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Writing Original Speeches: Ideals vs. Realities

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This paper presents the results of interviews with 25 junior and senior high school teachers in Kochi prefecture regarding preparing original manuscripts for English speech contests. The three questions investigated were: How should original speeches ideally be prepared? How are speeches typically prepared in practice? What role should speech content play in the evaluation of a speech? The responses revealed that most teachers feel that extensive student involvement in the writing process is ideal, with teachers in a supporting role. However, almost all teachers felt that they were not able to follow their ideal method of manuscript preparation. I discuss the reasons for teachers not following their ideal methods along with issues concerning the role that speech content plays in speech contest evaluation and how it may diminish the pedagogical benefits of speech contests for students. Finally, alternatives to a competition-based evaluation model proposed by Shannon (2014) are discussed.

　本論では、高知県内の中学校・高等学校英語担当教員25人を対象に行った英語スピーチコンテストのための原稿作成に関するインタビュー調査の結果を提示する。本論で考察したのは以下の3点である。　理想的なスピーチ原稿を作成する方法は何なのか。実際の準備はどのようにされているのか。原稿の内容が、どの程度スピーチコンテストの評価基準に影響を与えているのか。インタビューの結果から、ほとんどの教員は、生徒が教員のサポートを頼りにしながら、積極的に原稿執筆に関わることが理想だと考えている。しかし、ほとんどの教員が、実際は理想的な原稿準備の方法をとることができなかったと感じていた。本論においては、その理由とどの程度原稿の内容がスピーチコンテストの評価基準に影響を与えているかについての問題を考察する。評価基準を考慮することは結果、スピーチコンテストの準備における教育効果がなくなってしまう可能性もある。最後に、Shannon（2014）が提案する「競争に基づく評価モデルに対する代替え案」について論じる。

English speech contests are very popular for junior high school students in Japan. Each year hundreds of thousands of students enter the national-level Prince Takamado contest alone (Japan National Student Association Fund, n.d.). In addition to the national contests there are numerous contests held every year at the local and prefectural level. These speech contests are typically divided into sections on recitation (a student memorizes and recites a textbook passage or a speech written by someone else) and original speech (written by the student), with original speeches evaluated on speech content as well as delivery. However, considering the large number of speech contests held, there is a lack of research on public speaking in a second language in Asia (Hsieh, 2006). In order to further explore the specific issues regarding original speech writing in Japan, this paper features interviews with teachers, particularly Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), about their views on the topic.

Motivation for This Study

There can be many benefits for students participating in speech contests, including perceived improvements in pronunciation, intonation, and public speaking confidence (Head, 2015). However, improvement in writing through speech contest participation, especially at the secondary school level, is less clear.

There are many difficulties inherent in speech writing in a foreign language. Hsieh (2006) examined Taiwanese students and identified several areas of difficulty. These included a limited vocabulary range with which to express their ideas, a different style of organizing thoughts (with Asian cultures "talking around a topic" (p. 227) and western cultures getting straight to the point), difficulties developing their key points, and a lack of ideas, background knowledge, or original thoughts. Considering that the students Hsieh observed were university age, it is likely that Japanese junior high school students would suffer even more from a lack of life experience from which to draw when writing an original speech.

As an ALT for 5 years in Kochi, I was heavily involved in preparing junior and senior high school students for speech contests, helping them with manuscript preparation, and coaching them in performance-related areas such as pronunciation, intonation, and gestures. I felt that, ideally, students entering an original speech would have written their speech in English themselves and then rewritten it based on advice from a teacher. This would teach students important writing skills and allow them to express their own ideas, something that recitation contests don't offer. However, Shannon (2014) outlined concerns regarding the writing process: Students may write their own speech in Japanese and then work together with a teacher to translate it into English, but in most cases there is "no culture of self-correction" (p. 30) and Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) or ALTs simply translate the text into perfect English (with the general meaning provided by the student). This calls into question the value of entering speech contests in terms of improving student writing ability. Shannon (2014) stated,

> As self-corrected errors are found to be some of the least likely to be repeated . . ., we should actively pursue such natural opportunities to foster and develop the skills and attitudes inherent in self-editing and awareness. As the system stands now, these teacher translations help support a system of thinking that says, "Japanese students aren't good at English." (p. 30)

This was similar to my own experience with junior high school students. Students would typically write a short speech in Japanese, the JTE would translate it into English, and then I was responsible for crafting that base into a proper script, often rewriting it heavily. Ideally this rewriting would be done in consultation with the student to make sure that the new script matched the student's actual thoughts and feelings, although this did not always occur due to time constraints, scheduling conflicts, and my difficulties in communicating with students with very basic English ability. Often it was simply easier to interview the student (with help from the JTE) about their[1] thoughts and then write a script in English based on the interview. More often, however, I revised the translated script in conjunction with the JTE (but not the student), based on what the JTE felt would impress the judges. This left open the question of whether the final version accurately reflected the student's feelings or whether the student even understood the meaning of the words that they were reciting.

This raises the issue of the fairness of evaluating speech content. For example, Shannon (2014) presented a scoring chart for speech contests in his region of Japan, in which composition accounts for 40% of the final evaluation, with pronunciation and delivery accounting for 30% each. In the case of the Kochi Prefectural Speech Contest (KPSC), the scoring for original speeches is divided evenly between three categories (English, delivery, and content). However, a small pilot survey of 13 students conducted as part of my dissertation research revealed that only one had written their speech in English, and seven said that a teacher had written their speech despite content accounting for one third of the evaluation. Interviews with three of the students' teachers identified the following reasons for students' not writing their own speeches: a lack of ideas on the part of the students; a lack of life experience for students to draw on when writing a speech; a lack of training for students on how to structure an argument in either their L1 or L2; and a lack of time for collaboratively revising the student's writing.

To further investigate this phenomenon and to see if these results were an isolated case or reflect the general situation in Kochi, I conducted interviews with other teachers from across Kochi prefecture concerning three questions:

1. How do teachers feel original speeches should ideally be prepared?
2. How are speeches typically prepared in practice?
3. What role should speech content play in the evaluation of a speech?

Methods

A two-part survey was given out to teachers at the 2014 and 2015 Skills Development Conference (SDC) in Kochi prefecture and at the 2014 Kochi Prefectural Speech Contest (KPSC). The SDC brings together all the Japan Exchange Teaching Program (JET) ALTs in Kochi prefecture (85 ALTs in 2014 and 88 in 2015), along with at least one JTE from each junior high and high school (26 JTEs in 2014 and 59 in 2015), and the KPSC is attended by junior high school teachers from schools (both public and private) across Kochi. These gatherings served as a convenient way to survey a sample of teachers from the entire prefecture. All teachers were given a copy of a bilingual (English and Japanese) two-part survey. The first part contained questions regarding the teacher's background and experience with speech contests, along with various Likert-scale type questions regarding speech contests. The second part (parts of which are the subject of this paper) allowed for open-ended qualitative responses and focused specifically on original speeches. Only those teachers who had helped prepare students for original speeches were asked to complete this section.

The second part (Appendix A) was completed by 25 teachers. Of these 25 teachers, who are the focus of this paper, 22 were native English-speaking (NES) ALTs, two were JTEs, and one was a NES teacher. Written permission to use the results of the surveys was obtained and the results were anonymous. However, teachers had the option of supplying their names and contact information so that the researcher could ask them fol-

low-up questions. This survey was given out at both the 2014 and 2015 SDC conferences. This double sampling was done due to the high turnover rate among ALTs, as well as changes regarding which JTEs are sent to the conference each year, resulting in differences in the sample population from year to year. Also, ALTs who were in their 1st year may not have been involved yet with original speech contest manuscript preparation due to their arrival in August, part way through the school year. Teachers who had completed a survey the previous year were asked not to complete a second survey to avoid sampling the same person twice. Each teacher was assigned a code (T1 through T25) for the anonymous reporting of representative sample quotations below.

Results
The Ideal Situation

Teachers were asked to describe the ideal method of writing a speech contest manuscript, with the results summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Student Original Speech Preparation and Involvement: Teacher Responses (*N* = 25)

Response	Number of responses (percentage)
Students should write the speech in English and then the teachers should edit the speech.	7 (28%)
Teachers should help students develop ideas and then the student should write the speech in English and the teacher should edit it.	6 (24%)
Students should write the speech in Japanese, translate it into English, and then the teacher will edit it.	7 (28%)
Students should write the speech in Japanese and then the teacher should translate it into English with the student involved in the process.	3 (12%)
Teachers should explicitly teach writing over the course of a semester and then the student should write the speech.	1 (4%)
Students and teachers should write the speech collaboratively.	1 (4%)

Note. Questions: What is the ideal way to prepare an original speech manuscript? and How much involvement should the teacher have? Why?

There was disagreement on whether or not a speech should be first written in English (around 60% of responses) or Japanese (around 40%). This is likely due to students who were younger, lower level, or both being able to more effectively express their ideas in their first language. Regardless of which language is initially used for writing, many respondents emphasized that the ideas should be those of the student and the student should be involved throughout the process:

> Ideally a teacher or parents brainstorm with a student, [the] student writes [their] composition, has it looked over/checked for content by [a] teacher, fixes [it], has it checked again for minor mistakes, and a final draft is produced. The teacher should provide a low amount of input for content so the student has the opportunity to fully express themselves, but teachers should assist students in finding errors in the final version. Finding errors should be restricted to grammar errors to ensure students' ideas are comprehensible, but any alteration beyond that should be avoided so the student is truly expressing themselves. (T1)

The Real Situation

Next, how does the ideal situation compare to how the manuscript is prepared in practice? Of the 25 respondents, four could not answer the question as they were not involved in the writing process. The responses are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. How Manuscripts Are Written: Teacher Responses (*n* = 21)

Response	Number of responses (percentage)
The student writes the speech in Japanese and then the JTE or ALT translates it into English without student involvement.	14 (67%)
The speech is translated from Japanese with student involvement.	4 (19%)
The speech is entirely written by someone other than the student.	3 (14%)

Note. Question: How does this compare to how the manuscript is prepared in practice? Why?

Only one respondent (T12) felt that their practice followed their ideal method (i.e., students think about the topic and write the speech in Japanese, the teacher checks the composition, the student translates it to English, and an ALT proofreads the speech). It

is also important to note that despite feeling that students should be involved through-out the writing process only 19% reported student involvement after writing the speech in Japanese, and 14% stated that the student was not involved at all in preparing their speech. The reasons given by respondents for this disparity between ideal and actual practice is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Teacher Reasons for Not Following Their Ideal Speech Preparation Method (*n* = 15)

Response	Number of responses (percentage)
A lack of time	8 (53%)
In a contest setting, winning takes precedence over developing the student's writing, so teachers will adjust the speech considerably in order to match what they think the judges desire.	4 (27%)
A lack of creative writing ability of students	3 (20%)

The most common reason given for not following the ideal method is a lack of preparation time. This, combined with pressure to succeed in a contest, may prompt teachers to limit student involvement in the process, as shown in the following quote.

> It seems to often be the case that the student will write up the script in poor English, maybe with the help of an online translation tool and then the teacher will rewrite it for them or have a JET do it, without actually helping the students make the changes themselves or involve them in the process. Probably the main reasons for this are time constraints on the student and teacher. But, I suspect there is also an element of pressure on the result as well. In other words, it looks better for the school, teacher and student if a finely polished speech is presented, even if the student has had little input in the process and thus learns little from it. (T13)

Should Content be Evaluated?

Finally, teachers were asked if speech content should be a factor in speech contest evaluation. Responses to this question were given by 23 teachers, as summarized in Table 4. Only four respondents felt content shouldn't be evaluated. One teacher cited a lack of

skill and maturity at the junior high school level as a reason for not evaluating speech content. However, three of these four teachers mentioned that even though it shouldn't be evaluated, it is impossible to separate the content from the other aspects of a performance

Table 4. Speech Content Evaluation: Teacher Responses (*n* = 23)

Response	Number of responses (percentage)
Content should be evaluated	19 (83%)
Content shouldn't be evaluated	4 (17%)

Note. Question: Should speech content be a factor in the speech contest evaluation? Why or Why not?

The other teachers supported content evaluation, although to different extents and for different reasons. One teacher felt that speech content reflects student effort and so it is only fair that it be evaluated. Another teacher, although supporting the judging of content in terms of clarity of the argument, mentioned the concern that students who have had fewer opportunities in life or who choose less "serious" topics will be at a disadvantage. Four teachers expressed concern that judging the structure of the writing is reasonable, but judging the topic or content of the speech is problematic. However, three other teachers stated that knowing how to write for your target audience is an important skill. Finally, two teachers also raised the issue of whether students can even understand the content that they are being judged on, with one teacher proposing that students be evaluated on comprehension of their speech rather than the speech content itself:

> More so than content, I think it would be advantageous to have some way to enforce or evaluate comprehension. Rote memorization and simply going through the motions does not a good presentation make. Nor is it a good learning experience if the students have no comprehension of what they are presenting. (T8)

Discussion

The results of this teacher survey indicate that teachers believe strongly in the value of student involvement in the creation of an original speech. Although most teachers

believe that a student should write their speech in English and teachers should serve as a guide in its revision, others such as Nishikawa-Van Eester (2009) feel that writing an initial draft in Japanese is acceptable considering the limited English writing ability of many students, particularly at the junior high school level.

However, when it comes time for teachers to actually produce a manuscript, only one teacher felt that they followed their ideal method. The main issue raised by teachers is a lack of time. This is likely due to the difficulty in finding students who wish to participate, thus wasting valuable time on recruitment that could be used for preparation. As Parkin (2015) noted, "It seemed like every time I looked for other students to compete in the speech competitions, they ran away scared" (p. 110). Another factor is the pressure to impress judges and win contests. Winning a contest can benefit the school through positive publicity and serve as a valuable recruitment tool. Students also receive benefits in the form of prizes (some quite lucrative, as in the case of the Prince Takamatsu Trophy contest), public recognition at school award ceremonies, and recommendations for joining specific high schools or universities (Nishikawa-Van Eester, 2009). This can cause teachers to take control of the content away from the students in order to ensure the best possible chance of winning, but potentially losing the student's voice and opportunities for developing writing skills in the process. A further issue raised by three teachers was a lack of basic writing training for students in their regular classes, an issue that one teacher felt should ideally be addressed as part of speech contest training. Nishikawa-Van Eester (2009) outlined a 16-class, six-unit, after-school course used in a Tokyo junior high school that can serve as a model for such training. However, she noted that most schools lack the resources for such a program (a problem that would likely be even more pronounced in smaller rural Kochi schools).

Regarding the issue of including speech content in evaluations, most teachers surveyed supported it, and those that opposed it acknowledged that it is difficult to exclude from evaluations by judges. However, many respondents raised concerns regarding evaluating speech content. These included some students losing out to others who have had more life opportunities or who choose a more appealing (but not necessarily better written) topic. Also, some teachers felt that students are not ready to write speeches at this age (in either their L1 or L2) and that students may not actually understand the content that their speech is being judged on. These concerns bring into question the fairness of judging the content of an original speech. It could be argued, however, that if the goal of an original speech is to convey a student's thoughts to an audience rather than to develop students' writing skills, then a teacher is perfectly justified in writing a speech for a student as long as the student fully understands and agrees with the final manuscript. This does not support the evaluation of content, however, as it is the teacher's writing ability, rather than the student's, that is being judged.

Some contests (such as the Kochi Prefectural Speech Contest for first-grade junior high school students) combine recitations and original speeches together into one contest rather than separate categories. Although this theoretically means that all speeches will be judged purely on performance, several teachers pointed out that it is difficult to separate content from performance, as personal stories may be easier for audiences to connect with emotionally. Also, judges may have heard the same recitation (typically taken from a textbook) several times that day, giving the "original" speech an advantage.

Shannon (2014) suggested moving away from a speech contest model, which only some students can win, towards a model that lists a set of skills and objectives for a student to complete (see Appendix B), whereupon they receive recognition of their accomplishment (similar to how scout badges are awarded). This sets clear goals and skills that can be worked towards, rather than hoping that a judge is impressed by a particular story. It also theoretically eliminates the need for large and potentially stressful gatherings, with teachers able to work with students until they have completed their goal rather than trying to meet an arbitrary deadline of the speech contest date. One way to further improve Shannon's suggestion would be to provide certificates for different skills and at different levels (such as in the Eiken test). This would allow students to receive recognition for what they can already accomplish (e.g., composition), as well as motivating them to concentrate on problematic areas (e.g., pronunciation) in order to advance to the next level. Although the idea of winning can be seen as a significant source of motivation for participating in a speech contest, previous research (Head, 2015) indicates that although teachers view winning a prize as motivating for students, students report a desire to improve their English ability and enjoyment of the process as more motivating than winning a prize. Thus, a process that recognizes students' effort and ability but does not pit them against each other is a good solution. This would also address teacher concerns regarding having to please judges with their choice of topic rather than showing mastery of composition.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to see if my own experiences (and those of three teachers in a small pilot study) with preparing junior and senior high school student English speech manuscripts (wherein students are often uninvolved in writing their own manuscripts due to a combination of lack of time and ideas as well as pressure to impress judges) were representative of the general practices in Kochi prefecture. To explore this issue, respons-

es from 25 teachers were collected and their ideal methods of speech contest preparation, how these compare to their actual practice, and whether speech content should be evaluated, were examined.

The results of the survey show that the teachers felt that ideally students will be highly involved in all stages of speech preparation. However, as in the pilot survey, this often does not occur in practice due to time constraints and pressure to win.

As the speech contest system is designed currently, there are serious issues regarding the purpose of original speeches. Although recitations have a clear goal of evaluating speaking, with participants judged on pronunciation, intonation, expression, and body language, original speeches must also consider the content of a speech. However, if teaching students how to effectively communicate their thoughts in writing is the main point of doing an original speech contest (as many teachers believe), then the system as it currently stands does not accomplish this task. Issues regarding a lack of preparation time, a lack of basic writing skills, and a desire to win by impressing judges with the content conspire to rob the speech creation process of much of its pedagogical value.

In addition, although most teachers feel content should be evaluated, there are several problematic areas, such as students being penalized for their topic choice or, conversely, being awarded for content that they didn't create and may not comprehend. With this in mind, the current system of including speech content in the evaluation of a speech contest appears problematic. However, it is difficult to separate speech content from evaluation. This suggests that an alternative method of evaluation be employed, such as that proposed by Shannon (2014), which examines skills that a student has mastered, rather than pitting students against each other.

Note

1. In this paper, I have chosen to use the pronouns *they* and *their* as singular pronouns of indeterminate gender.

Acknowledgment

Bio Data

Philip Head has been teaching English in Japan for 9 years (including 5 as an ALT in Kochi City) to students of a wide variety of ages and English levels. He is currently actively involved in JALT through academic publishing as coeditor of *The Language Teacher*. His current research interests include writing fluency, student motivation, and English speech contests. <head.philip@gmail.com>

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Appendix A
Teacher Survey (Part 2)

Name: _____

Please give your thoughts regarding the following five (5) questions:

1. What are the advantages/disadvantages of original speeches as opposed to recitations? _____
_____

2. What is the ideal way to prepare an original speech manuscript and how much involvement should the teacher have? Why? _____
_____

3. How does this compare to how the manuscript is prepared in practice? Why?
_____

4.   Should speech content be a factor in the speech contest evaluation? Why or why not?
_____

5.   Do you think boys are less likely to participate in speech contests than girls, and does this affect their evaluation? _____
_____

Appendix B

Speech Contest Skill Evaluation Rubric (Reproduced From Shannon [2014] With Permission)

Composition

1   Student can create a speech utilizing an opening, body, and ending format.

2   Student can assess their own composition for proper capitalization, punctuation, and formatting.

3   Student can request help in editing their speech from an English educator or speaker.

4   Student can correct their composition based on suggestions or advice from their editor.

5   Student can produce a speech which can be said to inform, persuade, or amuse.

6   Student can compose a speech reflective of their interests, experiences, opinions, or future.

Non-Verbal Delivery

1   Student can utilize gestures which are not explicit/literal in execution.

2   Student can deliver a speech with regular frequency of gestures.

3   Student can utilize gestures which are brief in duration.

4   Student can present themselves with proper posture and an absence of idle shifting of weight, movement of hands, or nodding.

5   Student can present with an expression natural and appropriate to their content.

Vocal Delivery

1   Student can project their voice so as to be clearly understood by a listener 25m away.

2   Student can recover from an error in delivery (mispronunciation, forgetting a line, etc.) without self-remarks.

3   Student can utilize intonation at the word and sentence level to appropria tely reflect content.

4   Student can utilize speed of delivery to appropriately reflect content.

5   Student can practice to the extent that their rehearsals are free of delivery errors.

Pronunciation

1   Student can assess their own performance through recording of their own speeches.

2   Student can deliver pronunciation with accurate long and short vowel sounds.

3   Student can accurately produce Th, B, P, V, and F sounds.

4   Student can accurately produce L and R sounds.

5   Student can improve their pronunciation of specific words with the assistance of a coach or teacher.

6   Student can utilize phonological training (to include tongue/mouth/teeth diagrams) to improve their pronunciation.

Figure 3. Proposed Rubric for Five Core Speech Skills