Utilizing Junior High School Texts at the Japanese University Level For Large Non-English Major Courses

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Abstract

Many non-English majors encounter extreme difficulty when it comes to writing in English. Most learners are perplexed when asked to produce sentences that are comprehensible and cohesive enough to form a paragraph. Items such as a topic sentence, connecting clauses and phases may be unknown or long forgotten from their earlier schooling. Japanese junior high school texts offer a simple and easily understandable method of constructing rudimentary sentences and paragraphs. This in turn can guide students toward fashioning longer passages and eventually a modest paper consisting of a topic and conclusion. Subject matter included in the junior high school texts offer such themes as writing about historical places, world leaders, current pop stars and opinionated pieces that require student input on a personal level. Random selection of writing topics by Instructors can be detrimental to the overall process since some students are likely to only copy and paste from the Internet in order to complete their required assignments. Careful planning and visualization on the part of the teacher as to how learners might actually approach their writing tasks is necessary. Simultaneously, having sizable classes (over 100 students) also presents unique challenges concerning assignment collection, and review and grading. Additionally learner abilities may be so dissimilar that the class will have to be split into smaller groups based on student competence. Without these adjustments lack of student motivation can result in repeated class absences and ultimately failure of the course. The use of junior high English texts can help eliminate some of these issues. Throughout a 15 week course students can apprehend their own progress as tasks and assignments become larger and more specified. Students can progress on from the course confident that they have acquired Basic English writing skills that may become useful later on in the working world.

Keywords: education technology, efl, esl, Japan, higher education, large classes, tbl, university, writing

Introduction

Instructing language learners to write in a second or third language is no easy task. If the class size is also large the impediments for success become only more laborious for the lecturer as well as the learners. For those engaged in teaching second language learners, what is needed is both a firm grounding in theoretical issues of first and second language writing and an understanding of a broad range of pedagogical issues that shape classroom instruction (Kroll, 1990). It is therefore recommended for the teacher to consider retracing the steps that the students have made to reach their current position in the language learning process. If students are non English majors this procedure can be highly beneficial; as in many cases the students most likely failed to grasp the essential points in their junior or senior high English courses. This is especially true for Japanese learners of English but could hold true where ever 2nd or 3rd languages courses are taught.

In the case of Japanese students who have already had 3 years of English language study in both junior and senior high school the wealth and depth of the material available for university instructors is invaluable. In non-English major courses the barriers to writing in English can be many. Limited vocabulary and almost nonexistent experience in writing are but just two. Some learners may not realize that the first letter is capitalized in a sentence, while others may not be aware of the fact that there is one space after a period ending a sentence. The formation of nouns and verbs, and their tenses are all part of the necessary knowledge that needs to be covered. The establishment of a topic sentence, supporting and concluding sentence are all vital. A quick refresher of the rules and roles that certain items play in the writing process is essential before the full commencing of any writing activities. These details can be easily covered and administrated through supplementary tasks that are readily available on the Internet is this global age of learning.

Junior High Texts

Within junior high texts, the subject matter for future writing tasks covers a broad range of topics such as famous people, famous places or even global issues such as pollution or recycling. This allows for students who may have low writing abilities to inscribe on age appropriate topics. Student's personal views can also be conveyed through simple paragraphs.

A paragraph from the *Total English*, junior high school text displays not only a natural way of writing but also the components that may be involved. In this example simple and complex sentences are blended together to form a unified piece of writing.

Agnes was born in Macedonia in 1910. When she was still very young, she wanted to give her life to God. Agnes went to Calcutta, India and became a nun when she was 19 years old. She changed her name to Sister Teresa. Sister Teresa taught girls at high school. On the way to school, she always saw poor people. She could not forget them. One day Sister Teresa decided to help the poorest of the poor. She moved to the slums alone. (Total English 2, pp 8-9).

Additionally, paragraphs from junior high school texts may offer a topic that can inspire further debate among students; such as appropriate and future ways of travel.

Do you like traveling? Which do you like better, traveling by car or train? I like traveling by train better. We can relax on trains. Also they don't pollute the air as much as cars. And of course, to stop polluting the air, trains are better than planes. So

I like trains best of all. But if we can use cars with fuel cells in the future, we can travel without polluting the air. I'm sure that's the best way (Sunshine 2, p 76).

Other examples from school texts may offer more study and insight into the learners own customs, traditions and history further expanding their knowledge beyond the language writing environment. As the course progress's the depth and length of the writing assignments can be expanding from single paragraphs to more detailed topics. Another example from a Japanese junior high school texts expounds on the Japanese game of Go.

About a year ago I did not have any hobbies. But now I do. Last summer I went to a camp in Nagano. I made a lot of new friends there. We all had a good time together. But when everyone else talked about their hobbies, I could not join in. I really felt bad.

So I made up my mind to have some hobbies. Now I enjoy playing *go.* I am a member of the *go* club at our school. Do you know *go*? It is a very popular game in Japan. Two people play it. One person uses white stones, and the other uses black ones. If you get more "eyes" than the other person, you win the game. I think *go* is good training for the mind. Would you like to try it with me? (Sunshine 2, p 92)

As these examples are given to the learners, subsequently longer and more detailed writings can begin to take form. A further example describes the Japanese bullet train or Shinkansen.

The Shinkansen is one of the fasted electric trains in the world. The first Shinkansen began running in 1964, the year of the Tokyo Olympics. Before 1964, going from Tokyo to Osaka took more than six hours! But the Shinkansen was able to reach Osaka in about three hours. Some people thought the Shinkansen moves like a bullet. So they called it a "bullet train."

Now there are a lot of bullet trains in the world. France has the TGV. Germany has the ICE. But in the 1960's, only Japan had bullet trains.

Do you know the Shinkansen doesn't have any electric engines? Each car has it's own motor. In the 1960s, even the most powerful electric engine in Japan could not pull many passenger cars as fast as the Shinkansen. So motors in each car were more powerful than an electric engine.

On the other hand, the TGV is quite different from the Shinkansen. The TGV has two electric engines. The front engine pulls passenger cars, and at the same time the rear engine pushes them (Sunshine 2, p 93)

Student Examples

Early in the course as a follow up to the text examples that were given, an assignment required to students to expound on a famous place in Japan. An example given below demonstrates how three learners responded to various assignments.

The Kinkaku-ji is a building in very famous Japan. It is in Kyoto. It is also called Rokuon-ji. Yoshimitsu Ashikaga set the residence of another which will inherit the mountain villa of the Saionzike in 1397, and it calls Mr. Kitayama. Yoshimitsu's postmortem and Rokuon-ji were named and it was considered as the temple.

It is in Kyoto. Present Kinkaku is what rebuilt what was burned down by the fire in Showa 25. It is a visionary building. A student often visits by a school trip. Although the construction specified as a national treasure or Fumi Kunishige does not have one in the building in Rokuon-ji, many tourists visit in Kinkaku which makes the Kitayama culture consider, and it registers with the World Cultural Heritage in 1994. (Student A, 2013)

Animal is so cute. I like animal. Because of There are many tipes of animal. There is dog, cat, lion and others. Lion and crocodile is eating meat. Pig and cock is eat plant. I can encounter an animal if I go to the zoo. Please us, and the animals heal it. An animal is my house. I keep a dog.my dog is pretty. I love animal. I am only in Japan , and there is the animal which is only the country. The panda is in Japan, too, but is only in few places . Therefore I have not yet watched a panda . It is interesting that there is the animal which I do not know more in the various countries. Because I have an immeasurable fun in an animal, l like it (student B. 2013)

Tokugawa Ieyasu

He is the first Tokugawa shogun.

He unified a nation in japan and started to Edo era. In 1542, he was born in Mikawa that is Aiti prefecture now. When he was six years old, he sent to Imagawa clan in his capasity as hostage. Becouse his parents are Imagawa's subordinate. But he was kidnapped by Oda on the way. Two years ago, he sent Imagawa clan by trade of hostage. In 1560, Imagawa was wiped out by Oda Nobinaga.With Yoshimoto dead, Ieyasu decided to ally with the Oda clan. When he was 20 years old, he subjugationed and unify to Mikawa. 1575, at the Battle of Nagashino, Ieyasu defeated Takeda clan with Oda. The end of the war with Takeda came in 1582 when a combined Oda-Tokugawa force attacked and conquered Kai province.Takeda Katsuyori, as well as his eldest son Takeda Nobukatsu, were defeated at the Battle of Temmokuzan and then committed seppuku.

After the death of Nobunaga, Ieyasu concluded with Hideyoshi who was Oda's subordinate. In 1591, Hideyoshi became top of japan. But in 1598, after the Hideyoshi was dead, Ieyasu was going to get to top. Hideyoshi's subordinate would enthroned the Hideyoshi's son. In 1600, Ieyasu won The Battle of Sekigahara and became shogun of the Tokugawa shogunate . (Student C, 2013).

Although fulfilling the assignment requirements, it is immediately obvious that there are some problems with how the tasks were accomplished. The advent of the Internet age has brought many benefits but also numerous challenges to those in the teaching field. In the student's work there are some signs of original work but there are also clear signs that the student's have most likely gone to Wikipedia or some other content area and grabbed the necessary details. By the conclusion of these assignments it was also evident that a considerable majority of learners had been

steered toward the same Internet sites and had simply copied and pasted the necessary material to accomplish the task. It is therefore imperative that the subject and topic material be carefully considered. That topic that is objective or based on personal experience offers learners the best opportunity to reflect and contribute their own work.

Ceasing Copy & Paste, Translate

Once students discover the ease of simply searching for their topics writing assignment, copying and/or using translation software to finish the job, it is difficult for the instructor to choose the correct path to abolish the practice. One method is to demonstrate to the students the fallacy of such attempts by taking a text of English and using translation software to change it into their native tongue. In almost all instance the new version will be blatant with errors in grammar and word usage. It can then be explained to the students that when they do the same thing with their language and translate it into English; those same obvious mistakes can be easily spotted by the instructor.

Additionally, students may be given a warning by the instructor that subsequent attempts at copying and pasting or translating their way through future assignments may be met with a zero mark or requiring the student to re-do the assignment until the instructor is satisfied that the writing is original. In the future translation software will eventually reach a point where it will be almost impossible to desertion original from copied work. Thereafter, instructors will have to devise new strategies to work around the dilemma; until that time though, in the here and now instructors have to control the way assignments are completed. Students need to be per swayed as to that the goal of the course is not only about writing in another language but also developing the skills to do so. As the author DeSena states;

Students are natural economizers. Many students are interested in the shortest route possible through a course. That's why they ask questions such as, "Will this be on the test?" Copying a paper sometimes looks like a shortcut through an assignment, especially when the student feels overloaded with work already. To combat this cause, assign your paper to be due well before the end-of-term pressures. Remind students that the purpose of the course is to learn and develop skills and not just "get through." Writing a research paper helps to develop the skills of researching (hunting for something in the information universe), problem solving (the principal work of most people), writing (language is the most powerful weapon on earth), perseverance, and commitment. It follows that the more students learn and develop their skills, the more effective they will be in their future lives. (DeSena, 2007)

Specific Topics & Goals

As displayed in the previous student examples, the choice of topics for students to expound on cannot be taken lightly by the instructor. Non-English majors may suffer from a lack of confidence and a shortage of vocabulary from which to construe their writing intentions. The free use of the Internet offers a Pandora's Box from which information can be easily seized. Thought and care needs to be taken by the instructor before assigning writing duties to the learners. To stimulate writing it is best to ask students to write about topics that they are already familiar with, these could be hobbies, sports, their family or school life. Assigning a complex obscure writing task only adds to the frustration and confusion for students with low language abilities. In most cases these types of assignments will not be completed satisfactorily or even at

all. When students become discouraged the problem of copying and pasting as outlined previously only becomes that more attractive.

To expand students writing abilities from just stating items that they are familiar with tasks such as those that require thought or debate may be introduced. Assignments asking "what would you do if..." or "how do you feel about..." are both introductions to expanded writing. Questions querying a reply from "which to you feel is better...or ..." can add contrast and debate to a simple assignment.

As in most cases with non-English majors who may be engineering, nursing, or in another area of study, the students may be proficient in a specific field of knowledge. For example computer engineering, it is the instructor's responsibility to tie the two together; English and computers. In this fashion assignments hold meaning and purpose to the students while at the same time building writing skills that may be of use in their future careers.

Writing courses are more efficient and useful to learners when learner and curricular goals match. L2 students come to writing classes with their own ideas about what would be useful to them and not wanting to waste their time (or money). But when course goals do not match student goals, both teacher and learner have uphill battles (Leki, 2003).

Mixed Levels

Regardless of the subject matter in large classes it would not be surprising to find learner abilities of vastly different levels. This is most often true in writing courses. The challenge lies in how to engage all learners in a meaningful writing process with attainable goals for each level. If the instructor plans activities that meet only the needs of the learners whose skills fall in the middle, those learners with lower skills may become frustrated and those with more advanced skills may become bored (Boyd & Boyd, 1989; Wrigley & Guth, 1992). The burden on the instructor may seem overwhelming for some instructors. Teachers face challenges in class preparation and classroom management (Mathews-Aydinli, & Van Horne, 2oo6). This is why the utilization of prior learning material can help ease the load on instructor's shoulders.

Conclusion

It can be accepted without debate that learning to write in a 2nd or 3rd language is an arduous effort. Writing, similar to speaking has separate rules that must be understood and utilized in their proper forms. If the rules and forms are not comprehended at an earlier stage then there is no discredit in going back and teaching them again. For university students though in a classroom with many members, new methods are required to emphasize the rudimentary fundamentals of writing. Junior and senior high English texts which the students are already familiar with offer abundant examples of the basics of writing form. Topic sentences, supporting sentences, complex and simple sentence structures can all be easily displayed and reviewed throughout a writing course.

The construction of a paragraph and how they can be linked together to produce a simple essay can all be conveyed through the use of texts from previous years. In a short time, students are able to generate literary compositions that state a point, give support, and finish with a conclusion.

While former texts offer a simple solution to instructing writing to second language learners as instructors we must realize the first language environment from which learners are coming from. As Kroll states;

As teachers, we must realize that for those engaged in learning to a write in a second language, the complexity of mastering writing skills is compounded both by the difficulties inherent in learning a second language and by the way in which first language literacy skill may transfer to or detract from the acquisition of second language skills (Kroll, 1990).

While students in basic writing courses may never become true writers in their second language the understanding of the fundamental principles involved in the process can ease their burden when they may be called upon to contribute something in their chosen career. Through the application of texts from learners earlier years of study they can achieve a level of confidence and writing ability from which they never had before. This achievement while seemingly only classroom based in activities can benefit them later in life as they move into the working world.
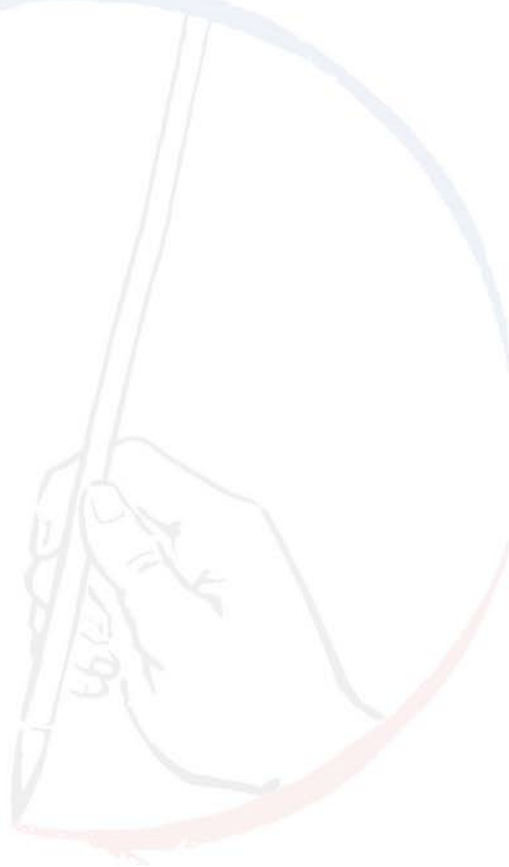
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