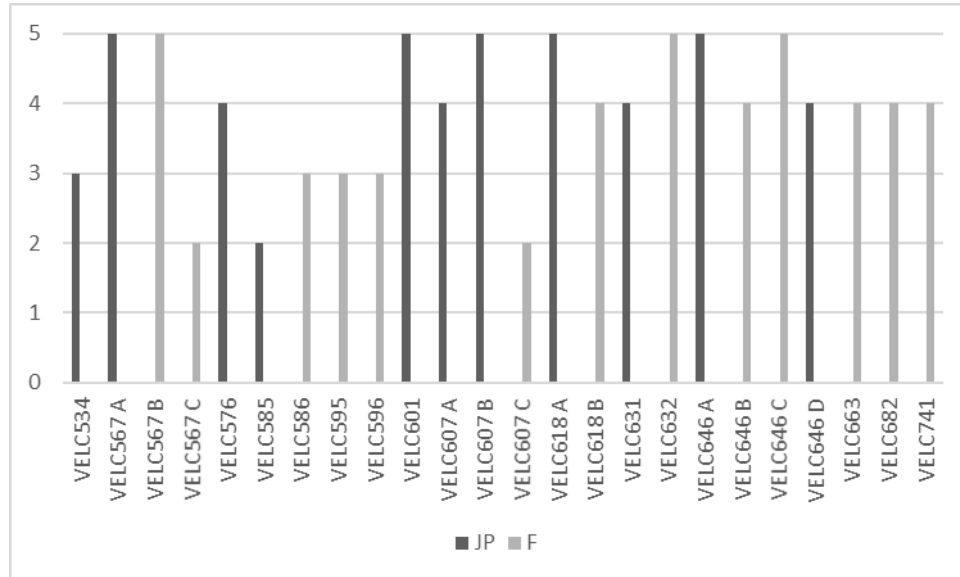


Table 2

Change in enjoyment between first and second readings

| Change | JP | % | F | % | SE | % | ME | % |
|-----------|----|------|----|----|----|------|----|------|
| Decrease | 5 | 41.7 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 25 | 2 | 16.7 |
| No change | 6 | 50 | 6 | 50 | 5 | 41.7 | 7 | 58.3 |
| Increase | 1 | 8.3 | 6 | 50 | 4 | 33.3 | 3 | 25 |
| Total | 12 | 50 | 12 | 50 | 12 | 50 | 12 | 50 |

Table 3

Change in enjoyment after third reading

| Change | JP | % | F | % | SE | % | ME | % |
|---------|----|------|----|------|----|----|----|------|
| Down | 1 | 8.3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 8.3 |
| Neutral | 9 | 75 | 4 | 33.3 | 6 | 50 | 7 | 58.3 |
| Up | 2 | 16.7 | 8 | 66.7 | 6 | 50 | 4 | 33.3 |
| Total | 12 | 50 | 12 | 50 | 12 | 50 | 12 | 50 |

At this stage, the Japanese-text readers’ response was 75% neutral, with only one respondent reporting a negative change. In contrast, the group of foreign text readers universally improved, now reporting 66.7% experiencing a positive change. A similar observation can be made for the SE versus ME groups. SE negative enjoyment responses fell to 0%, with positive rising to

50%, and ME negative down to 8.3% and positive up to 33.3%.

The interviews provide more insight into this nebulous concept of “enjoyment.” In the final interview, participants were directly asked for their evaluation of the three-stage reading process. Participants explicitly linked comprehension to enjoyment of the text, many of

them suggesting that their repeated readings were accompanied by higher levels of both comprehension and pleasure. How they articulated the nature of that comprehension differed. For example, participant L articulated how, over the course of the experiment, “I began to understand some of the contents [of the story]...umm, and the number of times I thought ‘ah, so that’s what that means’ increased. I felt that was really enjoyable.” In this case, the student seems to be motivated by the process of language acquisition and gaining understanding of the text. Participant R, by contrast, specifically treated the text as a literary object. They explained that “At the time of the first interview, too...really [...] I could not catch the meaning of the story [...] I could not enjoy it as a story,” but by the third iteration, “There was the enjoyment or something from being able to read the story.” Participant O offered a concurring opinion, explaining that only by the third iteration were they “Not simply reading the English, but I thought I was able to turn my attention to the moral and entertainment that was the original point of the text.” On the other hand, participant K reported no change in enjoyment, scoring it a maximum 5 points throughout the experiment because they had an intrinsic interest in fairy tales (*otogibanashi*) and children’s songs (*dōyō*), and so found it simply “interesting as a story” (*monogatari toshite omoshirokatta*). Participant M concurred that “I was not familiar with the story itself at first, so I enjoyed reading it, it was interesting” (*hanashi jitai wa, motomoto*

watashi ga shiranakute, omoshirokatta node yonde tanoshikatta), although, by the third reading when the story was no longer novel, had lost interest.

Perceived Difficulty

The previous section introduced results demonstrating that both cultural familiarity and literariness may be factors affecting enjoyment. Yet, another critical element affecting enjoyment scores herein may be the perceived difficulty of the texts. The term “perceived difficulty” is used in distinction from comprehension, describing mastery of the language itself. By contrast, perception addresses the learners’ subjective mental and emotional states as well as confidence. As demonstrated in Chart 1, the authors strove to balance the word count, Flesh-Kincaid Readability scores, and number of non-dictionary words, etc. However, the culturally unfamiliar materials were additionally hypothesized to correlate with higher perceived difficulty.

Regardless of the objective difficulty measures, student perceptions of textual difficulty were revealing. Participants rated the difficulty of the texts on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the most challenging, after the first and second readings:

Figure 3

Difficulty perception of text 1, by VELC Test score and country

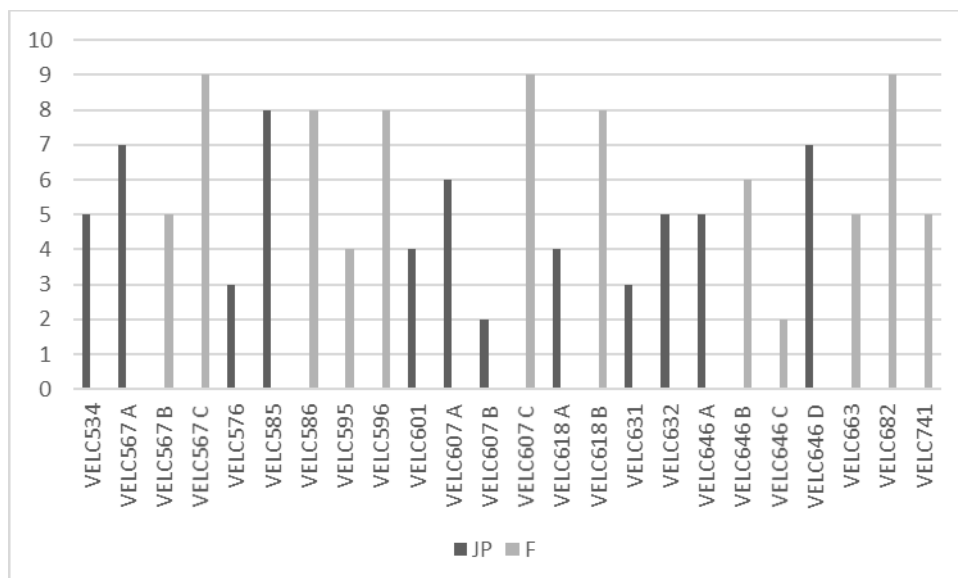
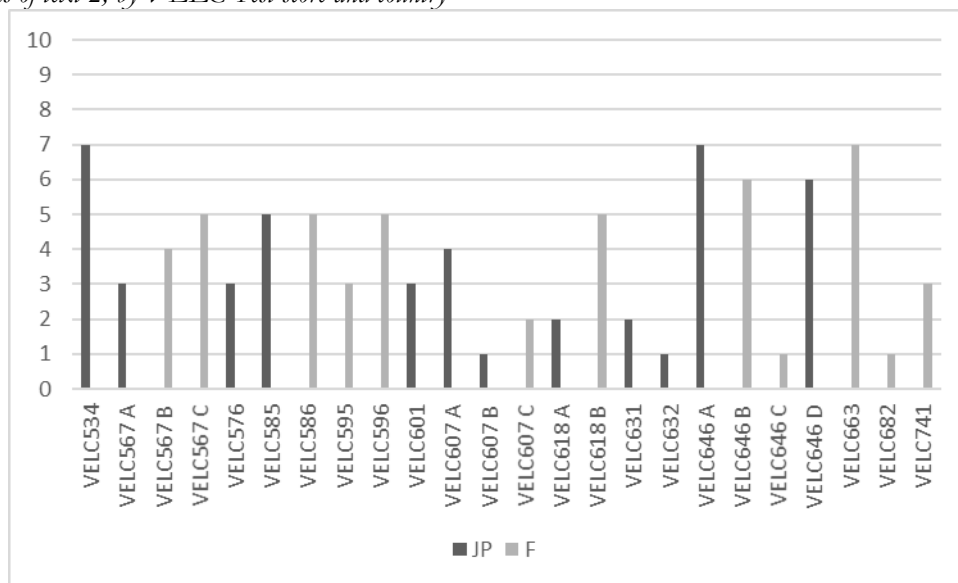


Figure 4*Difficulty perceptions of text 2, by VELC Test score and country*

The average difficulty score of the first F reading was 6.4 (ME cohort = 7, SE cohort = 5.9), while the JP text was scored on average a full 1.5 points lower, 4.9 (ME cohort = 4.7, SE cohort = 5.2). As these figures illustrate, there seems to be little if any correlation between participant VELC score and their perceived difficulty of text. In other words, proficiency did not correspond with the perception of difficulty. Conversely, in the case of ME texts read in the second session, there were 4 ratings of 6 or higher for participants with a VELC score of 618 or higher (the top 45%), versus only one such rating for the lower VELC-score half of the cohort.

Regarding the second reading, the F ME readers' average perceived difficulty changed by -2.3 points, whereas the JP ME changed by only -.5 points. This resulted in nearly equal average difficulty scores, of 4.7 and 4.2 respectively. There was also a less pronounced change from the initial ME texts to SE texts in the second round than expected: the average difficulty score for readers of F SE changed by -3, and the JP SE score changed by -1.6. Perhaps more surprisingly, the introduction of SE did not result in a substantial difference in difficulty perception for foreign text readers when compared to those who read F ME texts with vocabulary supplementation: -3 for the former and -2.3 for the latter. If we remove the outlier -8 change from one F SE reader, the average foreign SE difficulty perception plummets to -2.2—practically identical to the ME data.

To simplify the above, we can make three main observations about perceived difficulty following the second reading. First, that difficulty perception did not correlate with proficiency. Second, that through the second reading, there was a minimal change in average perceived difficulty of both the SE and ME versions of the culturally familiar text. Finally, that there was little difference in perceived difficulty reported by readers of F ME and F SE texts, although both scores, on average, fell significantly.

Desire for Repeated Readings

As participants engaged with the same text multiple times, they were asked about the number of times they wanted to have read the text after the final session. They gave a written numerical response in the third survey task as well as a more detailed explanation in the exit interview. Only 12.5% of participants preferred to have read the text a single time, 33.3% twice, and 54.2% three times.

More can be said regarding the combination of difficulty perception and the number of times participants desired to read the texts. Some simple observations can be made when specifically comparing the change in difficulty perception between the first and second readings to the number of times participants reported wanting to read the text.

Table 4*Times participants wanted to read text, by change in difficulty between readings 1 and 2*

| Change difficulty | +2 | 0 | -1 | -2 | -3 | -4 | -7 | -8 | Total |
|-------------------|----|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|-------|
| Read 1 time | | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | | | 3 |
| Read 2 times | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1 | | 1 | | | 8 |
| Read 3 times | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 13 |
| | | | | | | | | | N=24 |

First, three participants scored the difficulty of the second text higher than the first, including one JP ME, one F ME, and one JP SE. It is doubtful, should the readers compare the texts side-by-side, that any would find the second reading, either in SE or ME supplemented with vocabulary, more difficult than the first. This reinforces the fact that we are measuring *perception* of difficulty. In this case, the higher scores likely either resulted from imprecise recall or a recalibration of participants' difficulty perception.

The three participants who preferred to read the text only once saw a modicum of change in difficulty level, ranging from no change (0) to a slight decrease (-2). This is consistent with these participants' report of a neutral change in enjoyment at the end of the experiment. The eight students who preferred to read the text twice also tended to recognize less initial change in difficulty, with half of them reporting a slight decrease in difficulty (-1), one participant reporting no change, and one reporting an (anomalous) increase (+2). Of the 13 participants who wanted to read the text three times, 5 (38.5%) experienced either a moderate decrease in difficulty (-2 to -1) or a slight (anomalous) increase in difficulty (+2). On the other hand, six of the group (46.1%) reported substantial decreases in perceived difficulty (-3 to -4), and a further two participants reported extreme changes (-7 and -8).

While no cohorts started with SE or vocabulary supplements, participants were also asked in the final interview their opinion of a reading sequence beginning with a scaffolded form. The majority of participants supported the sequence they personally experienced, citing the importance of struggling before receiving comprehension aids. Echoing a common sentiment among the participants, Participant I stated that "struggling to read" (*ganbatte yomeru*) the first text was motivating as a test of their abilities. Likewise, participant J called the first reading "comprehension-focused reading" (*dokkai*), whereas by the second stage "I was able to focus on the contents" (*naiyō ni shūchū dekita*). A lone voice of dissent, participant V felt that the

experienced structure was like arduous "training" (*kaunren*) and would have preferred a simpler text first.

Discussion

This study provides some new and meaningful insights regarding the application of culturally familiar material and intralingual translation of literary texts in EFL. We find merit in the use of culturally familiar materials in the short term, but also that those benefits may depreciate through a second contact with the same text. In addition, the data suggest that modulating task difficulty in a mountain-and-valley pattern may increase learner enjoyment.

Enjoyment is a qualitative aspect of language learning which has been hypothesized to correlate strongly with learner motivation and achievement, making the following observations relevant to EFL more broadly (Liu, 2022). While the small numerical range given for reading enjoyment (1–5 points) may have limited the potential for more nuanced indications of change over time (one third of initial responses scored the maximum, leaving no room for subsequent increase), there are still some observable patterns. First, the foreign (F) text readers initially scored enjoyment lower, on average, than Japanese (JP). Then, when comparing changes in enjoyment (decrease, no change, increase) between first and second readings, Japanese text enjoyment fell whereas foreign text enjoyment rose, on the whole. Finally, taking a longitudinal view across the entire experiment, taken as a group, all cohorts saw an increase in reported enjoyment, with the biggest changes occurring in the groups reading the foreign and simple English (SE) texts. In other words, there seems to have been a higher initial enjoyment hurdle with the foreign text compared to the Japanese text; a phenomenon predictable based on the extant research on culturally familiar materials. However, repeated engagement with the same culturally familiar text seems to have dampened enjoyment until the third and final reading. This suggests the importance of taking a long view of

learner enjoyment in EFL when engaging with the same text or topic over time.

Similarly, while the initial difficulty perception of the Japanese text was lower, the second reading saw greater drop in both the foreign texts' difficulties than in either of the Japanese texts. Thus, the shock of unfamiliarity, which may increase perceived difficulty, was, in this instance, overcome through a second contact with the text. In addition, the near-identical perceived difficulty scores for the foreign simple English and foreign marked English with vocabulary supplements suggests that cultural familiarity is a greater determining factor in perceived difficulty than intralingual translation. Further research should be conducted to determine if culturally familiar materials for short-term study can reliably yield greater learner interest and enjoyment due to the lack of schema-building hurdle.

The interview questions relating to enjoyment suggested an additional element, beyond cultural familiarity and unfamiliarity: literariness. Some answers suggest that the use of folktales also had a significant impact on participants' interaction with and emotional investment in them. The extent of the motivational increase provided by literary materials requires further investigation, however.

Conclusion

As this was an exploratory experiment designed to probe multiple questions and identify areas for further investigation, it suffers from limitations in controlling for multiple variables and depth of analysis. In addition, while the participants were sorted based on their VELC Test scores for convenience, the VELC score is based on a combination of passive skills and does not exclusively test for reading comprehension and vocabulary level, and therefore may not be an appropriate aptitude test for creating cohorts for this type of experiment. In addition, while the researchers strove to create parity between the foreign and Japanese texts, a desire to respect the source material coupled with inherently non-quantifiable aspects of literary writing resulted in some discrepancies which may have affected participant responses.

Despite these limitations, this study offers several conclusions, each of which begs further investigation. We tentatively conclude, first, that the culturally familiar content scaffolded the reading experience, lowering the perceived difficulty. Based on the quantitative data, we speculate that the higher initial difficulty rating of the

foreign texts offered more room for scores to change, and also that reencountering the foreign text helped participants to develop the necessary schema to overcome the hurdle of culturally unfamiliar material. Either way, these results suggest that cultural familiarity correlates strongly with student perceptions of textual difficulty, and that the combination of difficulty and familiarity correlate with enjoyment. Finally, although the extent of this research is quite limited, these initial results indicate that a substantial decrease in perceived textual difficulty in the middle of a series of readings may be linked to an appreciation for more sustained engagement with the text.

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Interview

**Notes on Literary Education:
Teaching Language through Fiction in a New Textbook from the Asahi Press**

Michael Larson

Keio University

Published in January of this year, *Notes on Brotherhood: English Literature in the Classroom Vol. 1* immerses English language learners in engaging topics through original short fiction. The textbook's three chapters are based on three interlinked short stories, which tell a coming-of-age narrative about two brothers growing up in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States during the 1990s and early 2000s. These pieces were composed exclusively for this textbook by Michael Larson, an author based in Tokyo who teaches at Keio University.

Notes on Brotherhood was developed as a collaboration between the Asahi Press and the Kanto Branch of The English Literary Society of Japan (ELSJ) and was edited by Professors Soichiro Oku (Kanto Gakuin University), Kazuya Sato (Japan Women's University), Kyoko Kuze (Toyo University), Wataru Sasakawa (Aoyama Gakuin University), and Kohei Furuya (Aoyama Gakuin University).

The central story of each chapter is accompanied by an author's introduction and the annotated text provides context and brief cultural and linguistic explanations. The three chapters are subdivided into 12 units, which are short and digestible enough to be covered during a single class. The first story takes place when the two main characters are children, the second takes place while they are in high school, and the third takes place during their young adulthood. As the larger narrative advances, so do the complexity of the word choice, cultural references, and narrative structure of the individual stories, helping students to gradually grow their understanding of language and culture. In this way, *Notes on Brotherhood* is designed to help intermediate or advanced language learners push their abilities to new heights. Special attention is given to colloquial usages that appear throughout the text and which are typical of contemporary fiction and the way English is used by

native speakers; learning these types of expressions will be especially useful to students who plan to travel or study abroad. Toward this end, every unit comes with comprehension and usage questions as well as writing and discussion prompts. To make the textbook approachable, it also comes with a CD featuring readings of each story by the author himself, and the teacher's manual includes in-depth summaries of each story in Japanese.

What follows is a conversation between Michael Larson and Soichiro Oku about the development of this innovative, new textbook. Larson and Oku discuss the features and strengths of this approach to teaching English language and literature while also talking about the challenges this project presented.

ML: This is the first text published by the English Literature in the Classroom research group, which is part of the Kanto Branch of the ELSJ. Professor Oku, why did your research group want to publish a textbook?

SO: A few years ago, our research group put together a practical guidebook to show how professors in the Kanto Branch of the ELSJ teach literature in their own classes—like, “Hey this is what we're actually doing.” We hoped it would be a reference text and would show there are lots of approaches to English language education, including those utilizing fiction, poetry, and even films and online tools. But, when working with a particular literary text, I think an important aspect of any educator's methodology is just teaching it over and over. So, these approaches are very individualized.

For our next project, our research group decided to begin a series that anyone could use in the classroom. Board members Masahiko Abe (Tokyo University) and Noriyuki Harada (Keio University) came up with this

idea, and when I became president of the Kanto Branch of the ELSJ, we decided to continue this project.

Around that time, we heard that the Asahi Press was interested in making teaching materials using original literary works, and so we decided the executive council would act as editors and we'd put out the first textbook in a series called *English Literature in the Classroom*. It was perfect timing, and we were like, "Let's do it!"

Around that time, you gave a presentation at the ELSJ Kanto Branch's conference, and I heard about your background in creative writing from Professor Hiromi Ochi (Senshu University). This was why we reached out to you about the project, and then the Asahi Press officially asked you to write the text.

ML: What do you see as the difference between a theoretical approach and the approach in this textbook?

SO: Of course, with any text meant for use in a classroom, it's not always easy to distinguish theory and practice. Even very practical programs—like the British General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and the A-Levels—have a legacy of treating literary texts in a certain way and have a certain theoretical methodology behind them.

However, in Japan, when using literature in English education, the most important question is, "How are we using literary texts to teach language?" Our approach has to emphasize the practical aspects of language learning while also having a solid foundation in theory. You could say our approach is based on "theory plus practice."

ML: What do you think are the benefits of learning English through literature? Did you read a lot of English literature when you were learning English yourself? Do you have any favorite books?

SO: I'm a graduate of Keio University's English Literature Department, and actually, my main seminar focused on English linguistics. But all students in the department had to take classes in the history of English, ancient and medieval English, and phonetic linguistics. Even seminar students had to take medieval linguistics, and everyone had to read the original text of *Beowulf* and *The Canterbury Tales*. It was really an all-around education. So, even as a linguistics student, I had a background in literature. During my college days, it was beaten into me that there's no point in learning English if you can't read literary works.

After graduating, I worked as a high school teacher for 10 years. Still, reading literary works in English was very difficult for me, and, even more than just studying English, I thought of being able to read literature as the point I wanted to arrive at. It's regrettable that after 6 or more years studying English, many students still can't speak English or even read a single page of a Nobel Prize-winning text, like a book by Kazuo Ishiguro. There needs to be a balance in developing all those skills. In English education in Japan these days, listening and speaking are emphasized, while reading is somewhat neglected. But of course, by learning English through literature you also absorb the social context, so you learn about people's way of thinking and living. This is what makes reading such an essential skill—what distinguishes it from speaking or listening.

To balance things out, I recommend exposing students to a variety of genres in English, with literary works—which are often the most difficult—as the ultimate goal. Perhaps the toughest thing for students is when they read the first sentence and can't really grasp the background. I think literature makes for great teaching materials because it forces students to try to understand how the story will develop from a certain situation or setting. It makes them use their imagination, inspiring creativity. In the end, I think it's good to see reading and enjoying works of literature as a kind of ultimate goal.

In my own classes, I've used works by Kazuo Ishiguro and, recently, *All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr. These days, when I go overseas for research, I go to bookstores and pick a few titles from the piles of popular paperbacks, and I bring them back to Japan to give to my students to enjoy.

ML: Are there any parts of *Notes on Brotherhood* that you particularly enjoyed? Which part do you think will interest students the most?

SO: In the first story, I really enjoyed the sense of youth that emerges from the initial scene at the baseball game. Although then the problems within the family gradually become clear before the dramatic final scene at the military training ground. But by starting with the baseball scene, the narrative seems very bright and playful and gradually becomes more serious.

In the second piece, I thought the stage play and the preparations the characters are making for the drama were rendered very vividly, and I also thought the

slightly dark background of the teacher who is directing the play was very well captured.

By the third story, when the two main characters visit their stepbrother at his ship, we see how the parents have divorced and remarried, and new siblings have been added to the family. After being apart for several years, the two brothers have a kind of reunion, and we get the sense that while they've gone their separate ways and even though they get in something of a fight, in the end, they still share this relationship. In the final scene, you can see the complexity of their brotherhood. I guess I could say it really helped me visualize it. The scene of the docks near the ocean at night was very good.

ML: Is there a plan for the future of the "English Literature in the Classroom" series?

SO: Yes, this textbook is the first volume in the series, and I think the Asahi Press may be interested in making a second and even a third volume. This time, the executive council of the Kanto Branch of the ELSJ acted as editors. For future volumes, the makeup of the council will likely change, and we might aim for a schedule of something like one volume every two years, although that's not set in stone yet. In the future, it might be interesting to have works depicting various other cultures, such as Australia or England, although it's not necessarily easy to find works that are at the right level for Japanese students.

In fact, one thing I wanted to ask you was, what was the most difficult about writing these stories?

ML: I'm always writing, although usually the fictions I create come from my personal interests and motivations. When the Asahi Press approached me about this project, I wanted to write something that would live up to my standards, though it also needed to appeal to Japanese students who are in early adulthood. So, I was conscious of the need to write something that would land with a wide audience, while also being particular, grounded in detail, and based in a specific reality.

It took me a long time to decide exactly what to write. At one point, I was considering a more young-adult style and narrative mode. Although I have never written young adult fiction, and this was part of why I eventually turned away from that approach.

In the end, I decided to try a more personal story, which would allow me to craft the pieces without doing too much research—and that was important because of the time constraints we were operating under. Thus, I

wound up drawing on my experience growing up in the United States during the end of the last century and the beginning of this one, and I thought I could use that to reflect on American culture and society. At the same time, by this point, the 1990s and early 2000s are far enough in the past so as to feel a bit foreign or unknown, and therefore perhaps interesting to students. I thought this would be a way to show a little bit of what American society was like before the internet was everywhere and everyone had a smartphone, and I also wanted to depict what it was like in the aftermath of the Cold War and then later, during the Iraq War. This seemed like an appealing setting with which to depict the family saga and the coming-of-age story I was interested in telling.

SO: Yes, I was interested by the period setting and background. I haven't really read much about the interaction of average Americans with the military, and so that part seemed very fresh, kind of a new flavor. I also wasn't familiar with the region in Washington State you describe but looking at the photos you provided for the textbook I feel like I could easily imagine it. All the cultural and social background you managed to include was intriguing, and during the process of looking up those references and trying to explain them for Japanese students, I got interested myself. But I guess that was your intention, right?

ML: Well, I included those cultural and social details to make the stories feel real. But I also hope it has the effect of making the text appealing to teachers because it gives them plenty of avenues to pursue the things they're interested in talking about or discussing with their students.

In the text, there are a lot of references to works, such as the play in the second story and the films and novels that are mentioned. Also, this is a period that has been depicted in film and on the page. One example that comes to mind is the collection of short stories, *Redeployment* by Phil Klay, which has even been translated into Japanese. I'm hopeful that teachers who use this text will be inspired to use these other works as jumping-off points. A chance to show a film in class or look at the play or talk about some of the other authors that are mentioned, such as Zadie Smith or Denis Johnson, who wrote *Jesus' Son*.

SO: To me, the stories seemed very polished, like they could be translated and published as literature on their own. But, of course, you were writing with certain

restraints. Were there any other issues you had to work around when writing?

ML: As I said, I knew the stories needed to land with a wide audience. However, I had planned on basing these linked stories on my personal experience or growing up with a sibling. Specifically, I have a brother, so I knew it was going to be a story about two brothers. It would be very easy for a narrative like this to become very “boy-centric,” and I knew half the students who would potentially be assigned this textbook would be female. This is why, in the second story, the focal character becomes the teacher, who is a kind of mentor to the younger brother and has only recently moved to the area with her son.

Moreover, in the third story, which is set in Seattle, I think the reader has a chance to see some of the diversity of American society. We see people of different races, social classes, and professions. There are immigrants, tourists, and people from different parts of the country. Of course, ultimately the story is focused on the two brothers and the complexities of their relationship.

SO: The other editors and I are really pleased with how the project worked out, and I hope many teachers will find the textbook to be beneficial in their own classrooms.

Author Biographies

Michael Larson completed his MFA at the Ohio State University and earned a PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. His stories and essays have appeared in journals including *Colorado Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, and *Witness*, and in 2020 he published his first book, *When the Waves Came* (Chin Music Press), a nonfiction account of the Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami. <mwlarson@keio.jp>

Soichiro Oku completed his BA at Keio University and earned a PhD from the University of Tokyo. He specializes in corpus linguistics and stylistics, with a particular interest in English Education with ICT. His monograph, “A Stylistic Approach to Digital Texts: Teaching Literary Texts through New Media” appeared in *Literature and Language Learning in the EFL Classroom* (Palgrave, 2015) explored the power of literature to affect learners.

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Interview

An interview with Darryl Whetter, LiLT SIG's featured speaker at JALT 2022, on creative nonfiction and creative writing for language learning

Andy Decker

Kansai University

At JALT 2022 in Fukuoka, LiLT SIG forum chair Andy Decker took the opportunity to sit down with LiLT SIG's featured speaker Darryl Whetter between his workshops on teaching creative writing in Asia and hermit crab essays, and chat some more about his thoughts on creative nonfiction, the future of creative writing for language learning and his recent edited books, *Teaching Creative Writing in Asia* and *Best Asian Short Stories 2022*.

Andy Decker: Tell us a little about how you got into creative writing and language teaching?

Darryl Whetter: So, I went off to university and at first I thought I would major in philosophy because I went to university for big ideas. But then I realized that when I read a page of philosophy, it's like I turn the page and the letters crumbled and I didn't remember a thing, whereas when I read literature, that's what I remembered. So I studied literature with creative writing courses and then I did my master's degree, [which] was actually a hybrid degree in English and creative writing. I did some graduate level literature seminars and even published some of my papers there as articles of peer reviewed scholarly literary criticism.

[I] also was doing graduate creative writing workshops in poetry and fiction and writing a novel, a thesis novel...my PhD was actually in literature, but I just kept writing and writing and writing. My teaching career has spanned teaching literature classes, teaching creative classes, and then for several years I have actually taught at a tiny Francophone university, Université Sainte-Anne, in Nova Scotia Canada, where I teach in English. The students, the majority of the courses they are taking are taught in French, so that's where I am teaching bilingual students from the other side. I have colleagues who are teaching them how to speak English and write English, and I am teaching them how to

analyze English literature and how to write English literature. I also had a four-year sojourn in Singapore where I directed the first master's degree in creative writing there.

I've always been teaching literature, writing literature, and now I have experience with multi-language learners, someone, for example, whose English might be a second language. I've had that experience in both Canada and in Asia. That's been fantastic.

AD: I think that a lot of our members or people who come to these events might relate to that. So you started with creative writing, with literature and then came into language teaching later. These students sound like advanced students?

DW: Well, I mean, in Singapore I was teaching master's students and elsewhere in Canada I've taught master's students but in Canada where I'm currently teaching at Université Sainte-Anne I am teaching undergraduates and so, you know, it's the whole range. So [here is] something that I think is more true in the creative writing university course than, say, a university literature course. Whenever I teach a creative writing course, and this is true when I teach for non-credit courses for community learners as well, I ask the room how many people have gone to at least one yoga class. People have, then I say ok, what is the move you did in your first yoga class named after a dog, oh, downward-facing dog. And I say right, so, if you do yoga for four months or forty years you're going to do downward-facing dog every class and it's going to seem like it's the same move for a long time and then you'll have this epiphany of understanding, and it suddenly becomes a kind of new move. It's a staircase of knowledge. Creative writing is like that. I know this seems naive, but it is a practice and so the fundamentals you learn in your first class, you can revisit those fundamentals twenty years later.

AD: That's a really practical way to look at creative writing, right? Would you say there was an adjustment when you moved from the graduate level to the undergraduate level?

DW: Yes, undeniably. Although, [in] my Rutledge book, *Teaching Creative Writing in Asia*, one thing that a lot of us talked about in there is when I was teaching master's students I wasn't teaching generally people who had a BA where they did a lot of creative writing and now they were doing a master's degree. Generally, I was teaching people in their thirties who, when I would do their intake interviews so many students told me, "I was a good Asian child, I got a degree that would get me a job, that would get me a decent income, I've done all that, I'm bored out of my mind, now I want to do something creative." And so, I was generally teaching people at the master's level who might not have the same technical skills writing fiction at the beginning of their degrees as a master's student in North America would. You know, if you're doing a master's in creative writing in North America you out-competed other skilled applicants who are skilled at writing fiction to get in. Of course, we had limited enrollment, I did turn people away, but I was generally taking people who knew what they wanted to say, and I just brought their abilities to say it up to speed.

AD: I think that makes sense. You've written a lot; the things that you've published, do you use those in your classes? What's your philosophy about that?

DW: Yeah, well, I do generally think that's just an irresistible resource because well, actually I'll show students both published and unpublished work, right? Because on the one hand with the published work, you do want to show them that, the ideal of you know, look, I changed this so many times and worked on this for so long and I cut 10, I cut 20,000 words from my last novel between contract and publication. That's the novel *Our Sands* from Penguin in 2020, so you know, on the one hand you do want to show them the clichéd well-wrought urn, the polished finished thing, and then you can talk a lot about how you got there, plot lines that you collapsed, things that you augmented, etcetera, and I do think that's wonderful. But on the other hand, particularly when I teach creative nonfiction, I do also sometimes show them drafts or even, and I still do a lot of teaching on Zoom, I will Zoom them into my folder for one essay. Now I guess one distinction is I'm writing a memoir, which is of course a book of nonfiction, but

I'm also writing a series of stand-alone, creative nonfiction essays and while I do still occasionally write and publish short stories, like I had a short story in *Best Asian Short Stories 2020* and now I'm the editor for *Best Asian Short Stories 2022*, so I still occasionally publish short stories, but when I write fiction, I tend to be writing novels. Whereas when I write nonfiction, I'm writing both the stand-alone essay and the memoir.

This is a long-winded way to get back to your question so I find that the unpublished essays are great to show because I can show students like, look, let's go inside the folder I have for a single essay: A, it's not a file it's a folder...like I'm working on an essay right now the working title is called "Mr Freeze". Here you see a file called "Mr Freeze ideas", here's "Mr Freeze cutting room", because sometimes I cut something and I put it in a separate file, like I might use it again, but I never, never, ever, ever use it again. But then I'll show them like zero draft, first draft, second draft, and then I get up to, like, the seventh draft or I have a draft to print and read aloud, I show them all that. And then, also I never as a creative nonfiction prof, I never require people to write personally, but so many of us do, and so also I do think there's an important reciprocity of trust and confidence when they're telling me about heartbreak and family illness, I do feel it's kind of fair that I show them some of my own experiences. Or also just practically, like you know, and invariably with creative nonfiction, one practical issue that comes up is like, ok, right, what do I do about the fact that this is nonfiction and I'm really talking about my friend Rebecca, what do I do about that, and I say well, yeah, let's take a look at an example of mine, and you see right here in the essay, I don't have a footnote, right in the essay I say "a friend I'll call Jeremy," and that's the flag Jeremy is not his real name. You don't need a disclaimer. So, little examples like that or as I say, to show them you know, personal issues.

So, I do show students published and unpublished writing just because I think that's a great behind the scenes opportunity. They are paying tuition; what can you learn from me that you can't learn from a YouTube video, that you can't learn from a textbook, actually seeing how I've changed drafts is to me a really graphic lesson.

AD: I think that's something we could be doing more. The work that your students produce, what happens to that? Do you ever share that with other students? If they're writing personally, how does that work?

DW: Well, you've been through creative writing workshops yourself, and that's one of the ways in which the writing workshop is a revolutionary educational space in that with the literature classroom, the essay, the student writes the essay, the prof marks the essay, [and] hands it back to the student, it's this vertical silo. Whereas the workshop, of course, we're often seeing the writing, so by nature we're sharing, students are sharing each others' work. Anne Pratchett has a beautiful essay called "The Getaway Car" and she talks about how that's what you learn in workshop: not just having your story critiqued, it's watching how people critique your story, it's critiquing other people's stories. And so yes, we share writing, I organize the sharing of peer writing among students.

Although actually one thing I do with non-credit courses is I do encourage students to use a pseudonym if they want, right? And particularly if we're using something like Google Classroom. I keep a little Rosetta Stone file, so I know the person with the username strawberry bean is actually Sushmita, but to the peers I just refer to strawberry bean, strawberry bean, strawberry bean, and that's great again if someone is very shy about personal work.

But then also I do think it's important to share exemplary peer work because it's one thing to show them work by Ian McEwan and Zadie Smith right, top of the game, but to know that someone else in this classroom took the same instruction and delivered this is fantastic. And then, in a more practical sense of course, ideally, you do want to ultimately try to usher your students towards publication.

AD: This is interesting, the advantages of being anonymous but the advantages of seeing progress, right? Oh, it's strawberry bean, it's classic strawberry bean. Thinking of workshoping, you know, feedback, revision, assessment, stuff that we get questions about a lot, what's important?

DW: To me, the short story involves the magic question, who wants what. And we ask who wants what of any narrative, whether it's a short story, a novel, a stage play, a graphic novel, a movie, who wants what and then what's the trouble getting that desire. In nonfiction, I love nonfiction because it can be a narrative medium that tells a story, a who-wants-what story, or it can be like poetry, more meditative and contemplative, or it can be both.

With creative nonfiction, we have to have voice. We have to know on each page, we have to feel like we're with someone on each page. So voice is crucial to creative nonfiction. I do, if you are going to tell a story, I do want a who-wants-what but I, I think creative nonfiction in the English language is more amenable to place with form. So actually, my workshop tomorrow here at the JALT 2022 conference is on playing with form in creative nonfiction, which, when you do it with fiction you're taking a risk, oh, ok, you're going in the "don't publish" pile, whereas it's much more acceptable in creative nonfiction.

And just as a practical tip, and this one would be for language learners as well, I always advise students to read their work aloud. And to sound like a dinosaur, I say from a paper draft, and some of my students are like what is this paper nonsense you're talking about. But you know we've been staring at a screen and so a) you need to look at something different and b) you need to hear your work and that's where you hear repetition, that's where you hear we've repeated words, ideas, you hear what phrases don't work, that's where you spot all the typos, if you can't get through a sentence without taking a breath it's too long, that's where you realize that your dialogue sounds like, sounds really clunky.

AD: I can't wait any longer. Let's talk about creative nonfiction.

DW: Yes, gladly.

AD: How would you define creative nonfiction?

DW: In effect I can't not use the forward definition of the journal *Creative Nonfiction*, "True stories, well told." It's like, grand slam definition. "True stories, well told." Although crucially, we do need to distinguish that creative nonfiction, the bulk of it that I see as a prof and I think the bulk that we read, is personal creative nonfiction written in the first person, here is my story. But that's never to discount the value of third-person creative nonfiction.

AD: You've described creative nonfiction as "the most accessible creative writing genre for new writers" and "the genre most easily absorbed into the language learning classroom." Pulling this back to language learning, why does it work well for language learning?

DW: Right well, well, a couple reasons. One it's we're not just talking about language learning, but we are

talking about language learning in Asia. Now generalizing about any continent is ridiculously naïve, and generalizing about the largest continent is *ridiculously* naïve, but, you know, in in the Routledge book, *Teaching Creative Writing in Asia*, so many different profs, whether they're talking about teaching in Taiwan or in China or in Singapore [say] the same thing that in so much of education, like the point Carl Jung makes about India, so much of education in Asia involves memorizing facts. Right? So for students who get, Asian students who get a chance to try creative writing, in part, there's this great joy like oh, ok, it's not about memorizing facts but where do you start? It tends to be, some people find it easier to tell a story from their past than to invent a story about imaginary characters. So actually, in that great compliment that is envy, the one thing that I wish I'd done myself that is in *Teaching Creative Writing in Asia*, is Dr. Barrie Sherwood, who teaches writing at Nanyang Technological University, talking about sharing your students' writing, he contrasts opening lines from student fiction and opening lines from student nonfiction and the nonfiction just explodes.

But then, interestingly, this is also not just the language learner, but the language learner in Asia, and the 21st century language learner, so social media is a kind of grandparent in the room when you're talking about creative writing, right? So, students are narrating their lives, they are trying to turn their lives into a kind of art, you know, that quest for likes, the fact that getting shared is the compliment for how you might have phrased something...you know they're already doing creative writing and so now we need to move it from the short, short, short text to the longer, more polished text. But narrating your life is happening, you know, visually and verbally, and so now we just need to introduce, oh well, don't worry, people have been doing it forever and here's this wonderful thing called creative nonfiction.

Right now, so often, you know I don't like to generalize, but you'll get student fiction that is eighty-two percent devoted to describing some world and, you know, eighteen percent some story. Right? And so, whereas with nonfiction maybe it's easier for people to concentrate on what was dramatic, you know, if they knew when their heart was racing maybe they can render that to the reader.

AD: I'm sure you've tried lots of things with your students, right, some hits, some misses. Tell me about something that didn't work, that you wouldn't do again.

Something you asked them to write? Something you asked them to read?

DW: Ok, so actually the assignment I'm going to do a workshop on here, the genre, the sub-genre of creative nonfiction [is] known as a hermit crab essay, where someone needs to transpose an essay, whether it's third person or worldly creative nonfiction or first-person personal nonfiction, they need to put it into some other textual form. So, the student Anisha Ralhan, who is in *Best Asian Short Stories 2022*, her knockout version of that assignment was to write, and if you're a creative nonfiction prof, the writing you see the most is my mental illness, you're, you're just seeing that around the world, well, so the great creative writing challenge of "make it new," how do you write about your mental illness in a novel way, Anisha took the hermit crab assignment and wrote about her anxiety in the form of a resumé. It's literally, you know, like with an email address, it's skills, it's experiences, it's goals, and that was such a novel way of describing it: very powerful personal issues which of course requires bravery and yet she put it into that novel form and that was great. So, hermit crab essays: when I teach people in a first creative nonfiction class, that's the assignment that people either love or hate. And, hate or just don't get.

AD: When you look at who comes to these events, people that come to these hermit crabs and dancing skeletons because they look interesting, like, I'm interested in creative writing, I don't teach creative writing. How do we keep them? How do we not scare them away? For, like, teaching contexts that are outside of creative writing.

DW: Yeah, well, you do hope, you know, again you do hope, so I'm not a chef and I've never been to cooking school, right? But, you know, the idea is like there are these sort of stations of the cross at cooking school you know, so what does pastry have to do with BBQ, grilling meat? In ways those are very far apart, but you're always in this kind of bilingual dialogue between like, ok, I'm literally working on pastry but I'm going to transpose this idea about like, for example, having the butter at the right temperature before I begin, I am going to use that same principle when it gets to BBQ sauce. Or, for the language learner, also again you know when you know you need to emphasize the context and ethos in which you're speaking, right? So when does one need to be very formal, as in a job application, and when is that formality

a hindrance? You know if you're sitting across the table from someone and you need to try to get them to open up emotionally, you don't want to sound like a job interview or a job application letter. So you know, some of those constant communication principles hopefully will get, in a more exaggerated form, in a workshop on say, the hermit crab essay.

AD: Finally, for those of us who are researching this stuff—creative writing, literature and language teaching, your book—*Teaching Creative Writing in Asia*, it's got some good news for us.

DW: Well, one of the big points I make is that a) I think creative educations in Asia are on the rise, and b) creative writing is a popular and accessible way for creative educations to be delivered in Asia, and then c) literally the chapter that can be written in Asia about creative writing pedagogy that the big Anglo-American establishment can learn from, this is the laboratory where we talk about the English-second-language learner writing creative writing because, so with some of the post-colonial examples, India has a 200-year history of creative writing in English, which is literally back then the language of the conqueror, right, so what's it like when someone either self translates, they are a creative writer in their mother tongue, and they perfect their English and creative writing as a part of their perfection of their language, and they start writing in English, or, as I think is going to be the case, someone who has not perhaps been a creative writer in their mother tongue in Asia is going to be, is, creative writing. So there is going to be an interesting sort of parenting or marriage where English is their language of creative writing, you know? I think again, when we have so many Asian education systems that are about memorization, I think there is a kind of breaking loose that is available in English or, just as we all know, you know, languages do hardwire certain thoughts and emotions so... you are mostly the same person in your other language but you get to be a little different, right?

Crucially, Asian creative writing is in the vanguard, because it will be someone for whom English is a second or third language and they want to do creative writing in English and, again, then “boom”, they can lock in. There are enormous courses, national organizations, conferences, so a lot of our students would go to the Australasian Association of Writing Programs and that's to Australia's credit, when they were founding their “ok, there are a lot of us let's do our version of America's

AWP,” they called themselves the Australasian Association of Writers and Writing Programs and that's when there weren't many creative writing programs in the rest of Asia. So yeah, that's the big open, and actually Australia is starting to have satellite campuses in Asia. The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology has one in Vietnam, so, yeah, the fact that someone is going to start writing, start doing creative writing, as part of perfecting their English as a second language education, that's a really exciting intersection.

Author Biography

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Interview

Interview with Professor Paul Sevigny

Tara McIlroy

Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University Center for Language Education

About Paul

I am interested in pedagogical and cultural stylistics, which employ stylistic analysis as a tool for understanding literature, culture, and learning language at the same time. I have been focused on designing literary discussion systems, training peer literacy leaders, and coaching creative writers, especially of language learner literature. More recently, I have been developing novel approaches to grading literature and have written my first graded reader.

Interview by Tara McIlroy

Paul and I met virtually when we were both PhD students at the University of Birmingham. Paul seems to be able to connect different strands of his areas of expertise through his interests in language learning, discussion circles, and narrative. Paul is passionate about exploring new approaches to sharing stories and assisting students, especially when it comes to working with stories in multiple languages. We have met again at JALT on multiple occasions since our first encounter, the most recent being in 2022 when Paul gave a presentation on bilingual short stories alongside a Japanese colleague. His current research project, a KAKEN research initiative entitled *Developing Bilingual Short Stories and Community Literacy Activists* looks at innovations in writing and working with multilingual short stories. We appreciate Paul agreeing to participate in an interview for the LiLT journal.

Tara McIlroy: First off, could you tell us a bit about your background in literature and language teaching?

Paul Sevigny: I came to Japan as an Assistant Language Teacher in 1989. While working as an ALT, I confirmed my interest in becoming a teacher, and entered the University of Hawai'i Second Language Studies MA program, where I worked with Mike Long (known for task-based language teaching) as my advisor. Deep

experiences in both art and science have been important in shaping my views toward language teaching and research.

I started teaching with literature as a teacher in an American high school. My role was to make a literature circle system called 'The Harkness Method' accessible to ESL students (Sevigny, 2012). These students, in their first year of high school, would have to talk about and write essays based on books such as *The House on Mango Street*, *The Kite Runner*, *The Odyssey*, and modern muckrakers like *Fast Food Nation*. I would sometimes put on a wig and impersonate the authors, so my students could interview 'the author' about what they were trying to get across in their books.

At that time, I also directed short-term programs and would write short stories for specific sets of visiting students and then have a high school student write the screenplay version. Thus, with aspiring American high school cinematographers supporting the show, the visiting language students would star as actors in their first English movie. My favorite was called 'The iDream Movie' (Sevigny & Yamamoto, 2006). I have enjoyed literary writing, drama, and the discussion of literature with L2 learners for many years now.

After that, I came back to Japan and worked to install an extensive reading (ER) program at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University and have supported ER ever since. I also have been interested in employing literary texts as a basis for discussion and completed a PhD in English Language and Literature (Sevigny, 2019) at the University of Birmingham, with Michael Toolan as my advisor. Specifically, I researched role-based literature circle discourse. During my dissertation studies, I also developed a course for teaching creative writing of short stories as a way for students to explore the stages of culture shock (Sevigny, 2017). My main interest has been researching how literature circles work and how to make the methodology more accessible to teachers and students around the world. Part of my research has been to investigate changes in self-efficacy for literary

discussion over the course of a semester, and I was glad to find large effect sizes for increases in self-efficacy for literary discussion as part of my dissertation research (Sevigny, 2022). Having an interdisciplinary mindset, I believe that when students and teachers put their all into engrossing processes such as discussion and art making, the learning can become indelible.

TM: Delving a bit deeper into research, please explain a bit more about your research interests and how they have developed to your current way of thinking.

PS: Like many applied linguists, I started into the language teaching field being deeply impressed by Krashen's input hypothesis, Long's interaction hypothesis, and Swain's output hypothesis. My early training in the task-based approach has been complemented with text-based and skill-based approaches to organizing curricula over the years, as there are times when each of these three approaches are more useful than the others. I tend to focus on building linguistic and cultural awareness through comprehensible, literary and informational texts, in student-centered settings where students co-construct meaning. Central to my approach are Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and Pedagogical and Cultural Stylistics (Carter, 2010; Zyngier, 2001; Zyngier & Watson, 2022).

As for literature circles, I was hopeful I could create a simple, non-role-based alternative to Daniels (2002) and Furr's (2004) systems, following the trend in L1 settings where role-based systems have been let go. I was surprised to find there are almost no data-driven studies of L2 literature circles in EFL or ESL contexts that definitively show the way for language teachers in this area, so I settled on studying the discourse of role-based literature circles for my dissertation work. Role-based literature circles provide several affordances for research as the various roles (Discussion Leader, Summarizer, Word Master, Connector, Passage Person, etc.) differentiate responsibilities and allow for studying the connections between talk about texts and various levels of interpretation (Sevigny, 2022). My research definitely confirmed the value of these role-based literature circles especially for CEFR B1 students. Currently, I have been developing a stake-holder approach to role-based literature circles, which will offer an important alternative for CEFR B1+ to CEFR B2 students especially.

TM: What (or who) are your influences?

PS: As a language teacher, I worked with Mike Long, Richard Day, Dick Schmidt, and JD Brown, mainly at the University of Hawai'i in the 1990s. UH was definitely at the forefront of the language teaching field at that time. My first research was on sources and methods in second language needs analysis with Mike Long. Richard Day's work with Extensive Reading has had an equally strong impact on my approach to teaching. Related to ER, I embrace Widdowson's (1998) approach to authenticity, that is, a text must be appropriate for the learners who are reading it, and thus the teacher's job is to grade language to create an effective learning context and experience for L2 students.

As an example, let's take Hemingway's "Hills like White Elephants" (1927). Anyone who has read this story with language students knows the lexis is not especially difficult, yet interpreting the story requires layers of external textual referencing – to the history of Spain, abortion, the term 'white elephant' and so on. While completing my PhD at the University of Birmingham, Michael Toolan, my advisor, challenged me to write a graded reader version of this story. This exercise turned into my first graded reader, *Kittens Like Steam Clouds* (Inkblots, 2023). By creating a parody of the story, contextualized to Japan and set in a specific site in Beppu, Oita, I needed to research a number of works by Hemingway and other authors like Soseki, and even some obscure ones like Brother Jo who wrote poetry in Hawaiian Creole English. The interesting part to me is that adding context meant elaboration, not condensing or redacting, and it also meant exploring responses to literature like parody, satire, and appropriation, rather than purely retelling in a summarized form.

TM: Particular to reading, what is your current project and how are you conducting the research?

PS: Over the past few years, I have been working on a Grant-in-Aid project called 'Developing bilingual short stories and Community Literacy Activists'. I hired multilingual undergraduate students to rewrite and translate stories that started as university stage plays that featured the dances, culture, martial arts, and fashions from the countries represented at our school. After I started the project, however, the pandemic hit, these performances were canceled for two years. So, after securing our first three stories, we had to reverse the process for the last three stories. That is, we had student

authors who were familiar with the cultural stage plays write original short stories that could someday be appropriated into new stage play scripts – in the reverse process. This became sort of a happy accident, because while not the intended process, it empowered students from countries less well represented on our campus to contribute to the anthology, including students from Japan.

So, we now have six stories on our website (StudioCLA.org), each available in multiple stages (levels). The research has been aimed toward developing a community of practice around bilingual literacy for students at our dual language university. One of the main problems in this area is the dearth of materials available for researching bilingual literary discussion, so our website is a resource for those developing and/or researching second language literature circles in English or Japanese. In this regard, we are really just getting started.

TM: Now to the most creative part of your work recently, writing. Tell us how your current project brings together all the threads of language learning, literature, and creative work.

PS: Okay, on a larger scale, I have adapted the concept of Citizen Science (Gura, 2013) from hard sciences to the concept of Community Literacy Activism (Sevigny, Manabe, H. Shankar, & Lim, 2021) – to validate both research and development in the area of (multilingual) literacy development. While Community Literacy Activism is a theory, the first application of the theory has been to develop a process for students to author graded readers that celebrate the many cultures present on our campus. Additionally, as student authors represent their own cultures, they also tend to weave into their stories the suffering of their main characters, usually due to maladies unique to each of these cultures. I find there is an authenticity that comes from these students in their hope for the future of their countries in spite of these challenges.

The first six of these stories are part of an anthology called *YAMS – Young Adult Multicultural Stories* (Sevigny & Manabe, 2023). The stories have been produced in both English and Japanese. Most of the original drafts of the stories were 9,000 words. Then I asked the authors to rewrite the story to 4,000 words. The creative work here can best be described as creative destruction. The authors feel that I am asking them to destroy their own work, but that is the first lesson of

human creativity. Creating something new means letting go of the old. At this point, I train the students to use tools to consider the frequency of words and phrases in English to write the new version for an intermediate level audience. The tools for doing this in English are ER Central's Online Grade Text Editor, and Lextutor, mainly. At the same time, my collaborating researcher, Shoichi Manabe, worked to master similar tools for the Japanese language – like Jreadability, for example. We also consulted with Japanese language teachers to analyze Japanese language textbooks to create specifications that would work for students in our Japanese language program.

English is privileged to have many tools available for supporting language analysis that are not developed to the same level in some other languages. Community Literacy Activism can support the diffusion of such development across languages. Currently, we are starting to work with literature teachers in other countries whose students are developing new stories that represent their countries. I am inviting these teachers to create mirror sites for our stories where they can create translated versions to support multilingual literary discussion and development in their countries.

TM: The short story project looks quite unique in Japan. What do you think makes it different?

PS: One important distinguishing feature of this program is the emphasis on human creativity. The first six stories and translations of the *YAMS* series are human made, as it should be for language learning. For my students to write, translate, simplify, and illustrate works by hand was a deep, meaningful, and time-consuming undertaking. Since the narratives fit into an existing multicultural event program on campus, the stories have an organic authenticity and can work to cross-pollinate within that ecosystem. For example, this year, the India Week Grand Show was penned by a research assistant who has been working for the last two years as a Community Literacy Activist, so she was well aware of many issues regarding the community development of such shows. Plus, the community of students from India is rather small on our campus, so we are thrilled to know her story will be a future addition to the anthology. The students involved regarded their work as one of the most deeply meaningful of their university life.

A second feature is our provision of the same story in three levels, and in both English and Japanese

languages. This feature allows for various uses. Readers can move vertically within one language, or horizontally, taking a bilingual approach, reading one stage in both English and Japanese. Another unique feature of our dual language university is an exchange class program in which students studying in English and Japanese classes come together for bilingual class time. Providing multiple levels in two languages allows for multilingual/multilevel literary exchange discussions of culture-based texts.

TM: I attended your talk last year at JALT (2022) which featured multi-level stories in Japanese. What is your advice about working across languages?

PS: The *YAMS* story project is one that would provide Anglo teachers an opportunity for genuine exchange with their students. A few years back, Richard Day reminded us of his and Bamford's (2002) tenth principal of ER: *The teacher is a role model of a reader*. He pointed out that in L2 classrooms, this means that *the teacher is reading in their second language as well*. Crucially, the *YAMS* anthology gives English language teachers in Japan the opportunity to become a role model of an L2 reading teacher, and to authentically experience second language reading of literature as a learner. Reading the abridged stages of the Japanese stories may be a good place to start, if (like me) you struggle with reading *kanji*. It was very important for me to bring on Shoichi Manabe as a co-collaborator, who could mentor me on the Japanese aspects of our project.

For teachers who are already biliterate in English and Japanese, the *YAMS* series supports teachers and students practicing translanguaging, so I hope that some of our most bilingual English-Japanese teachers will try experimenting with the stories on our site to research bilingual literature circle practices. Additionally, some faculty members may wish to challenge their students to write stories in English or Japanese that represent their culture, so our website can provide models for products created in a bilingual format or perhaps might provide inspiration for something new or better.

For those who are mentoring student authors and translators, I would recommend developing a system of paired bilingual workers and have them read stories aloud to each other while trying to translate or paraphrase. We actually interviewed students in pairs to determine if they could create a productive writing and translating atmosphere between them. By ensuring that there was a collaborative, verbal and flexible linguistic

atmosphere among the translators and editors, we were able to create a strong multicultural, collaborative team.

TM: How do your students respond to the work?

PS: On the level of story creation, the students report great joy in learning to work creatively with their second (or third) language. When teaching creative writing in a classroom environment, students often encountered difficulties in writing dialogue and choosing narrative point of view, for example. But when students are engaged first in a stage play as an author, they work with student actors who often improvise dialogue for scenes. In this way, the student authors and editors develop a deep connection to other community members on campus, some of whom have supported multiple productions for other countries as well. This deep connectedness among students and the shared experience in putting together these large cultural celebrations is extremely life-giving. This is successful in part because the program is not classroom based.

With regard to students who are reading the stories on the StudioCLA website, we are still in a learning stage. Teachers and students have expressed a desire for pdf versions of all the versions of the stories, with ruby furigana for the Japanese stories. Others have expressed interest in audiobook versions. Additionally, the lowest-level versions have had some mixed reviews, due to the strict teacher-led requirements for very short word limits (Stage one limit is 400 words in English or 800 characters in Japanese). Student editors have tried removing scenes, characters, and other details, which according to our focus group audiences, took away so much context that it actually made these versions harder to comprehend. For this reason, it is likely that the elementary versions will see some sort of radical change in approach in the future. At this point, readers seem very happy with the Stage 2 and Stage 3 versions in both languages, and after working to ensure continuity both vertically and horizontally for each story set, I believe we are ready to share them on other platforms like NPO Tadoku or Xreading.

TM: What are some next stages of the project?

PS: Currently, I am starting to meet and work with faculty members at other universities around the world who take a literary approach to teaching language. For example, one professor in Turkey is now running a competition for her students to contribute a story about

life in Turkey for the *YAMS* anthology. Thus, we are working with international collaborators to develop new stories.

Additionally, the research team is now working to reckon with the advent of tools like ChatGPT to better understand when these tools can add value to the process, and when they are short-circuiting, slightly dehumanizing, or literally robbing us of creative opportunity. At the same time, there may be some ways that generative AI like ChatGPT can help L2 learners to develop language and stylistic awareness. We are now dealing with a new subject for stylistic analysis: Machine-Generated Literature (MGL). The Community Literacy Activists in my program have been using ChatGPT to generate stories similar to those on our website and are studying the perceptions of EFL students regarding said output. At the same time, we are tracking the time it takes to create these stories in comparison to the prior *YAMS* anthology stories, which were 100% human made.

TM: What advice for other teachers and researchers do you have?

PS: In my opinion, we need teacher-researchers who can substantiate gains in proficiency, along with gains in empathy, cultural competence, and autonomy, in environments where literature is employed as the basis of the approach. New technology can help with this, but we need to find ways to manage it, while helping our students experience higher levels of creativity and self-efficacy in their language learning. AI was supposed to do the tedious parts, not take over the creative parts. It will take some concerted literacy activism on our part to ensure that human creativity and expression retain their vitality in our language programs. Lifting up our students' voices and creative works will help keep us on the path.

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Book Review

David McMurray (2022) *Teaching and Learning Haiku in English*. The International University of Kagoshima Press. ISBN: 978-4-901352-66-6.

Ian Willey

Kagawa University

Teaching and Learning Haiku in English, by David McMurray, is an essential reference book for teachers planning to introduce their students to English-language haiku. McMurray, editor of the *Asahi Haikuist Network* for over twenty years, provides an overview of research into haiku, how English-language haiku can be taught at various levels, and how the genre has evolved alongside social and environmental changes.

The book is divided into seven main chapters: an introduction to haiku education; understanding international haiku; how to teach haiku; learning haiku through information and communication technology (ICT); haiku contests; haiku at academic societies; and trends in international haiku. The third chapter, how to teach haiku, forms the core of the book, and is subdivided into haiku education for teachers at elementary school, junior high school, high school, university, and for company staff.

Rather than attempt to define English-language haiku up front—the norm for most books about the history and features of English-language haiku (e.g., Digregorio, 2014; Kacian, Rowland, & Burns, 2013)—McMurray instead fills each chapter with examples of English-language haiku by Japanese and non-Japanese people as well as the author himself, allowing the reader to get a feel for English-language haiku. Most of these haiku were written directly in English, without having been translated from Japanese or other languages, and the reader can sense the different linguistic and cultural influences that come into play when authors from countries as diverse as Canada, Serbia, Japan, and Borneo write haiku in English. In the last chapter, McMurray gives a partial definition of English-language haiku as a literary form that no longer follows a 5-7-5 syllable pattern nor necessarily includes seasonal words (*kiigo*).

English instructors may do well to follow this approach and provide a minimalistic definition of English-language haiku to students as well as examples, which can be found in abundance in online haiku journals or sites such as *Heron's Nest* and the *Asahi Haikuist Network*. Alternatively, the instructor could ask students to read samples of English-language haiku and then come up with their own definition or description of this genre. Such an approach could give students a sense of the freedom involved in English-language haiku writing and make haiku writing tasks less onerous.

Having said this, McMurray does offer a simple recipe for how to write English-language haiku. He describes a three-step process for writing photo haiku. Use of a photo is itself an inspired teaching method. In the past, I would ask students to come up with their own English-language haiku based on a memory or experience, but this can be challenging as students often do not know what to write about. By providing students with a photo, say of a boat on a lake, they have something concrete to work with. McMurray recommends having students say what they see in the photo in the first line, describe the natural scenery or season in the second line, and say how the photo makes them feel, or what they want to do, in the third. As an example, he shows a photo of a dog wading in a river, with the accompanying haiku:

Riverside
Endless summer
Without shoes

I tried out this task in one of my writing classes and found the results to be positive. I gave students a photograph of a person gazing at the Seto Ohashi Bridge [a famous, very long bridge that connects the main island

of Honshu with the southern island of Shikoku] and asked them to compose, as homework, a haiku following the three-step method advanced by McMurray. My impression is that students struggled less with the task than when they had to come up with a haiku on their own. Some of their haiku were rather patternistic, and often quite similar. However, the purpose of the task is to allow students to experience writing haiku in English, not to produce a masterpiece. I told students that the three steps were there to help them assemble their ideas, but that they could deviate from this pattern in the future. Additionally, students could be asked to write haiku about their own photographs, which reduces the burden on the teacher in finding photographs and permits students to be creative.

One idea in the book that could trigger debate is McMurray's postulation, based on extensive research, that Japanese people and Westerners focus on different parts of a photograph when writing a photo haiku: Westerners tend to focus on objects or people in the foreground, McMurray asserts, while Japanese writers focus more on the background. I tend to bristle whenever the "West" and "East" are dichotomized and did not find that the examples in the book showed major differences between what the Japanese and Western writers focused on when composing haiku. However, the idea is intriguing and worthy of discussion in classes with advanced-level students.

The book has an environmental theme as well. McMurray argues that climate change is affecting how people write haiku as the differences between seasons come to blur. As of this writing, in late September 2023, the daytime temperatures in much of Japan remain at mid-summer levels, and cicadas—a staple of summer haiku—can still be heard screaming in the hills. McMurray describes how the seasonal words that haiku contain have become "out of whack," and asserts that this 'seasonal creep' has made it more difficult for contemporary readers to comprehend traditional haiku" (p.122-123). However, this may be more of a problem for traditional Japanese haiku than English-language haiku, where seasonal elements—or natural elements of any kind—are often absent.

Although I would have appreciated more practical advice on how to incorporate English-language haiku into English classes, I recommend this book to any teacher hoping to deepen their knowledge of English-language haiku. The hundreds of haiku featured in the book, written by people from around the globe, present English-language haiku as a vibrant genre encapsulating

both tradition and change. Teachers and students can explore this tiny but fascinating genre together.

Author Biography

Ian Willey is an associate professor at Kagawa University, Japan. In addition to teaching and research, he writes and has published hundreds of haiku and poems. <willey.ian.david@kagawa-u.ac.jp>

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Submission guidelines

The Journal of Literature in Language Teaching, the refereed research journal of the Literature in Language Teaching (LiLT) Special Interest Group, invites research articles, research reports on the use of literature and literary forms (e.g. creative writing) in language classrooms, as well as book reviews, practice-sharing and relevant conference reports. Although we have a focus on Japan- and broader Asia-based language education, we welcome submissions from international contexts based on applicability to the journal's readership. Further details can be found at <http://liltsig.org>

Submissions accepted on a rolling basis.

There are, broadly speaking, seven categories of article. Word limits provided here are guidelines, not rules, and do not include the bibliography in the count.

- 1) *Feature articles*, detailing in depth research, whether empirical or theoretical. These are generally between 2,500 to 4,000 words long.
- 2) *Literature in practice*, which describe the practical use of literature in the language classroom which teachers can readily apply. These are typically 2,000 to 3,000 words long. Although such articles detail classroom practice, it is preferred that they try to connect the practice to the academic literature in terms of why or how the practice helps educators and students
- 3) *Reviews* of books pertinent to the field.
- 4) *Interviews*. These may be with members of the Special Interest Group detailing their research and practice, or prominent researchers/practitioners in the field.
- 5) *Conference reports* from literature-themed events and presentations.
- 6) *Presentation reports*. These are short write-ups of conference presentations given by the authors. They should be academic in tone and include references to the literature.
- 7) *Comments* on article previously published in the Journal.

We may also occasionally accept “My share” style activities describing original, effective activities for promoting literature.

Submissions should follow APA7 style, also known as the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 7th edition, particularly with regard to referencing. Submissions should be in carefully formatted MS Word, Pages or Libre Office, in Times New Roman size 12.

Submissions should go to: liltjournaleditor@gmail.com