Readings From Students, Demos From Teachers: LiLT SIG Forum

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In this paper, we report on the Literature in Language Teaching SIG forum at the JALT 2022 International Conference held in Fukuoka. At the forum, four presenters shared various approaches to using literature for language learning and discussed insights from literature-based language courses. The presenters also focused on practical suggestions with an emphasis on course planning. The conference and forum themes as they related to literature were discussed in the question-and-answer session. The authors individually outline the approaches used and the reactions of students to the course. The paper also illustrates recent trends from theoretical methods to language learning using literature. The report concludes with some reflections on using literature in different contexts with varieties of language learners.

本稿では、福岡で開催されたJALT2022年次国際大会におけるLiterature in Language Teaching SIGのフォーラムについて報告する。当該フォーラムでは、4人の発表者が文学を言語学習に活用するための各種のアプローチを紹介し、文学を利用した言語コースからの洞察について議論した。また、コースプランニングに重点を置いた実践的な提案も行われた。質疑応答では、文学に関連する会議とフォーラムのテーマについて話し合われた。本稿の各セクションには、各プレゼンテーションの短い要約、使用されたアプローチ、コースに対する学生の反応などが含まれる。また、文学を用いた言語学習に対する理論的なアプローチから最近の傾向を説明する。最後に、様々な言語学習者と多様な文脈で文学を使用することについての考察を述べる。

In this paper, we report on the forum at the Literature in Language Teaching (LiLT) SIG forum at the JALT annual International Conference on 12th November 2022. Four speakers explored ways to engage learners with literature, using picturebooks (Lacy), graphic novels (Igawa), creative writing (Maune), and critical theory (McIlroy). In the four short talks summarized in this paper, the authors discussed how literature may be used for language learning and made recommendations for teachers and course planners.

Literature can be used in different ways in the language classroom, and its inclusion continues to evolve in different teaching contexts. One view of literature is that its use in courses of additional language (L+) study can provide rich opportunities for learning about culture at the same time as language. Another view is that literature serves a general aim of humanistic education to develop the whole learner. In the Common European Framework of References for Languages, or CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001, 2018, 2020), literature is referred to in can-do statements related to language learning. Using literature as it is conceptualized in the CEFR means (a) reading as a leisure activity, (b) personal responses to creative texts, and (c) analysis and criticism of creative texts (CEFR, 2018, p. 51). Mediation, another key concept in the CEFR, is closely aligned with uses of literature in language learning settings. Yet, these concepts may not show the full picture of how literature may be used as content for engaging contemporary L+ learning. Over the years, some researchers have favored language-based approaches, while others have worked with the idea that learning with literature enables personal and cultural

development (Bland, 2018; Carter, 2007; Collie & Slater, 1987; Hall, 2015; Kramsch & Kramsch, 2000; Paran, 2008). Recent research has continued to highlight how literature can be used in multilingual classrooms (Bland, 2020; Williams & Normann, 2021), suggesting that evolving approaches will continue as long as teachers innovate.

Literature, often difficult to define, may be considered broadly to be "any materials with imaginative or fictional content" that "brings imaginative interaction, reaction and response into play" (McRae, 2022, p. 1). This inclusive definition of literature includes non-canonical forms such as flash fiction and graphic novels, as well as recognition and acceptance of learner literature (i.e., creative texts written by the learners themselves). Bringing literature closer to the learners is useful in that culturally relevant texts can include characters, settings, or themes that resonate with students (Ebe, 2010; Feger, 2006).

An additional issue concerning using literature for language learning is teacher identity. For those teachers already using literature for such purposes and for those considering developing literature-based language courses, the balance between language learning and literature learning is a particular consideration. Teachers have different backgrounds and experiences themselves, which all contribute to their subject knowledge, curriculum planning, and selection of literary texts. Some language teachers may have been English literature teachers in their home countries before moving overseas, whereas others may have found literature through their curiosity for content, interest in local culture, or other reasons. Teachers who are approaching literature in the language classroom may be inclined to see the literary part of the lesson as the primary element, while the alternative approach sees the language as the most important element. On this topic, Paran (2010) writes, "There is a split between teachers who wish to teach literature and literary skills and teachers whose aim is to use literature in the foreign language (FL) classroom for language development purposes" (p. 143). Those teaching English literature in Japanese (either Japanese literature or English literature in translation), as is typical in English literature departments in Japanese university settings, are likely to feel that they are teaching literature and literary skills, not language skills. Those teachers utilizing English-medium instruction in Japan are likely to feel at least partly that language learning is a general overall goal of their course.

The approaches taken by the four authors in this paper may additionally be considered examples of the *teachers as designers of learning environments* paradigm, which positions educators and their learners at the center of educational innovation. These approaches build on the natural inclinations of learners towards creativity, inquiry, and collaboration (Paniagua & Istance, 2018). For example, teachers working with discussion-based teaching are often doing so to foster critical thinking and questioning. Lessons using creative writing and focusing on the feelings of learners may be considered immersive, utilizing embodied learning. Problem-solving occurs when learners work out the puzzle of a literary text, or when they consider the social issues highlighted in literature. In bringing together this collection of short talks, the authors present multiple perspectives on learning experiences using literature, in order of their appearance at the forum.

Connecting Picturebooks to Local Social Issues

Bethany Lacy

The focus of this research project was on the utilization of picturebooks, their connection to contemporary social issues, and their application in an educational environment. The study participants were four first-year Japanese university students who were studying in a CLIL-based curriculum in central Tokyo. The picturebook class was an optional class that students could volunteer to join. They did not receive a grade, nor did they receive credits for partaking in this research project.

The participants read the assigned picturebooks together in class and then, outside of class, completed individual projects related to the picturebooks and their local communities. The individual projects were called *reading in action* (RIA) homework assignments, in which the students took pictures and wrote reflections. The RIA assignments were designed by myself, and I tailored each assignment to relate to specific issues highlighted in the picturebooks and how they connect to Japan. The implementation of active reading was aimed at boosting the participants' knowledge of their local communities and enhancing their empathy toward people with different backgrounds and life experiences. The assignments involved community-based activities, such as contemplating areas for improvement in their neighborhood, identifying useful items for asylum seekers, and exploring websites of local nonprofit organizations addressing social issues in Japan. All participants provided their consent to share their responses. Institutional consent to conduct this research was also acquired.

Change Sings: A Children's Anthem (Gorman, 2021) includes the importance of community building and connecting with other people living in the same area. It also focuses on community service, such as cleaning up parks and creating murals. Due to the picturebook's emphasis on local communities, the participants completed three community-based activities for their RIA assignments. The activities were titled "Three Things to Change; One Thing I Love," "Local Community Board," and "Local NPO/NGO."

For the first RIA activity, the participants took pictures of three separate things they would like to change in their neighborhoods and one thing they loved about their homes. They then wrote short summaries of the items presented in the photographs. In the second activity, they were asked to find a local community bulletin board. They took a picture of the community board and chose three things or activities on the board to write about. The final activity was for the students to look for the nearest NPO/NGO on an online map service of their choice. From the map, the students could access the organization's basic information, reviews, and photos. For further information, the students were asked to browse the organization's website as well. The participants then wrote a summary of the NPO/NGO's services and their previous knowledge of the organization.

One of the students' responses to the "Three Things to Change; One Thing I Love" activity provided insight into what it is like living in a rural area on the outskirts of Tokyo. The student took a photo of the local train schedule, stating that they wished the trains ran more frequently. They gave additional information about their daily commute to the university in this assignment, saying that if they missed their usual train, they would have to wait nearly an hour for the next train to Tokyo. Another image showed a dark road bereft of streetlights. The student stated they would like more lighting on their walk home to feel safer. This student's final picture for something to change showcased utility poles with multiple cables. The student explained how their area did not have undergrounding, so the sky was lined by electrical wires. Their picture of something they loved showed a vast park bordering a river; the student said they loved picnics and playing sports in this park.

Another student found a nearby NPO that helped children with disabilities—namely developmental disabilities. They stated that the volunteers "provide good parent-child relationship [*sic*], confidence, and life skills to children." The student noted unfamiliarity with the NPO before completing this activity. They also added that they were glad the NPO existed in their neighborhood.

The second picturebook, *The Journey* (Sanna, 2016), focuses on the pilgrimage of one family of refugees from their war-torn country to a place of safety. Related to this text, the RIA activity paired with this book asked students to imagine the family was coming to Japan. The students took pictures of four items they thought would be essential for a refugee family moving to Japan. One student took pictures of rentable bicycles, towels, rice bowls, and a Suica public transportation fare card so the family could commute in Tokyo. The students also accessed the Japan Association for Refugees website. After exploring this website, they wrote two questions they would like to ask refugees living in Japan and two things they were surprised to learn about the process of receiving refugee status in Japan.

The last picturebook, titled *Something Happened in Our Town*: *A Child's Story about Racial Injustice* (Celano et al., 2020), delves into racism, police brutality, and school bullying. In the final third of the book, a new student who doesn't speak English is ostracized by his classmates. Two children invite the new student to play with them in an act of kindness. While police brutality may not be a significant concern in Japan, bullying and exclusion in school settings are. For the RIA exercise, the participants commented on something positive on their friends' social media posts. The students then wrote a short reflection on the experience. The purpose of this assignment was to encourage empathy toward others through interaction and small acts of kindness. One student took a screenshot of their friend's post and their comment. The following extract is in its original form; spelling and grammar mistakes have not been corrected. In their reflection, the student stated,

> I felt happy. Actually this is the first time to left a comment on my friend's posts. I think this is a good for each other. Because she might be happy to receive good comment and I'm also happy to see good post. Actually I do not really comments on my friend's post. But when I tried it it was fun and good communication method. So I want to do it frequently.

During the class discussion, the student stated that they did not often comment on their friends' posts, yet they browsed through their social media accounts daily. They thought more deeply about how their friends might feel about having more comments on their posts. The student said that thinking about how happy their friends would feel to receive positive comments also made them happy.

In conclusion, this research demonstrated the application of picturebooks in addressing pertinent social issues relevant in contemporary societies worldwide. Through the implementation of the RIA assignments, the four participants were encouraged to explore their local communities and establish connections with the themes explored in the picturebooks. The assignments, which encompassed community-based activities and active reading, were aimed at enhancing the participants' understanding of their communities, fostering empathy towards individuals from diverse backgrounds, and inspiring them to enact positive change. Overall, this study emphasized the significance of utilizing picturebooks and engaging students in community-oriented activities to promote empathy, understanding, and social engagement.

Instruction of Graphic Novel Conventions: Bad Study, Great Results

Jennifer Igawa

Igawa introduced a preliminary study conducted in a first-year English Communication class in the Economics Department at a private university in Tokyo. The students' TOEFL ITP scores at entry range from 470 to 503 (equivalent to CEFR B1). The present study is based on research conducted by Kennedy and Chinokul (2020) in a Thai high school EFL context that showed that explicit instruction in structural and visual conventions of graphic novels would improve comprehension and motivation. The premise of the Thai study was that students unfamiliar with structural and visual conventions of American graphic novels would have difficulty understanding such texts.

The text selected for the present study was Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* (2006). This graphic novel comprises three stories woven into one novel. Furthermore, each story is divided into three parts. Igawa selected one of the three stories and used one of each of the three parts for the three phases of the study: pretest, intervention, and posttest.

The present study was conducted over 5 weeks (See Table 1 for a summary of class content and homework). In Week 1, students read Part 1 of the text to themselves and then completed the pretest, which consisted of questions incorporating structural and visual convention terminology. For homework, students completed a worksheet that consisted of questions geared to guide discussion. Students uploaded their completed worksheets to the university's learning management system so that the instructor could monitor student preparation for class. In the second week, students had explicit instruction on the structural and visual conventions of American graphic novels. Students also had time to discuss the text, in groups of two or three. They could reference their homework questions when necessary. The instructor led a full class discussion in the last 15 to 20 minutes of class. Because she already had the students' answers, she could focus on areas where students seemed to have the most difficulty with the story. For homework, students were asked to read Part 2 of the text and complete a worksheet that helped students prepare for discussion in class the following week. In Week 3, structural and visual conventions were reviewed, and students discussed Part 2 of the text. In Week 4, students read Part 3 of the text to themselves and then completed the posttest. While the questions in the pre- and posttests were not the same, they were designed to test the students' understanding of the same structural and visual conventions used in American graphic novels. For homework, students completed a worksheet to prepare for discussion of Part 3. A final discussion of the entire text was conducted in the final week and in the same manner as the discussions for Parts 1 and 2.

Table 1

Class Content and Homework During the 5-Week Study

Week	In-Class Content	Homework
1	Read Part 1 (18 pages) and pretest (16 Qs)	Re-Read read Part 1, Complete Discussion Questions handout
2	Intervention—Part 1 discussion, instruction on conventions	Read Part 2, Complete Discussion Questions handout
3	Part 2 (20 pages) discussion—guiding questions, review of conventions	Re-Read read Part 2
4	Read Part 3 (36 pages) and posttest (19 Qs)	Re-read Parts 1-3, Complete Discussion Questions handout
5	Part 3 discussion	None

Contrary to expectations, the average aggregate scores of the pre- and posttests showed no improvement in understanding of both structural and visual conventions. In fact, scores decreased slightly. The scores of students who demonstrated familiarity with various structural and visual conventions in the pretest did not change significantly from pre- to posttest. Furthermore, the scores of students who scored low on the pretest did not improve. Thus, the intervention did not appear to have the intended effect of improving comprehension. The results of this preliminary study revealed many issues As Igawa tried to follow the procedure of the original study as closely as possible and, therefore, expected similar results, the unexpected absence of improvement in scores in the present study needs to be examined. One explanation might be the difference between Part 1 and Part 3 in terms of the length of both the texts and tests. Part 1 was nine pages in length, and the pretest had 16 questions, whereas Part 3 was 19 pages in length with a posttest of 19 questions. Students had the same amount of time (80 minutes) to read each part and take the pre- and posttest. We would expect that students would need more time to complete the reading of Part 3 and therefore would have less time to answer the questions on the posttest. (It should be noted that the texts for the present and Thai studies were different. Igawa was unable to obtain a clear explanation

of how the text in the Thai study was used.) Alternatively, additional instruction sessions might have resulted in improved scores.

Another explanation might be the test items themselves. In the posttest, students were asked about changes in a character's confidence. For one item, students could correctly identify an increase in confidence, yet only one student could explain how she knew this. In other words, students could not explain what visual conventions illustrated the change. It could be posited that the students understood the functions of the conventions but could not express the visual conventions correctly in English. On a subsequent item, however, most students could correctly identify a decrease in confidence in the same character as well as explain the visual conventions that illustrate that change. These limitations merit a reworking of the test items at least, and perhaps even all the tasks in the study.

Despite the limitations of the study and its results, Igawa believes this pilot study revealed not only clear areas for improvement in the implementation of the study but also new areas to investigate. It may be possible to evaluate the value of introducing graphic novels in the EFL classroom by observing student engagement with the text based on their engagement in discussion. In the present study, students came to class talking about the story they had read for homework. Before class had even begun, they were sharing their impressions of the reading with each other, in English. Similarly, class discussion was observed to be more animated than discussions of stories covered earlier in the semester, with more people actively participating. This increase in participation, which could be interpreted as an increase in motivation, is in itself a valuable benefit of using graphic novels in a first-year college English communication class.

Short but Sweet: Six-Word Memoirs

John Maune

Maune reported on using a short story format in his university courses in Hokkaido. In his forum talk, he described the process of developing his approach to literature courses over time and the ways in which students responded to the creative writing prompts.

Utilizing six-word memoirs in a content-based literature course was an organic process that evolved over time. Originally, Maune used excerpts of popular memoirs by Sedaris (2000) and Thurston (2018); however, judged by student and reader responses, the material seemed daunting for most of the students, whose average CEFR level was below B1. Students were apprehensive about asking questions about the excerpts as there were too many passages to question; they were defeated, with no chance of mastery in sight. A unit on memoir that would better fit the students' language levels was needed: Therefore, Maune decided on the six-word memoir.

The first six-word memoir in the flash fiction genre is attributed to Ernest Hemingway: "For Sale: Baby Shoes, Never Worn." This, however, is most likely an urban legend, although it makes for a dramatic introduction ("For Sale: Baby Shoes, Never Worn," 2022). The important point is that using minimal effort, even students of limited English proficiency can make sense of most six-word stories. Six-word memoirs have been used by many educators, including those working with EFL learners (Le, 2018), and there is an inexhaustible supply online. The genre is well established with a wide range of websites and books, and there is even a TED talk.

Students were shown 30 six-word memoir slides, including a picture, along with six words of text. Students were asked to choose one memoir and write about it, creating an activity that involved reader response. The results were pleasantly surprising. The responses were starkly better thought out and more personal than those regarding the longer memoir excerpts. They went from hesitant to bold. The six words were easier to understand as well as being open for interpretation. Therefore, the students seemed clearly more confident and willing to express themselves.

Six-word memoirs can be studied by students in many of the same ways as their wordier relatives. Teachers can help students to approach the poem by asking questions related to the text: What is the writer's purpose or the mood? Can you guess the culture, age, or gender of the memoirist? What is the possible economic class of the characters in the poem? Does the picture fit the context of the poem? What kind of design should be used in visualising the poem? At the time of writing, Maune was considering additional group activities that were difficult under COVID restrictions.

The memoir excerpts were eventually made optional reading, while the six-word memoir topic was expanded. Students created their own six-word memoir slides that would be shown to the class and possibly chosen for reader response. The student whose slide was chosen by the most students received extra credit and in-class recognition; students were asked whether they agreed to be recognized in front of the class. When the students` slides were shown, the increased buzz and engagement with the stories were apparent. This was even more obvious the following week when the slides that had been most chosen and written about by the students were presented.

For those who would like to use six-word memoirs in class, here is some advice. It is important to provide examples of how text and, to a much greater extent, images affect

meaning. This can be illustrated by showing the purported Hemingway six-word memoir with just text on a white background, no image, using a variety of typographic designs differing in style, size, color, placement, and punctuation, among others. For example, big, bold, block letters will evoke different feelings than fine cursive. Following this, the text is shown paired with various images that can drastically affect the mood. Students are asked what the memoir means to them. A smiling, barefoot baby in lush, green grass with a pair of baby shoes in the background will lead to a different interpretation than a pair of torn, bloody baby shoes askew in the shattered glass of a car accident. This demonstrates a fundamental principle: Layout matters. It also illustrates that there is a certain degree of ambiguity inherent in six-word memoirs. The image, by design, can maintain that ambiguity or not.

Six-word memoirs are simple, but the student responses they inspire are not. Students who are overwhelmed by more detailed stories instantly feel in control; this shows in their writing, both in response to and creation of six-word memoirs. In this case, less is more.

English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) and Literature Curriculum Design

Tara McIlroy

McIlroy described the development of a literature-themed course at a private university in Tokyo in which students learn to use different critical theories to approach a range of classic and contemporary texts. Part one used myths (traditional and contemporary), and part two looked at fairy tales (various forms and adaptations). This course was created for the 2022-23 academic year as part of a university project to increase the number of classes available using English as a medium of instruction (EMI). EMI has various definitions, but it is generally understood that English is the language used for instructional purposes while the target content is not English but instead other subjects such as science, maths, or history. An often-cited definition of EMI is "the use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English." (Macaro et al., 2018, p. 37).

The literature course described here explores the psychology of literature (based on Oatley, 2011) from a variety of perspectives. Learners use critical theory to analyze, examine, and critique the texts. The objectives of this course are 1) to utilize the methods of literary analysis related to psychology, and 2) to apply those methods to the analysis of literary texts. Students develop skills in textual analysis, applying inquiry methods to a variety of texts. By the end of the course, students can:

1. discuss different aspects of psychology in literature;
2. in a pair or small group, prepare and present an interactive talk related to aspects of psychology in literature;
3. write short essays and reflective responses to literary topics while showing understanding of relevant theories of literature and psychology.

The critical theory adapted was based on the work of Tyson (2021). Along with other related critical theories such as feminist readings and postcolonial approaches, textual analysis using psychoanalytic theory can be introduced to students to increase their critical skills and overall literary engagement. Reference texts referred to in the course were related to psychology and literature. These included Kidd and Castano (2013) and Koopman (2016), on the topics of readerly emotion and the effects of fiction on readers. McIlroy, in her presentation, described an example 100-minute lesson with various activities, including a review of background reading, mini-lecture, discussion based on themes and critical theory, group work using shared writing, and student-led presentations or discussions.

The course was open to students of any department and international students, representing a wide range of English levels. Although learners of intermediate proficiency (CEFR B1) and above could take the course, international students, including those from Anglophone countries, were also eligible to enroll. To evaluate the course activities in the first year of instruction, McIlroy used an adapted version of the language curriculum development framework (Macalister & Nation, 2019). She reported on the stages of the language curriculum design model. This framework begins with a needs and environment analysis and moves on to examine the principles, aims, and content of the course. Following that, the method of course planning should consider the format and presentations of lessons along with monitoring and assessment.

One consequence of teaching international and local students together is that in the course planning, activities should be designed in ways to support varied learning backgrounds. Instead of different backgrounds being a hindrance to literary understanding, the viewpoints of learners can become a feature of multi-layer literary discussions. Raising intercultural awareness can support engaging discussions and interactive group presentations.

Language teachers may continue developing EMI courses in the future, requiring content-related training. EMI approaches also present challenges related to teacher knowledge. In McIlroy`s case, although she had studied literature as an undergraduate and graduate student, the pace of change in the field of study meant that extensive background reading was required for course planning. Through the needs analysis at the beginning of the course, it seemed that many students were interested in psychology. Additional background reading related to psychology was necessary to work with students, some of which who studied psychology for their major. McIlroy concluded the presentation by stating that catering to the diverse needs of learners requires careful planning. Modification of materials for learners in multicultural classrooms is necessary. For those working with EMI course planning and using literature with their learners, a thorough needs analysis is required at the beginning of a course.

Conclusions

Although there may be different ways to approach literature when considering elements such as learner age, language proficiency, and cultural backgrounds, there are also many similarities between approaches. Literature is certainly considered difficult by some learners (and some teachers). This may be because of the use of "language which is open to interpretation, contains plurality of meaning potential…and requires negotiation and judgment by its receiver in order to be understood" (McRae, 2022, p. 19). While it may have a reputation of being difficult, the possibilities for adaptation and creation of lessons with literature provides opportunities for engaging contemporary learners in diverse classrooms.

Plurilingualism, a key element of the CEFR, is an increasingly familiar term for language teachers in Japanese contexts. Specific to literature in the language classroom, allowing translanguaging and bringing in local languages, as well as considering ways to build on background knowledge of literature can help to create an atmosphere of inclusion in our classrooms. Japanese students themselves are not a homogenous group with monocultural backgrounds, as educators are aware. Literature can help educators to hold a mirror up to society and show students diversity in different ways.

In summary, it is generally expected that teachers have a background of teaching literature, teaching language, or both. Different types of engagement with literary skills and language skills are expected in a subject so often related to two areas of research. Teachers using literature often consider themselves primarily language teachers. However, it is accepted that there may be some integration of both literary and linguistic goals in many contexts. We recognize and accept the different backgrounds of teachers and have shown in this short paper how four different teachers approach literature use in their courses.

The talks in this forum all referred to university courses, although the texts and approaches used can be adapted for any level of learner. A variety of approaches to literature is also to be expected in a community of teachers with different backgrounds themselves. Difficulties may result from culturally unfamiliar elements in literary texts, which is something that speakers at this year's LiLT forum recognized and discussed. It is hoped that the current discussion can help those planning courses and activities with literature. When teachers share their classroom practices as part of a community, it is possible to share perspectives and approaches.

Bio Data

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