

The Language Teacher

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JALT Central Office

Level 20, Marunouchi Trust Tower—Main,
1-8-3 Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo
100-0005 JAPAN
Tel: 03-5288-5443
jco@jalt.org

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<https://jalt.org/main/publications>

To explore our unrestricted archives:

<https://jalt-publications.org>

Hello, everyone. Welcome to the July/August issue of *The Language Teacher*. As we enter the summer months, we present a collection of research and teaching ideas exemplifying innovation and dedication within our language teaching community in Japan.

This issue includes two Feature Articles. The first, by **Noriko Kurihara**, examines the impact of peer review on high school students' writing abilities. The findings show that well-structured peer review can improve students' writing skills while potentially reducing teacher workload without compromising educational quality. Kurihara argues that peer review works best when students view their peers as an audience and when there is active interaction between students in the process.

The second article, by **Anna G. Faeh**, investigates lexical organization among inexperienced and experienced learners of English and Japanese. Based on McCarthy's word association task, the study reveals notable differences in lexical associations according to learners' age, language proficiency, and educational context, and offers valuable implications for vocabulary teaching and learning strategies.

In our Readers' Forum, **Ekwueme Macpaul C. Hirata and Hakeem Adeolu Azeez** explore the vital decision-making process of material development in language teaching. This timely piece addresses critical questions about how textbook selection and adaptation can best support teaching effectiveness—a particularly pressing issue in light of pandemic-era educational disruptions. Drawing on extensive literature, the authors provide a comprehensive framework for evaluating, selecting, and adapting teaching materials that balance authenticity, learner-centeredness, and instructional goals. This research offers practical guidance for educators navigating the complex landscape of language teaching materials.

As always, this issue includes our regular *JALT Praxis* columns, offering practical classroom activities, professional development resources, and community updates. The *My Share* column continues to feature engaging, classroom-tested activities designed to enhance language acquisition and student participation.

Continued over



TLT Editors: Brian Strong & Greg Dalziel
TLT Japanese Language Editor: Mami Ueda

Finally, the success of a publication like *The Language Teacher* would not be possible without the dedication and hard work of numerous volunteers. My sincere thanks go to our authors, reviewers, copyeditors, proofreaders, and translators. I especially want to acknowledge and thank Rob Kerrigan, *TLT* Assistant Editor, whose meticulous coordination of the *JALT Praxis* section, amongst many other duties, is invaluable to our publication's quality and consistency. This behind-the-scenes work ensures that each issue comes together as a cohesive and valuable resource for our community.

We hope this issue inspires and enriches your teaching practice. Thank you for your continued support and readership.

— Greg Dalziel, *TLT* Co-editor

読者の皆様、こんにちは。*The Language Teacher* 7/8月号へようこそ。夏の到来に際し、日本の言語教育界における革新的で献身的な研究と教育上のアイデアをまとめてご紹介いたします。

今号のTLTには2つのFeature Articlesが掲載されています。1つ目はNoriko Kuriharaによるもので、高校生のライティング能力に対するピアレビューの影響を検証してい

ます。調査結果によると、適切に構成されたピアレビューは、教育の質を損なうことなく教師の作業負担を軽減しながら、生徒のライティングスキルを向上させる可能性があることが示されています。Kuriharaは、ピアレビューは、生徒が仲間を読み手と見なし、その過程で生徒同士が活発に交流する場合に最も効果的であると主張しています。

2つ目のFAはAnna G. Faehによるもので、英語と日本語の学習経験の浅い生徒と経験豊富な生徒の語彙構成を調査しています。McCarthyの言語連想課題に基づいて、この研究は学習者の年齢、言語能力、教育的背景に応じて語彙連想に顕著な違いがあることを明らかにし、語彙の指導と学習戦略に貴重な示唆を与えています。

Readers' Forumでは、Ekwueme Macpaul C. HirataとHakeem Adeolu Azeezが、言語教育における教材開発という重要な意思決定過程について探っています。この時宜を得た論文は、教科書の選定と適応化が教育効果を最大限に高める方法についての重要な問いに取り組んでいます。これは、コロナ禍の教育の混乱を踏まえると特に喫緊の課題です。著者らは、広範な文献に基づき、真正性、学習者中心主義、そして指導目標のバランスを取りながら教材を評価、選定、適応化するための包括的な枠組みを提供しています。この研究は、言語教材の複雑な状況を乗り越えようとする教育者にとって、実践的な指針となるでしょう。

今号には、いつものように*JALT Praxis*のコラムで、実践的な教室活動、専門能力開発リソース、コミュニティの最新情報などが掲載されています。*My Share*のコラムでは、言語習得と生徒の参加を促進するために作られた、教室で実証済みの魅力的なアクティビティを引き続き紹介しています。

最後に、*The Language Teacher*のような出版物は、多くのボランティアの献身と努力なしには成功しません。著者、査読者、編集者、校正者、そして翻訳者の皆様に心から感謝申し上げます。TLT副編集長のRob Kerrigan氏には特に深く感謝申し上げます。JALT Praxisの綿密な調整をはじめ、多くの業務を担っていただき、TLTの質と一貫性を保つ上で非常に貴重な存在となっています。こうした舞台裏での尽力のお陰で、各号は教育界にとって一貫性のある価値あるリソースとしてまとまっています。

本号が皆様の教育実践に刺激を与え、豊かなものとなることを願っております。皆様の変わらぬご支援とご愛読に感謝申し上げます。

— Greg Dalziel (*TLT*共同編集者)

The Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT)

A Nonprofit Organization

The Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) is a nonprofit professional organization dedicated to the improvement of language teaching and learning in Japan. It provides a forum for the exchange of new ideas and techniques and a means of keeping informed about developments in the rapidly changing field of second and foreign language education.

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How Does Peer Review Impact Writing Abilities of High School Students?

Noriko Kurihara

Nagoya University of Commerce and Business

Since MEXT emphasized developing writing skills in English instruction (MEXT, 2018), high school English teachers face challenges with large class size and heavy feedback workloads (Yamashita, 2023). Some adopt peer review but do not expect it to improve student writing. In fact, few empirical studies have confirmed its benefit for students' writing skills development. Research in the secondary education context is particularly scarce. This study investigated the relationship between peer review and the improvement in students' writing abilities in a Japanese EFL high school context. In addition to pre- and post-tests, audio-recorded peer review sessions and interviews were analyzed to determine which aspects of reviewing might affect the students' writing development. Results show that the frequency of interactions about specific writing aspects during peer review influenced students' performance in writing a new text. Thus, peer review helped high school students develop their writing abilities.

文科省により英語ライティング指導の強化が提唱され(MEXT, 2018)、多くの中学・高校の英語教員はクラス規模の大きさや大量のフィードバックによる指導の困難に直面している(山下, 2023)。ピア・レビューを実践している教員も、それがライティング力向上につながることは期待していない。実際、ピア・レビューのライティング力向上への影響は実証されておらず、特に中等教育での研究は乏しい。したがって、本研究では、日本のEFL中等教育におけるピア・レビューとライティング力向上の関係を検証した。事前事後テストに加え、ピア・レビュー活動を録音して書き起こし、さらにインタビューを実施して、ピア・レビューのライティング力向上に関わる側面を分析した。結果では、ライティングの特定の領域に関するやり取りの頻度と新しい英文作成の出来栄にに関連があることがわかった。すなわち、ピア・レビューはライティング力向上に寄与していたのである。

<https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTTLT49.4-1>

The new Course of Study emphasizes developing writing skills, introducing a process-oriented writing instruction in English classrooms (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology—Japan [MEXT], 2018). However, many English teachers in Japan face challenges due to large class sizes and heavy feedback workloads (Yamashita, 2023). Although some teachers adopt peer review, they often expect little improvement in students' writing skills. Research on peer review in ESL/EFL writing classrooms primarily focuses on benefits like affect and strategies (Min, 2006; Villamil & Guerrero, 2006; Yang et al., 2006). Few empirical studies have investigated peer review's impact on improv-

ing learners' writing abilities. Therefore, this study examined how the peer review and revision process contribute to developing students' writing abilities in a Japanese EFL high school classroom.

Literature Review

Studies on peer review and feedback have been extensively conducted at the tertiary level, identifying benefits in ESL/EFL contexts. Peer reviews foster idea generation in advanced ESL classrooms (Mendonça & Johnson, 1994), enhance social skills and provide scaffolding (Min, 2005), promote cognitive self-initiation (Villamil & Guerrero, 2006), and encourage autonomy (Tsui & Ng, 2000; Yang et al., 2006). Thus, peer review offers substantial benefits.

However, the impact of peer feedback on text improvement in second language (L2) contexts remains inconclusive. Some studies reported that only a small percentage of peer feedback was incorporated into revisions (Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Yang et al., 2006), with no significant improvement (Sengupta, 1998), whereas other studies observed improved writing quality in revisions (Berg, 1999; Kamimura, 2006; Min, 2006).

Although various aspects of peer review have been extensively studied, its impact on student writing performance in new texts remains underexplored (Kamimura, 2006; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). Kamimura (2006) investigated the effect of peer review on college students' performance in writing new texts, finding significant improvements in writing quality. However, because these students practiced peer review only twice, including peer feedback training, transferability of peer review remains unconfirmed. Lundstrom and Baker (2009) examined peer review's impact on university students' performance in writing new texts. Participants engaged in peer review four times, with feedback givers showing greater improvement than receivers. However, no interaction between feedback givers and receivers was observed. Thus, the impact of typical peer review remains unclear. This study investigated how specific aspects of peer review contribute to the improvement of students' writing abilities in a Japanese EFL secondary education context.

Methods

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. In what way does peer review influence the improvement of student writing abilities in EFL secondary education contexts?
2. Under what conditions does peer review contribute to the improvement of student writing abilities in EFL secondary education contexts?

Participants

The participants were 17 male and 15 female students (aged 17–18 years) enrolled in a Japanese high school, with a mean T-score of 45.0, half a standard deviation below the national mean (50) on English practice tests.

Research Design

Before the experiment, the participants provided consent after the study's purpose was explained. They then received peer review instructions, using written products from the previous year's students. They received peer feedback sheets listing feedback points, which they used to identify strengths and weaknesses in the writing and to provide comments or questions about unclear content or word meanings. The teacher then provided model feedback, explaining that its purpose was to enhance understanding of each other's writing and support revision.

The students first selected a topic and formed groups based on similar topics. They then brainstormed ideas together before writing. They wrote a 150-word essay as homework. Peer feedback was conducted in class. The students were organized into groups of four, and within these groups, they worked in pairs for feedback exchange, allowing each member to potentially receive feedback from two different peers over the course of the study. The peer reviews were conducted in Japanese to facilitate communication (Kamimura, 2006; Min, 2005; Yang et al., 2006). The sessions were audio-recorded and lasted 20 minutes. During analysis, students' remarks were translated from Japanese to English. The experiment was conducted over 12 weeks.

The impact of peer review on students' writing performance was assessed using pre- and post-tests. The students wrote a 100-word essay on a given topic in 20 minutes. After the post-test, the students were interviewed to explore their perception

of the impact of peer review. Additionally, their drafts and the revisions were analyzed to determine how they responded to peer review.

Coding of the Interaction

A Master of Arts student in an English language course and the researcher categorized the interactions into four groups. The coding system and examples are presented in the following section. To establish an analysis standard, the two coders jointly analyzed one group's peer review interactions from Day 1. The remaining interactions were coded individually and later compared. Coding discrepancies were resolved through discussion until agreement was reached.

Results

Pre- and Post-tests

The pre- and post-tests were evaluated using the TEEP Attribute Writing Scale (Weir, 1990), an analytical scoring system, to assess aspects of students' improvement following peer review. The tests were scored on seven dimensions: relevance, organization, cohesion, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Each dimension was scored from 0 (worst) to 3 (best). Table 1 presents the test results. Large effect sizes were observed for organization, relevance, and cohesion.

Peer Review Sessions

Table 1

Pre- and Post-Test Scores: Means and Standard Deviations

	Pre-test	Post-test	Effect Size (Δ)
Total	10.20 (3.37)	13.79 (3.35)	1.07
Relevance	0.69 (0.64)	1.40 (0.73)	1.11
Organization	0.60 (0.59)	1.39 (0.79)	1.34
Cohesion	0.56 (0.58)	1.44 (0.69)	1.52
Vocabulary	1.57 (1.07)	2.17 (0.79)	0.56
Grammar	1.33 (0.78)	1.73 (0.75)	0.51
Mechanics	2.74 (0.60)	2.81 (0.37)	0.12
Punctuation	2.83 (0.38)	2.79 (0.53)	-0.11

Note. Adapted from N. Kurihara (2017). Significant difference between the pre- and post-tests: $p < 0.05$ (**bold**), $p < 0.01$ in (**bold italics**)

Students participated in four peer review sessions. All utterances were transcribed and coded into four categories: global, local, global/local, and other. The global category comprised utterances about relevance, organization, and cohesion. The local category included vocabulary, grammar, mechanics, and spelling. Utterances about word or phrase meanings were classified as “local,” while those at the sentence level were classified “global.” The “global/local” category included text-related utterances that could not be distinctly classified as global or local. Short utterances (e.g., “Yes” or “No”) were categorized with the preceding utterances, as they responded to the same subject. Utterances addressing multiple areas were categorized and counted for each area. In the following example, local utterances are underlined, global utterances are italicized, global/local utterances are underlined and italicized, and non-text-related utterances are in standard font. The speakers are labeled A, B, C, and D, and the utterances are numbered from 1 to 26. (Students’ utterances were translated into English.)

- A1: Okay, I’ll go first. *Well, what do you mean by “Let’s competition these?”*
- B2: *I think I meant “Shall we compare these?”*
- A3: *Is this a question?*
- B4: *I mean to suggest comparing them to find which is better.*
- A5: *I see. What do you mean by “fat contents?”*
- B6: *It means that fast food contains a lot of “fat.”*
- A7: *What is “fat”?*
- B8: *I didn’t know how to express this ... something like “the material of fat.”*
- A9: *Okay. What does “Will you be so?” mean then?*
- C10: *I think he means to say, “You are the same way, aren’t you?” Something like “We both like hamburgers and potatoes,” right?*
- B11: *Yes, exactly.*
- A12: *What does this word mean? [A is looking it up in a dictionary.]*
- B13: *It means “immediately.”*
- C14: *Was it difficult to understand?*
- A15: *“Mother taste” means “the taste of the dish your mother cooks,” right?*
- B16: *Yes. It means the taste your mother hands down to the next generation.*
- A17: *Oh, I see, “mother taste” means “the taste your mother makes.” I got it.*
- B18: *It’s your turn.*
- C19: *No, no. I already talked. I did.*

B20: *You wrote, “I think will be a reason...” Well, you also wrote “there are two reasons.”*

A21: *Sorry. It’s my mistake.*

B22: *You wrote “there are two reasons” (at the beginning), didn’t you?*

A23: *Sorry, I made a mistake.*

B24: *Exactly. You wrote three reasons in total.*

D25: *He increased the number of reasons halfway through.*

B26: *Besides, the second reason... about the ingredients... you first wrote about different foods, such as vegetables and fish, but then changed the topic to seasonings, such as soy sauce and miso. Finally, you wrote you like strong flavors and that flavors change in each region... I think you changed the point.*

The interactions primarily occurred between Students A and B, who worked as a pair in turn. However, as both belonged to the same group, other members (C and D), also engaged in tasks, occasionally distracted or interrupted them. The dialogue began with an utterance containing two areas: “OK, I’ll go first,” (task-related, categorized as “other”) and sentence-level comment (categorized as “global”). Utterances B2 to A5 address global areas. Utterances A5 to A9, focusing on word and phrase meanings, were classified as “local.” Utterances A9 through B11, addressing sentence-level issues, were categorized as “global.” Then C14 interrupted the A12–B13 interaction about word meaning. This utterance was classified as “local,” aligning with the preceding conversation, though the reviewing pair ignored it. Following local interactions (A15, B16, A17), B18 playfully urged C to review, but C19 declined. These task-related interactions, unrelated to the writing were categorized as “other.” B20 resumed reviewing, but his utterance was ambiguous, unclear whether it addressed a grammatical error (“I think will be a reason”) or a content contradiction (“there are two reasons”). However, B24 later clarified his focus on content and organization, but A’s repeated apologies (A21, A23), suggest a lack of understanding. Thus, utterances B20 through A23 were categorized as “global/local.” Then, D25 interrupted the conversation. Utterance B26 addressed global areas.

Relationship Between Peer Review and Essay Score Improvement

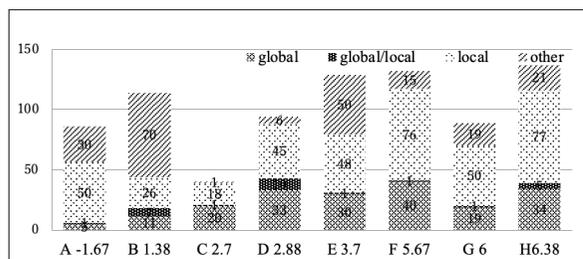
To examine the relationship between peer review and students’ essay score improvement, the researcher compared the frequency of interactions across writing areas with test score gains. Figure 1 shows the frequency of utterances by category

(global, local, global/local, other) and the mean score differences between the pre- and post-tests of each group. Groups A to H were labeled based on the magnitude of the mean score differences. Group A exhibited the least improvement (-1.67), while Group H showed the greatest (+6.38).

The relationship between utterance types and improvements in student essay scores was assessed using Pearson's product-moment correlation. The correlation coefficients for total utterances, local utterances, and global/local utterances were small ($r = 0.41$, $r = 0.54$, and $r = 0.07$, respectively). However, the correlation coefficient for global utterances was high ($r = 0.76$), suggesting a strong association with group improvement levels. Thus, students' writing performance improvements were likely associated with the frequency of global areas interactions during peer review sessions.

Figure 1

Frequency of Utterances by Category and Mean Score Differences



Peer Reviewing and Revision

The peer review interactions, student interview responses, and drafts before and after the peer review were analyzed to determine how peer review impacted students' writing abilities. This analysis revealed three distinct types of practices and attitudes. The first type showed moderate post-test improvement, common interview responses, and positive attitudes toward peer review despite skepticism about peer comments. The second type exhibited average post-test improvement and strong skepticism of peer comments, although attitudes toward peer review remained somewhat positive. The third type dismissed the value of peer review, showing no post-test improvement.

Type 1: Yukio exemplifies this type, with Cases 1–4 illustrating how peer review influenced writing practice and learning.

Case 1: Peer comments as a prompt to reconsideration

In the third peer review session, Yukio's peer asked, "What do you mean by this sentence, 'Let's comparison these?'" Yukio clarified that he intended to compare the two items and revised the sentence to "Let's compare these." He changed the noun "comparison" to the verb "compare." Although his peer did not highlight the grammatical mistake, the question prompted Yukio to identify and correct it independently. In the interview, Yukio noted that he did not always adopt peer suggestions because of partial skepticism. However, he considered his peers' comments, as they facilitated self-reflection. He explained that interpreting peer comments deepened his text analysis, often leading to revised wording.

Case 2: Peer comments for idea clarification

When a peer found the expression "Will you be so?" unclear, they asked Yukio for clarification. Before Yukio responded, another peer interjected, stating, "I think he means, ... 'We both like hamburgers and potatoes.'" Yukio confirmed this. He then revised his text, translating the peer's Japanese suggestion into English. Thus, peer interaction clarified ideas and helped students identify intended expressions.

Case 3: Peer feedback applied to self-correction

When a peer suggested including examples in his argument, Yukio incorporated this in his revision. The original draft stated, "First, Japanese food is healthy. But the fast foods include a lot of fat content." In his revision, he wrote, "First, I think that Japanese food is healthy. For example, Japanese food seasoned lightly with soy sauce. But fast food include a lot of fat." It is still grammatically inaccurate. However, this revision reflects attention to cohesion, as he added an example per the peer's suggestion and included a discourse marker. Yukio reported that during peer review, he carefully read his peers' writing to understand their main ideas. As a result, he became more aware of the importance of cohesiveness. Thus, he frequently provided feedback on sentence cohesion. Similarly, he aimed to write a cohesive text, applying feedback given to peers to his own revisions. Thus, Yukio valued peer review for fostering self-correction in writing.

Type 2: Mayu was not a typical learner in this group, but she showed one type of learning attitude and practice clearly.

Case 4: No incorporation of peer suggestions

Mayu, a high achiever in her class, was confident in her writing ability. Her peers viewed Mayu as a skilled writer. Thus, during peer review sessions, Mayu's peers typically praised her text, stating, "I found nothing to correct in this text." However, on one occasion, a peer suggested reducing the frequent use of "I," and replacing the second mention of "globalization" with "it." Mayu disregarded both suggestions. In the interview, she stated that she could write essays effectively without peer review. Thus, she relied more on herself than on her peer's comments.

Case 5: Critical self-reflection

Mayu revised her text after peer review, correcting missing verbs overlooked by peers. She wrote "I think elementary school should English education..." and "If you can English, there are a lot of..." In the revision, Mayu wrote a verb in each of these sentences: "I think elementary school should teach English education ..." and "If you can speak and write English, there are a lot of" The revised text still required refinement, but she improved it to some extent. In the interview, she explained, "Even though I thought my text was perfect, after peer review sessions, I always noticed my mistakes." Peer review enabled critical self-reflection on her writing. She also noted that, viewing peers as her audience, she used simpler English vocabulary to ensure clarity. Although her revisions primarily stemmed from self-reflection, peer review enhanced her revision practices. Thus, peer review supported Mayu's writing skills development.

Type 3: Hiromi and her peers represent negative attitudes toward peer review, and their practice strongly correlated with their writing improvement level.

Case 6: Little value on peer review

Hiromi, relatively less proficient in English, appeared to enjoy writing English texts. In the interview, she described peer review as a nuisance. Despite its being conducted in Japanese, she said, "My peer's comments made no sense to me." Her peers only questioned word meanings in her writing, offering no positive feedback. Although Hiromi wrote longer texts with more complex expressions, her peers' revisions showed minimal changes from prior drafts. Audio-recorded data further showed repeated use of phrases like "What does this mean?" and "Oh, I see." Evidently, his peers approached peer review with little seriousness. As a result, Hiromi disregarded peer comments and revised

her text independently. After the third peer review session, she wrote an entirely new text rather than revising the prior draft. Lacking an engaged audience and relying solely on herself, she continued writing English texts independently. Consequently, her post-test performance dropped by 7 points. Her group was the only one with a reduced mean post-test score. Thus, peer review did not enhance Hiromi's or her peers' writing abilities.

Limitations

Because of the small sample size, the findings of this study have limited generalizability. However, this study found that, despite the participants' proficiency levels' being below the national average, peer review could enhance their writing skills. This finding is important, as it may help reduce teachers' feedback workload to some extent. Future studies should investigate how a larger, more diverse sample of students with varying proficiency levels engages in peer review and whether their writing skills improve.

Conclusions

The findings of this study demonstrate that peer review impacted the writing abilities of high school students. Participants' writing performance significantly improved, particularly in global areas (organization, relevance, cohesion), consistent with Lundstrom and Baker (2009). This study further examined peer review interaction and found that student interactions fostered self-reflection and self-correction. Analysis of students' interactions and interview data showed that reviewers strove to understand writers' intentions, focusing on appropriate word choice and logical organization. For peer review interactions to enhance students' writing skills development, students' attitudes toward peer review were paramount. Students who viewed peers as their audience were motivated to improve their writing, and their skepticism of peers' comments fostered self-reflection and self-correction, enhancing their writing abilities. Peer relationships and students' attitudes toward peer review significantly influence students' gains. Thus, teachers' careful monitoring and timely intervention may be essential for successful peer review implementation.

Note

1. Students' names are pseudonyms.

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Noriko Kurihara is a professor in the Department of International Studies at Nagoya University of Commerce and Business. She has long years of experience teaching at senior high school, where she incorporated a process-oriented approach for more than a decade, focusing on the influence of peer review on student writing skills development. Her research interests are collaborative learning, peer review, autonomy, and critical thinking.



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Word Associations of Inexperienced and Experienced Learners of English and Japanese: Toward a Fuller Understanding of Lexical Storage and Retrieval in Second Language Learning and Teaching

Anna G. Faeh

Utsunomiya University

The present research uses McCarthy's (1990) word association task (WAT) to examine how English and Japanese speakers organize words in their mental lexicons, both in their first language (L1) and second language (L2). Drawing on word association (WA) research and some original classifications, this study categorizes 720 associations of 18 participants into lexical categories, followed by examination of WA behavior across languages and L2 ability levels. The results revealed that younger native English speakers' associations were more meaning based in both their L1 and limited L2, while younger native Japanese speakers inexperienced in English gave more position-based associations in both languages. Older, L2-experienced participants' associations were more balanced but overall more position based. These trends diverge from WA research that has been limited to English WATs and student participants, prompting discussion of L2 influence on older participants' lexical relations, as well as the influence of significantly different methods of L1 vocabulary instruction in English versus Japanese educational environments.

本論は、McCarthy(1990)の単語連想課題(WAT)を用いて、英語話者と日本語話者が、第一言語(L1)と第二言語(L2)の両方において、どのように心的辞書に単語を整理しているかを明らかにする。この研究では、単語連想(WA)研究といくつかの独自の分類をもとに、18名の参加者の720の連想単語を語彙カテゴリーに分類し、その後、言語とL2の能力レベルを横断してWAの行動を検討した。その結果、英語を母語とする若年者の連想は、母語でも限られたL2でも意味ベースであるのに対し、日本語の母語話者で英語の経験が少ない若年参加者の連想は、どちらの言語でも位置ベースであることが明らかになった。年配でL2経験が豊富な参加者の連想はよりバランスが取れていたが、全体的には位置ベースであった。これらの傾向は、英語WATや学生参加者に限定されたWA研究とは異なるものである。そして、年配参加者の語彙間の関係性に対するL2の影響や、英語と日本語の教育環境におけるL1語彙指導方法の有意な違いの影響についての議論を促すものである。

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When responding to the word “spring” with the next word that comes to mind in a word association (WA) exercise, most English speakers provide words such as “fall”, “flowers”, or “season” (De Deyne et al., 2018). Interaction with locals in Japan points to the association of *haru* (“spring”) with *sakura* (“cherry blossoms”), an association which may gain prominence in native Japanese speakers' first language (L1) lexical development due to their custom of *hanami*, or “cherry blossom viewing”, each spring. Associations such as “spring” → “fall” and “spring” → “cherry blossoms” provide a glimpse into the organization of words in language users' minds. While native speakers' lexical organization is an interesting study in itself, language teachers may naturally be interested in how second language (L2) learners organize their more limited L2 lexicon and how this organization may connect to vocabulary learning and teaching. This study employs the word association task (WAT) format and evaluation points outlined in McCarthy (1990), as well as two additional evaluation points, to examine the word associations made by both L1 Japanese learners of English and L1 English learners of Japanese.

Lexical Relations in the Mental Lexicon

McCarthy (1990) utilizes multiple metaphors when describing the mental lexicon and the tens of thousands of words it contains; as he depicts it, not only is the mental lexicon a vast library of catalogued words and a computer that can process those words in a split second, but it is also a dictionary full of descriptions of word class, pronunciation, and meaning; a thesaurus of related words; and an encyclopedia in which “words carry with them crucial links with...historical, perceptual, and social knowledge” (p. 35). These metaphors only partly capture the complexity of the mental lexicon,

as McCarthy himself notes, but they reveal something significant, namely that there is incredible *organization* underlying the processing, storage, and retrieval of words in the mind. This reality is illustrated by the familiar “tip-of-the-tongue” phenomenon, in which a speaker cannot think of a word and asks her interlocutor for help in retrieving it. She may ask, for instance, “What’s that word that means you really can’t believe something? But it’s an adjective. Like unbelievable, but it starts with ‘im’ or ‘in’...You know, from Princess Bride? I keep thinking of ‘incorrigible,’ but that’s not right...” Her interlocutor, his mind naturally equipped with dictionary-like knowledge of meaning and word class, encyclopedic knowledge of cult classics, and phonological and orthographic knowledge of similarly shaped words, may then quite easily reply, “Inconceivable.”

“Unbelievable” → “inconceivable”, “spring” → “fall”, “sleep” → “deprivation”, and → “hand”, “shy” → “timid”, and thousands of associations like these are readily made in the mental lexicon. Before the implications of these relations can be explored, however, it is necessary to lay the groundwork of how connections between words are classified. Classification schemes of lexical relations in WA vary in specificity, but the influence of three main categories—paradigmatic (also called meaning-based), syntagmatic (position-based), and clang (form-based)—has persisted, with an “other” category typically included also (see Fitzpatrick & Thwaites, 2020, for a summary of WA schemes). Paradigmatic relations are those reflecting similarity, difference, and part-whole relationships between words, typically in the same word class, and can be viewed broadly as relations within taxonomies of words; “spring” → “fall” and “shy” → “timid” above are two examples. Syntagmatic relations are sequential textual relations one might expect to see within a sentence, particularly in a phrase, clause, or collocation, such as “sleep” → “deprivation”. Clang relations are those stemming from phonological or orthographic similarities, such as “and” → “hand”. Relations marked “other” in WA research generally refer to blank responses, responses with no discernible link, or repetitions of cue words.

Categorization WA research utilizing the above classifications has largely sought to elucidate language learners’ lexical storage and retrieval as it compares to that of native speakers. For native English speakers, many studies have shown paradigmatic responses to be most common (Fitzpatrick, 2006; Jiang & Zhang, 2019; Wolter, 2001; Zareva, 2007); others have shown that, depending on the word class (Nissen & Henriksen, 2006) and

frequency (Namei, 2004) of cue words, syntagmatic responses can predominate. McCarthy (1990) hypothesizes that lower level L2 learners, “for a long time lack[ing] the ability to make instantaneous collocational associations...may be more inclined to associate L2 words by sound similarities” (p. 40). However, clang responses were the least common for L1 and L2 participants in the above literature. Even in studies where clang responses were more common in L2 learners’ word associations than in those of native speakers (particularly in instances where cue words were not wellknown to participants), such responses were still the least prominent response type (Jiang & Zhang, 2019; Namei, 2004; Soderman, 1993; Wolter, 2001).

Researching Word Associations in a Japanese/English Context

Bearing the trends in WA research in mind, the present study aims to use WAT data to explore the evaluation points listed in McCarthy (1990, p. 152):

1. At lower levels, do phonological similarities play an important role?
2. Does such a word association test indicate anything about how learners make mental links between words they have learned?
3. Do the results bear out the characteristic types of responses (discussed above)?

As the above studies found clang responses to be the least prominent response type even for L2 learners, an additional research question explored here is 1a) Does the type of test administration (verbal cues/textual cues) impact the prevalence of phonological responses? Furthermore, because data in English is much more abundant than other language data, a fact that may obscure any WAT trends stemming from L1 characteristics rather than L2 knowledge (Fitzpatrick, 2007), both Japanese and English were used in this study, and a final research question (2A) was added: Are learners’ response patterns consistent across their L1 and L2?

The participants in the present study were Japanese, British, and American students, coworkers, and friends of the researcher. The L1 Japanese learners of English ($n = 10$) were aged 15 to 62 years old. The L1 English learners of Japanese ($n = 8$) were aged 23 to 60. The pool of participants was larger initially, but the decision to administer a second set of WATs meant that only those who could take both sets were included in the data for consistency. Proficiency levels in both groups varied significantly, largely in correspondence to years of experi-

ence with the L2. Personal interaction with each participant in their L2 enabled me to divide both the Japanese and the English groups in half, under two broad categories of generally lower and higher ability. These groups are respectively referred to in this study as *inexperienced learners* (L1 English A and L1 Japanese A, with less than four years of L2 study and/or real-life L2 exposure) and *experienced learners* (L1 English B and L1 Japanese B, with 10 or more years of study or exposure).

Creating and Administering the WATs

McCarthy (1990) provides several guidelines for cue word selection. Briefly, selections should include:

- at least one function word
- at least one concrete item
- at least one infrequent word
- a variety of word classes (p. 152).

Although McCarthy recommends using six to eight words for the task, 10 cue words were chosen to test a broader range of words and word classes. Cue words selected for the first English/Japanese set of WATs (EWAT1 and JWAT1) and their characteristics are detailed in Appendix 1A. Because of the presence of some very inexperienced L2 learners, cues selected for the first set of WATs consisted of more basic (and thus quite frequent) vocabulary in each language, but an attempt was made to balance high-frequency words in a class with one of lower frequency when more than one word from that class was used. For example, EWAT1 contains the high-frequency “go” and the comparatively infrequent “sleep”. A second set of WATs with overall much lower frequency cue words was also administered. (The reasoning for this will be discussed later.) The two sets of 10 words² used in the second set of WATs (EWAT2 and JWAT2) are detailed in Appendix 1B.

The cues appeared in a random order in the WATs given to participants (Appendix 2), which were administered in two sessions at least a week apart. Across the two sessions, each participant completed one set of WATs by reading cue words (*textual*) and one set by listening to cue words (*verbal*). The latter is in keeping with McCarthy’s task design, while the former is more typical of WA research, a possible contributing factor to why fewer clang responses are seen in the literature than McCarthy hypothesized. The participants both read and listened to instructions for the task in Japanese or English. The WATs in the appendices being cut into half-sheets to separate the English and Japanese tasks, each

session involved completing a WAT in both languages; the participants were tested in their native language first, followed by their L2. Administration of each WAT was followed by a short interview to clarify responses, but follow-up interviews were not possible in some cases (one L1 English and one L1 Japanese on the first set of WATs and one L1 English and three L1 Japanese on the second set).

Data Entry and Categorization

A total of 720 responses, including one blank response, were recorded from the two sets of WATs. These were categorized according to the scheme detailed in Table 1 below, which includes examples from participants (see Appendix 3 for all responses and categorizations). Though his evaluation points will be used in analyses, McCarthy’s (1990) does not provide a detailed classification scheme for word relations, listing only coordination, collocation, superordination, and synonymy as response types likely to occur in WATs (pp. 39–40). Thus, the schemes used in Fitzpatrick (2006, 2007), which subsume McCarthy’s list, have been preferred, with the addition of *antonym* as a unique sub-category drawing on Carter’s (1998) descriptions of antonymy, as well as my own delineation of *lexical collocations* that represent single units of meaning and *syntactic collocations* that occur within phrases, clauses, etc. Responses resulting from associations with a more uncommon usage of a polysemous word (e.g., “fly” → “pest” rather than “fly” → “airplane”) were categorized according to the association being made. Responses resulting from misunderstanding a homophonous word in verbally administered WATs (e.g., “we” → “Nintendo”) were categorized as *other*, as the association would not have been made if the orthographic form had been visible to participants.

Responses marked with an asterisk in Table 1 exemplify Meara’s (1983) comments that distinguishing between paradigmatic and syntagmatic responses can be “very difficult to work in practice, especially when you cannot refer back to the testee for elucidation” (p. 30). Only post-task discussion confirmed that “English” → “British”, for instance, was a lexical set relationship referring to English (substitute British) people, when it could have been a collocational relationship, that is, British English as opposed to American English. The reverse is true for “theater” → “movie”, in which both words are of the same class, but the consecutive yx collocation forming “movie theater” was prominent. Even though interviews helped in these instances, it should be noted that participants often could not explain exactly why spontaneous responses were associated with cue words in their minds. Further-

Table 1

Classification Scheme for Categorizing WAT Responses

Main Category	Sub-category	Participant Examples
paradigmatic (meaning-based)	synonym (defining or context-specific)	“shy” → “timid”; “and” → “plus”
	antonym (gradable, complementary, converse)	“cold” → “hot”; “sleep” → “awake”; “listen” → “speak”
	lexical set (meronym, (co-)hyponym, superordinate)	“desk” → “office”; * “English” → “British”; “come” → “return”
syntagmatic (position-based)	conceptual link (strong conceptual, loose conceptual, encyclopedic)	“summer” → “beach”; “cold” → “blue”; “mirror” → “makeup”
	lexical collocation (consecutive xy/yx lexical item, compound)	“spider” → “man”; * “theater” → “movie”; “go” → “home”
	syntactic collocation (naturally co-occurring within phrase, clause, etc.)	“English” → “fun”; “always” → “school”; “wash” → “laundry”; * “fly” → “sky”
clang (form-based)	other collocation (title, idiom, lyric)	“cloudy” → “meatballs”
	change of affix (conjugate, plural)	“go” → “gone”; “come” → “coming”
	similar form (orthographic, phonological)	“we” → “week”; “at” → “it”
other (erratic)	blank, repetition, no discernable link, mistake (homonym, misreading)	“go” → “relief”; “theater” → “girl”

more, for an association like “fly” → “sky”, participants would supply explanations such as “You know, ‘fly in the sky,’” feeling like the association is natural and obvious. Unfortunately, categorization based on such a response is not so straightforward, as an argument could be made for a connection based on meaning, position, or form. Such categorization difficulties are noted in WA research (Fitzpatrick, 2006; Nissen & Henriksen, 2006), and there would certainly be points of disagreement between how I and other WA researchers have delineated WA relations.

Evaluation of the Results

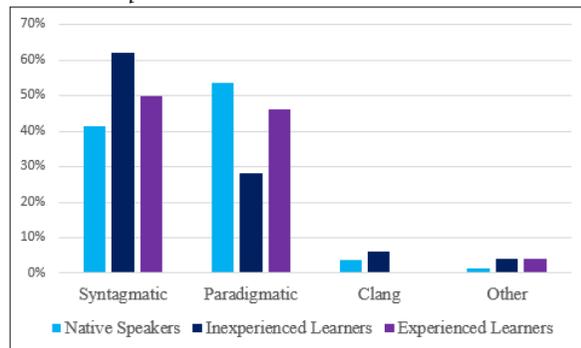
Categorization issues notwithstanding, the fact that all responses were categorized in the same way here provides the internal consistency necessary for applying the evaluation points introduced above. This consistency also means that despite the small pool of participants, comparisons between groups may reveal trends worth further exploration. To briefly rephrase, the questions to be examined are: 1) whether inexperienced learners produce more clang responses and 1a) if verbal versus textual administra-

tion of cue words affects this; 2) what the tasks reveal about learners’ mental links and 2a) whether these links are consistent across tasks/languages; and 3) whether responses align with expected relations.

Inexperienced Learners’ Responses

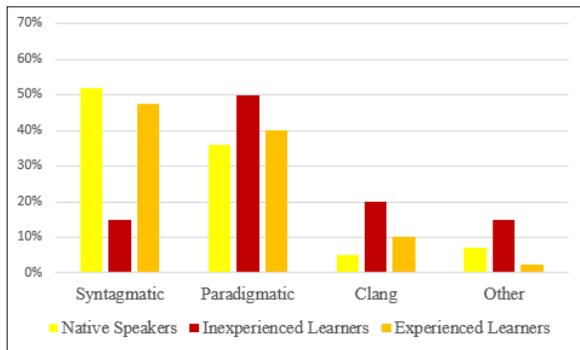
The response patterns for the first set of WATs are detailed in Figures 1 and 2 below.

Figure 1
EWAT1 Response Patterns



The incidence of clang responses was minimal for inexperienced L1 Japanese learners of English ($n = 5$) on EWAT1. Only three out of 50 responses (6%) were clang responses. However, no clang responses were provided by experienced learners. Of clang responses, two were provided by participants taking a textual WAT and one by a participant taking a verbal WAT, indicating that oral delivery did not elicit more clang responses.

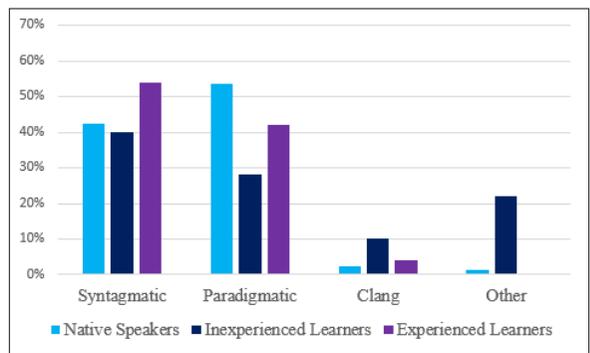
Figure 2
JWAT1 Response Patterns



Clang responses were more prevalent in inexperienced L1 English speakers' ($n = 4$) JWAT1 results, comprising 8 out of 40 total responses (20%). As with the L1 Japanese group, however, participants' clang responses were unaffected by verbal versus textual test administration. Of their clang responses, half were a change of affix, such as "kuru" → "kimasu (come)" → "(will) come". This is worth noting because Japanese verbs are highly inflected, and conjugation plays a significant role in Japanese. In many instances in which verbs are modalized in English—"go" becomes "can go, won't go, let's go"—they are inflected in Japanese—respectively, "iku" becomes "ikeru", "ikanai", and "ikou". Thus, lower-level learners of Japanese may rely on learned grammar rather than just form in their clang responses, slightly contrary to what McCarthy suggests.

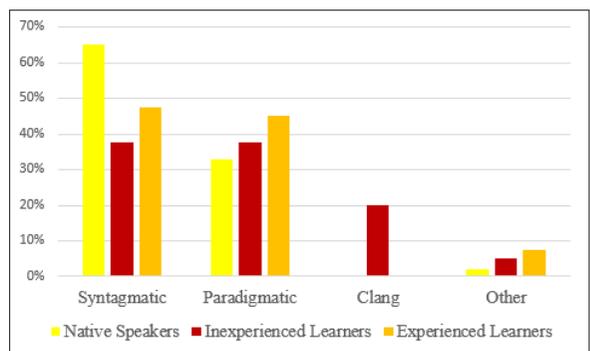
For this reason, and because the results of EWAT1 including only one blank response and few clang responses in the L1 Japanese group, a second set of WATs containing overall lower frequency words, more likely to be unfamiliar or unknown to learners, was administered in order to better evaluate whether inexperienced learners rely more on form similarities. Figures 3 and 4 below summarize the results.

Figure 3
EWAT2 Response Patterns



A paired-samples t-test analysis of EWAT2 showed a nonsignificant increase in clang responses among the inexperienced learner group, rising from 6% to 10% ($p = .59$). What did increase significantly was the percentage of "other" responses, from 4% to 22% ($p = .02$). Although these results should be viewed with caution because of the very small sample size, it is interesting that students, who were encouraged to respond even if they did not know a word, often fell back on basic English they had learned (e.g., "theater" → "study", "that" → "yay!", "soon" → "apple") instead of responding to unknown words based on form similarities.

Figure 4
JWAT2 Response Patterns



For L1 English participants' results on JWAT2, inexperienced learners' frequency of clang responses, which included three changes of affix, did not increase; experienced learners gave no clang responses.

Learners' Mental Links

While inexperienced learners of Japanese and English gave more clang associations than experienced learners, it is clear from the figures above that responses for all groups fell mainly in the syntagmatic and paradigmatic response categories. Within these main response types, however, further analysis revealed interesting differences worth exploration. Separating lower and higher L2 groups in their L1 as well and consolidating results of both English WATs and both Japanese WATs for a representative dataset for all participants yielded the results in Figures 5 and 6 below. L1 English A and L1 Japanese A represent the less experienced L2 learners and overall younger groups, whereas L1 English B and L1 Japanese B represent the more experienced L2 learners and overall older groups.

Figure 5
English Response Patterns Across Four Groups

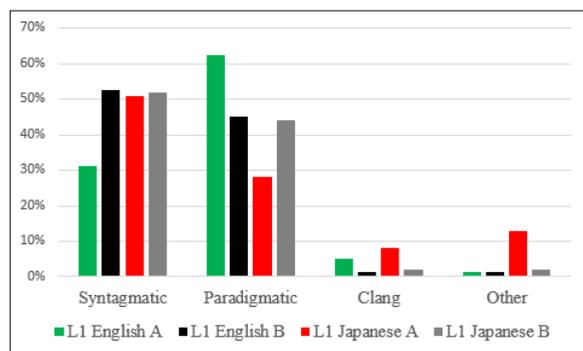
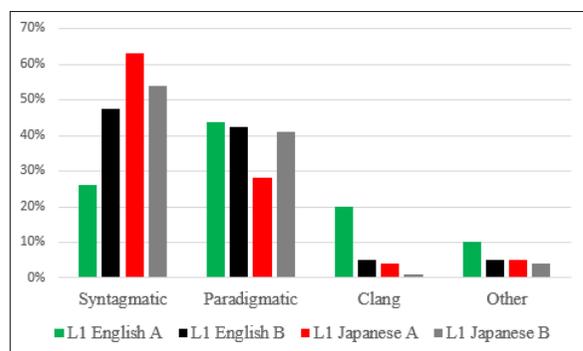


Figure 6
Japanese Response Patterns Across Four Groups



In their first and second language results, the less experienced participants are almost mirror images of one another. L1 English A's responses to the English tasks were predominantly paradigmatic (62.5%), with syntagmatic responses coming second (31.25%). Increased clang and "other" responses not-

withstanding, this preference remained in their L2, with 43.75% of responses paradigmatic and 26.25% of responses syntagmatic. Conversely, L1 Japanese A's responses in Japanese were 63% syntagmatic and only 28% paradigmatic, and in their English responses these percentages were 51% and 28%, respectively. Thus, the results here indicate that inexperienced learners are making mental links in their L2 similarly to how they connect words in their L1: English speakers primarily based on meaning-related groups, and Japanese speakers primarily based on connections within strings of language.

In the response patterns of L1 English B ($n = 4$) and L1 Japanese B ($n = 5$), the experienced L2 learners and overall older groups, learners' paradigmatic/syntagmatic response preferences were less marked. Interestingly, though, both groups' preferences trended the same way across languages—toward syntagmatic responses, thus prompting the question of whether the L1 English B group, three of whom have lived in Japan for at least a decade with Japanese spouses, have been influenced by their L2 surroundings enough to alter their L1 word association behavior or whether the same preferences would have been present regardless, as happens with some native speakers (Fitzpatrick, 2007). Unfortunately, exploring this hypothesis is difficult because of the limited sample size, but comparisons with L1 English A point to the possibility that extended exposure to Japanese has altered advanced learners' mental links in both their L1 and their L2. L1 Japanese B also hints at the possibility of L2 influences, as their response preferences were less distinct than L1 Japanese A.

Specific Relations: Emergent Patterns

Though participant responses fell mainly in the categories of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations, the above data do not give a detailed picture of the types of meaning-based and position-based connections participants made. Categorizing results further should reveal whether participants responded with the types of relations McCarthy's final evaluation point predicts. Applying the categorization scheme detailed earlier, all groups' paradigmatic responses in both languages yielded the results in Figures 7 and 8 below.

For the L1 English A group, lexical set relations—McCarthy's coordination (co-hyponyms) and superordination, as well as meronyms and hyponyms—were the most common in English and Japanese, followed by relations of antonymy. In English, lexical set relations were also the most common paradigmatic relations for L1 English B and L1

Japanese A groups, but second to these relations were conceptual links; for L1 Japanese B, conceptual links were slightly more prevalent than lexical set relations. This tendency toward conceptual associations was more pronounced in the Japanese tasks, accounting for the majority of L1 English B, L1 Japanese A, and L1 Japanese B's paradigmatic responses in Japanese, followed by lexical set relations. Just a few examples of conceptual associations made in Japanese include "but" → "negative, mirror" → "face, rabbit" → "carrot, and this (n.)" → "goods/merchandise". Thus, in addition to a tendency toward syntagmatic responses that is uncommon in WA research, these three groups' paradigmatic results in Japanese also deviate somewhat from the relations that McCarthy would expect.

Figure 7

Paradigmatic Relations in EWATs

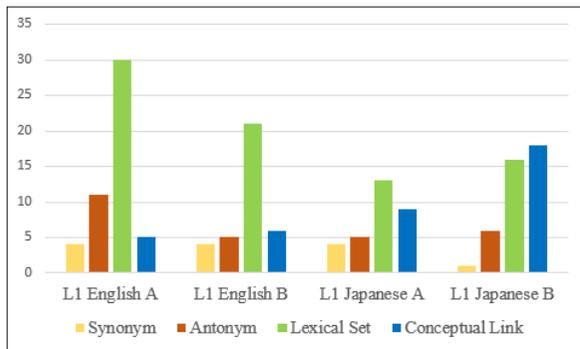
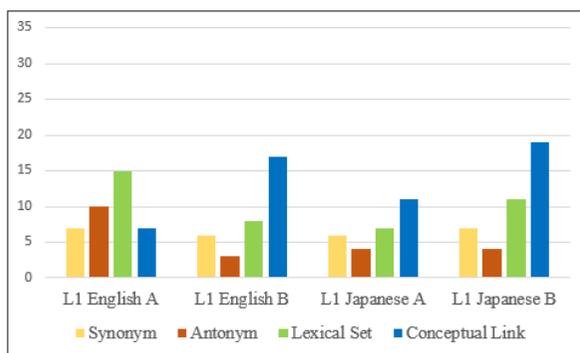


Figure 8

Paradigmatic Relations in JWATs



As for learners' syntagmatic responses, McCarthy (1990) simply provides collocation as a type of common response, but his examples of "butterfly" → "net", "bright" → "red", and "salt" → "water" (pg. 40) are more typical of lexical collocations according to the scheme used here, as opposed to syntactic collocations. As is evident in Figures 9 and 10, however,

syntagmatic collocations were more common for all groups in both languages.

Figure 9

Syntagmatic Relations in EWATs

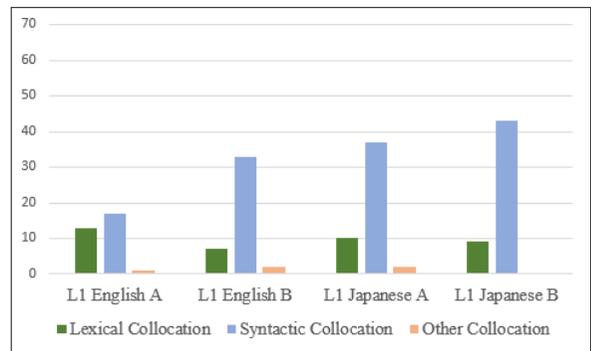
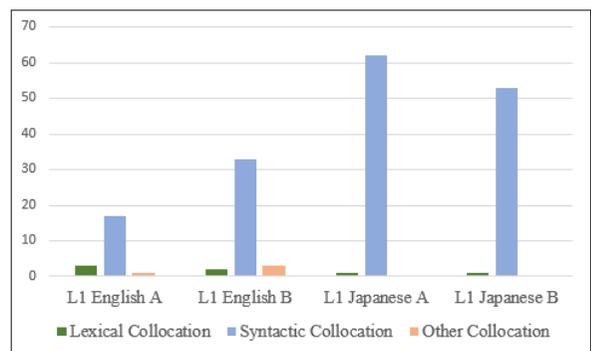


Figure 10

Syntagmatic Relations in JWATs



Examples from EWATs include "go" → "Hawaii, interesting" → "story, and" → "you, sleep" → "can't, and at" → "11:00. Examples from JWATs include "come" → "friend/s, beautiful" → "heart, language" → "speak, always" → "happy, and this" → "desk". Had the cue words contained more nouns, syntactic collocations would likely have been less prevalent (Li & Wang, 2016; Nissen & Henriksen, 2006), but it may be worth considering what effects language or cue word variety have on participants' lexical versus syntactic responses. It is clear, for instance, that Japanese elicited a large number of syntactic responses, especially for the younger Japanese group (62% of their total responses in Japanese were syntactic collocations).

Implications for EFL in Japan

To summarize, the results of the WATs indicate the following: 1) slightly increased clang responses

at lower levels, but ‘other’ responses to unknown words prominent for L1 Japanese participants; 1a) a nonsignificant impact of verbal versus textual test administration on clang responses; 2) a tendency toward paradigmatic responses for inexperienced learners of Japanese, toward syntagmatic responses for inexperienced learners of English, and less marked preferences in the experienced groups; 2a) overall consistent response patterns across speakers’ L1 and L2; 3) responses aligning with expected relations for younger L1 English speakers and diverging for younger L1 Japanese speakers.

These results could have implications for EFL in a Japanese context, perhaps the most significant of which relates to Japanese students’ tendency toward syntagmatic responses, in direct contrast to their young L1 English counterparts. Although it is possible that the nature of each language affects response patterns, as is suggested by shifts in preference in experienced learners, another possibility lies in how English and Japanese are taught to native speakers. Vocabulary learning in the U.S. consists of learning lists of words and their many (paradigmatic) parts—definitions, word class, synonyms, and antonyms—and how they are used. According to native Japanese coworkers interviewed after all the data were compiled, Japanese vocabulary is mainly learned through various readings, throughout which unknown words are looked up in a Japanese dictionary consisting only of definitions and example sentences/phrases with blanks into which the words would fit in usage. Both types of learning seem to correspond with the younger L1 English and L1 Japanese groups’ response patterns, indicating the possibility that the shift away from such distinct preferences in experienced L2 learner groups could actually be a reflection of their distance from days in the classroom.

This raises the question of what method might help Japanese students learn English vocabulary most effectively. Should English vocabulary be taught the “English way”, “Japanese way”, or by some other method? While not representative, anecdotal evidence suggests that teachers in Japan often teach vocabulary using L2 word lists with L1 translations. Given the way Japanese students are accustomed to learning vocabulary in their native language, however, coupled with the importance of learning useful language “chunks”, or lexical phrases (see Nattinger & DeCarrico (1992) for an in-depth examination), it may be worthwhile for English teachers in Japan to consider teaching English vocabulary within phrases, clauses, and sentences—in other words, syntagmatically. This suggestion can only be made cautiously in light of the factors

limiting this study, namely, response categorization being completed by only myself (potentially skewing results) and small participant samples (making any claims of significant group differences subject to criticism). However, further investigations into the impact of years away from school and/or time spent living in an L2 environment on older participants’ WA behavior, the impact of L1 vocabulary learning methods on L2 WA behavior, and the learning gains for Japanese students, if any, of learning English vocabulary syntagmatically, would be welcome in light of the results presented here.

Conclusion

This study has used McCarthy’s evaluation points to examine the WA behavior of both inexperienced and experienced L1 English learners of Japanese and L1 Japanese learners of English. First, words from a variety of word classes and with varying frequencies were selected for word association tasks in both English and Japanese. These WATs were then administered to the participants, and the responses were categorized by association type and analyzed across languages. The limitations of a small pool of participants notwithstanding, the results indicated that clang responses were not as prevalent for even inexperienced learners as other types of relations. For the younger L1 English group, paradigmatic relations, particularly of lexical sets and antonymy, were most prominent across their L1 and L2. For the other three groups and especially the younger L1 Japanese group, syntagmatic responses, particularly syntactic collocations, were most prominent. These tendencies point to a possible influence of L1 vocabulary teaching and learning on learners’ L2 lexical associations, inviting exploration into how such an influence, if present, might be used to learners’ advantage.

Notes

1. To differentiate, word associations translated from Japanese will be italicized and English associations will not.
2. In fact, four translation equivalents from the first WATs were included in both Japanese and English in the second sets to test whether participants were mentally translating responses, bringing the total to 14 words each, but the cue word and participant sample sizes were too small to adequately explore this possibility, so translation equivalent cue words were discarded in analysis.

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Anna Faeh graduated from the University of Birmingham with a Master of Arts (Applied Linguistics) in 2022. She completed her degree while teaching at a private high school in Japan, where she taught for five years. She has been working as an assistant professor in the English program of Utsunomiya University since April 2024. Her love of learning, language, and seeing others grow inspires her to experiment with different ways to create active and authentic learning opportunities, for which she employs a wide range of materials and methods in the classroom and in her own studies. As such, her interests within the field of Applied Linguistics are diverse.



Appendices

The appendices can be found in the online version of this article at <https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/archive>.



Call for Presentation Proposals for
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Materials Development: A Vital Decision

MacPaul C. Ekwueme Hirata

Toyo University

Hakeem Adeolu Azeez

Meiji Gakuin University

The COVID-19 pandemic transformed education, highlighting the necessity for varied teaching and learning methods. With the return to in-person classes complemented by online formats, selecting appropriate teaching materials and syllabuses has become more complex. This paper discusses the development and adaptation of teaching materials, the reliability of textbooks, and the factors influencing materials design. It emphasizes the importance of educators' possessing strong pedagogical skills for effective materials development and adaptation.

COVID-19のパンデミックは教育を一変させ、多様な教育・学習方法の必要性を浮き彫りにした。オンライン形式で補完された対面授業が再開される中で、適切な教材やシラバスの選択はますます複雑になっている。本稿では、教材の開発と適応、教科書の信頼性、および教材設計に影響を与える要素について論じ、教材の効果的な開発と適応のために、教育者が強力な教育スキルを持つことの重要性を強調する。

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The sudden onset of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted education globally, forcing institutions to continually reassess and adapt their approaches. Among the critical decisions faced by educators is the selection and adaptation of course materials. A plethora of teaching materials is available both online and offline, catering to diverse educational needs. However, effectively engaging learners and ensuring their motivation can be challenging. Often, instructors have limited input in material selection, which is usually determined by committees or course managers. Still, understanding the criteria for selecting, developing, and adapting materials, and possessing the skills to evaluate them objectively, are essential for benefiting learners.

Literature Review

Studies of materials development, as noted by Tomlinson (2012a), are relatively recent, gaining prominence in the 1990s with contributions from researchers like McDonough and Shaw (1993). Earlier debates on the use of textbooks for language learning featured arguments both for and against

them (Allwright, 1981; O'Neil, 1982). However, textbooks have become integral to language learning in recent years. In his framework for language teaching materials, Tomlinson (2012a) categorizes materials based on their primary function in the learning process as *informative*, *instructional*, *experiential*, or *exploratory*. Informative materials such as grammar charts and vocabulary lists provide learners with knowledge about the target language. Instructional materials guide learners in practicing the target language, whereas experiential materials expose learners to real-world use of the target language. Exploratory materials encourage learners to discover the target language for themselves through investigation. The literature on materials development highlights key issues, including the effective use of textbooks, the adaptation of materials to suit diverse learner needs, and the ensurance of authenticity in instructional content. These issues warrant closer examination to understand their implications for language teaching and learning.

Textbooks

Textbooks are a cornerstone of language teaching, but their role generates considerable debate among educators and researchers. Advocates point to several advantages of textbooks. They are cost effective and timesaving, and they provide a structured curriculum with clear learning objectives, allowing learners, teachers, and parents to monitor progress. Textbooks also promote standardized teaching (Tomlinson, 2012b), offering ready-made teaching aids and fostering learner independence (Ur, 1996). They are also adaptable to diverse learning needs and levels (Apple, 1992), and they ensure continuity across lessons, thus creating a consistent learning experience, benefiting large and diverse classrooms.

However, textbooks also face significant criticism. Some educators view them as rigid, limiting flexibility and responsiveness to individual learner needs (Littlejohn, 1998). Critics argue that textbooks can be restrictive because of their authoritative language, which leaves little room for modification or adaptation (Luke et al., 1989). Gabrielatos (2004) adds that their content and methodologies can be unclear and overly prescriptive, and Ur (1996) notes that their homogeneity can stifle creativity. Furthermore, global textbooks, as Tomlinson (2012a)

observes, often fail to meet the diverse needs and interests of learners because of their generic design. For example, textbooks featuring American or Australian English may not align with the cultural and linguistic contexts of Japanese learners, thereby limiting their practical relevance. This lack of localization can disengage learners and promote formulaic teaching that overlooks real-world language use. Instructors may therefore need to adapt these materials by incorporating culturally relevant examples to enhance their effectiveness.

Textbooks provide structure, continuity, and valuable teaching aids; however, they also present challenges in addressing diverse learner needs and fostering creativity. Their effectiveness depends on their thoughtful use as a flexible learning tool rather than a rigid guide (Cunningsworth, 1995). This approach allows educators to adapt and supplement them with context-specific materials, creating meaningful and engaging learning experiences.

Although textbooks have long been a cornerstone of materials development, the rise of AI tools is increasingly challenging their dominance as a primary resource in language teaching. AI enables the creation of personalized learning experiences by analyzing learner data to tailor content to their proficiency levels and learning styles. AI-powered tools can also generate diverse, contextually relevant language exercises. For example, AI-driven platforms such as ChatGPT-4o can generate reading passages and listening texts, and can simulate real-life conversational scenarios, allowing learners to practice speaking and listening skills in a controlled environment (Hirata et al., 2024; Rusmiyanto et al., 2023).

However, critics contend that AI integration in language materials poses challenges. One major concern is that AI-generated content may perpetuate biases embedded in its training data, resulting in culturally insensitive or inappropriate content. Furthermore, overreliance on AI may diminish human interaction, which is essential for developing nuanced language skills and cultural understanding. AI systems also raise concerns about data privacy, the ethical use of learner information, and the broader ethical implications of using AI in education (Hirata et al., 2024, Hockly, 2023)

Adapting Materials

Adapting materials involves modifying content and format to make them more comprehensible and engaging for learners (Dar, 2012). Adaptation is essential for effective materials development. Materi-

als in their original form can often be too dense and thus difficult for learners to comprehend. This is particularly true of global textbooks, as mentioned earlier. However, adapting materials requires the instructors' skill to avoid significant digression or inconsistency with the original concepts. Yan (2007) outlines four principles of adaptation, namely integrating traditional and communicative methods, catering to learner needs, integrating multiple language skills, and meeting teacher preferences.

Materials adaptation should integrate traditional methods with communicative teaching and learning approaches. The English language textbooks used in most schools often emphasize traditional techniques, such as form-focused practice. Although grammar and vocabulary are foundational to language learning, integrating opportunities for communication is equally important. For example, a lesson could introduce vocabulary and grammar structures, followed by group production activities, such as discussions or roleplays to reinforce language use in a communicative context. This approach ensures that learners practice both form and meaning, fostering a holistic learning experience.

Catering to learner needs involves creating a stimulating learning environment by assessing learners' moods and abilities. Teachers can observe engagement levels through body language, facial expressions, and participation. Warm-up activities, such as icebreakers or quick games, are effective for energizing learners and addressing low energy or frustration. By incorporating adjustable difficulty levels and clear learning objectives, teachers can tailor lessons to suit beginner or intermediate learners, maintaining focus and motivation.

Integrating multiple language skills involves blending vocabulary, grammar, listening, and speaking within teaching materials. This approach enables learners to practice these skills within the allotted lesson time. When time permits, collaborative activities, such as pair or group work, can be incorporated before individual presentations, encouraging learners to share their experiences in the target language. Thus, integrating grammar, vocabulary, listening, and speaking within lessons fosters comprehensive language practice.

Although adapting materials to learners' needs is essential, the third principle emphasizes tailoring them to align with teacher preferences. Modifications can promote active learner participation through discussions on topics relevant to their daily lives, aligning with the teacher's preferred teaching style. Materials should therefore align with teachers' goals of fostering active learning.

Material Authenticity

Material authenticity involves presenting language learning materials in the classroom to reflect real-life situations and promote a communicative approach, preparing learners for authentic language use.

The use of authentic materials, which mirror real-world language use, has sparked debate in materials development. Recent studies (e.g., Gilmore, 2019; Trabelsi, 2023) emphasize the importance of authenticity in English language teaching (ELT) materials. Authentic materials expose learners to real-world language use, enhancing their communicative competence. For example, Gilmore (2019) explains how authentic materials bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-life language use, making lessons more engaging and effective. Although authentic materials are beneficial, they come with challenges, especially for lower level learners. Research indicates that these materials can be overly complex and lead to frustration and demotivation. However, when appropriately scaffolded, they can significantly enhance the learning experience by providing contextually rich and meaningful language practice (Gilmore, 2007). Ensuring that authentic materials are culturally relevant to the learners is crucial. Culturally relevant materials resonate with learners' experiences, enhancing relatability and comprehension. Conversely, culturally inappropriate materials may introduce unfamiliar concepts, contexts, or values, creating a disconnect that hinders comprehension and engagement. For instance, discussing Thanksgiving traditions without contextual explanation in a classroom of Japanese learners may confuse or alienate them, reducing engagement. Trabelsi (2023) advocates adapting authentic materials to align with the learners' cultural contexts, thereby enhancing their relatability and effectiveness.

In the light of these considerations, incorporating authentic materials requires thoughtful integration into the curriculum. According to recent frameworks, materials should be selected and adapted on the basis of learners' needs, cultural backgrounds, and linguistic abilities. This approach helps in creating a more learner-centered environment that promotes active participation and meaningful learning (Gilmore, 2019).

Factors in Designing and Adapting Materials

Researchers have proposed frameworks for materials evaluation, moving beyond simple checklists (Tomlinson, 2012a). Scholars emphasize several framework elements, including contextualizing

language experiences, motivating learners, ensuring meaningful language features, and enabling multidimensional processing (Howard & Major, 2004; Tomlinson, 2008). These elements are essential for developing effective and engaging materials.

Materials should be contextually relevant to learners' environments, reflecting their cultural backgrounds, interests, and prior experiences to foster inclusivity and ensure that materials resonate with learners' lives. For instance, a lesson on environmental conservation could use case studies from the learners' local communities to foster meaningful connections. Moreover, modern frameworks promote a learner-centered approach, enabling learners to personalize their learning. Such projects might include learner content creation, such as a presentation on personal hobbies, to promote active participation and decision-making. Ultimately, integrating contextual relevance with learner-centered strategies fosters an interactive, inclusive, and engaging classroom dynamic.

Furthermore, Tomlinson (2008) highlights the importance of multidimensional processing as a factor in material design and adaptation. Multidimensional processing refers to materials' capacity to engage multiple senses and cognitive processes, deepening learning. For example, a listening activity could combine audio clips with visual aids, such as diagrams or infographics, to help learners connect concepts across modalities. Likewise, roleplay exercises that integrate spoken dialogue and written cues enhance both linguistic and cognitive engagement.

Flexibility is another important factor in designing and adapting materials. Flexibility is essential for meeting diverse learner needs. Teachers should adapt materials to adjust difficulty levels, content, and formats, ensuring accessibility and engagement for all learners. A reading passage, for instance, can be simplified for beginning learners or supplemented with vocabulary aids to enhance comprehension, while providing additional exercises for advanced learners. Using tools like differentiated worksheets or scaffolded tasks, teachers can effectively tailor the learning experience (van Geel, 2023).

Finally, the design and adaptation of materials should prioritize the use of authentic materials. Authentic materials, such as news articles, interviews, or menus, bring realism to the classroom, bridging the gap between learning and real-world applications. However, these materials should be carefully selected and adapted to align with learners' proficiency levels and cultural contexts. For instance, a beginner class might use simplified excerpts from a news article, whereas an advanced class could

analyze the original text through group discussions on its implications (Gilmore, 2007). This approach ensures that authentic materials remain meaningful and accessible.

In summary, designing and adapting materials requires balancing contextual relevance, multidimensional engagement, skill integration, flexibility, and authenticity. These factors coalesce to produce materials that are effective, engaging, and empowering, ultimately enhancing learners' experiences.

Implications

This paper's findings provide key insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers, highlighting the importance of thoughtful materials selection and adaptation. For educators, integrating multiple language skills, reflecting real-life situations, and adapting materials to meet diverse learner needs is essential. These practices enable learners to develop communicative and critical thinking skills, aligning with the goal of preparing them for real-world language use.

Policymakers should prioritize teacher training programs that equip instructors with effective strategies and skills for materials adaptation. These programs should foster skills in integrating cultural relevance and using AI tools to enhance engagement and accessibility.

Curriculum designers should prioritize flexibility and learner-centered activities in materials development. Effective materials should offer opportunities for learners to personalize their learning while balancing instructor guidance and learner independence. Peer-driven activities, such as discussions facilitated by the teacher, encourage learners to pose questions, make connections, and reflect critically on issues like social justice and environmental conservation, fostering active participation and collaboration. This approach fosters autonomy and critical thinking, both essential for language acquisition (Banaruee et al., 2023). Furthermore, shifting from traditional teacher-led instruction to a learner-centered approach—"guide on the side" versus "sage on the stage"—is essential for empowering learners to take ownership of their learning. Instructors should serve as facilitators and guides rather than authoritarian figures to encourage active participation and collaboration among learners (Geel, 2023). By integrating these insights with practical, classroom-tested strategies, educational stakeholders can develop materials that meet institutional objectives while enriching learners' language skills and critical awareness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, selecting appropriate teaching materials is essential because of factors such as evolving environments, institutional requirements, learners' needs and abilities, and cultural considerations. The choice of textbook or language materials significantly impacts classroom dynamics, learners' progress, and teaching effectiveness.

Effective materials development ultimately requires balancing pedagogical expertise and adaptability. By engaging learners in the materials selection process and prioritizing contextual relevance, educators can foster engaging, learner-centered experiences that promote meaningful language use and lifelong learning.

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MacPaul C. Ekwueme Hirata is a lecturer in the Faculty of Health and Sports Sciences (HELSP0) at Toyo University, Akabanedai Campus. His research interests include second language vocabulary acquisition, contemporary teaching techniques, materials development, and formulaic sequences.



Hakeem Adeolu Azeez is a lecturer in the Faculty of International Studies at Meiji Gakuin University, Yokohama Campus. His research interests include language planning and policy, materials development, and discourse analysis.



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Reflections on a Lifetime of Diversity: An Interview With Dr. Andy Curtis

Torrin R. Shimono

Kindai University

Welcome to the July/August issue of TLT Interviews! In this issue, we feature an interview with JALT2024 plenary speaker, Dr. Andy Curtis (Ph. D). Dr. Curtis started his professional life as a clinical biochemist in hospitals in the U.K. However, having found his real passions—teaching, learning, languages, and cultures—he moved from health care to science education to language education, making his path highly unusual and risky. However, such a pathway enabled him to bring together diverse fields of inquiry that had not been previously connected, and he has been recognized as the founder of the new peace linguistics. From 2015 to 2016, he served as the 50th president of the TESOL International Association, and in 2016, he received one of the association's 50-at-50 Awards, when he was voted one of the fifty most influential figures in the field, over the first 50 years of the association. Over the last 30 or more years, Dr. Curtis has (co)authored and (co) edited over 200 articles, book chapters, and books; presented to 50,000 language educators in 100 countries, in Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the North, South and Central Americas; and his writings have been read by 100,000 language educators in 150 countries. He is currently serving as a Distinguished Guest Professor in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the City University of Macau (SAR, PRC) and is cross-appointed to a number of universities in Mainland China. His most recent book is *Bad Language: Decoding Donald Trump* (2024b). He was interviewed via written correspondence by Torrin Shimono, who has taught Japanese learners of all age groups for nearly two decades. He currently is an Associate Professor at Kindai University in the Faculty of Law. He received his doctorate from Temple University. His research interests include reading

fluency, reaction times, phonology, self-efficacy, and testing. Without further ado, to the interview!

Torrin Shimono: *I really appreciate you, Dr. Curtis, for taking the time to do an interview again for TLT Interviews! My co-editor, James Nobis, and I really enjoyed the interview you did for us in 2021 with your former Anaheim University TESOL graduate student, Aviva Ueno, and your plenary speech at JALT2024. Thank you. To get started, please let me tell you a little bit more about myself. I am from Seattle but have been teaching in Japan for the last 18 plus years. I am of Japanese and Chinese descent, but I heard that my first name has Nordic origins meaning “Thor,” and my middle name, Robert, is plain vanilla, but my parents thought it might be a good backup name if Torrin sounded too unique. Actually, my grandparents were put into the Japanese American internment camps during World War II and consequently gave their children (my father and his generation) very Caucasian sounding names so they wouldn’t get bullied at school. So, I could definitely understand the strategic value of the decision you made to change your name to get more job interviews as you said in your plenary. Also, as an American who looks like a Japanese person teaching English in Japan, I quite enjoy the look on students’ faces when I introduce myself in the first class exclusively in English, and sometimes I feel one of my roles as an English language teacher is to create that “cognitive dissonance” that you mentioned in your talk—perhaps to challenge their notions based on stereotypes and open their minds that there is a diverse array of English speakers out there!*

Dr. Andy Curtis: Thank you, Torrin, to you and to James, for your positive feedback on my presentations at JALT2024 last November, and for inviting me to do this written interview with you. You have posed many important, large, and complex questions that deserve thoughtful and thorough replies, so the interview is longer than it might otherwise have been. Something else that also makes this interview different is that I have included in-text citations to published work, mine and others, with reference details given at the end of the interview. That is because my position on a number of issues has been described as “unconventional” and even

“controversial,” so citing supporting work can help to explain those positions. Also, although interviews like this are usually opinion-type pieces, I tell my students that they are welcome to hold whatever opinions they choose—but if they want anyone else to pay attention to their opinions, then they need to be clear and explain on what those opinions are based. The last thing our deeply divided world needs right now is any more uninformed but highly opinionated people who cannot explain the basis of their opinions. Thirdly, I included sources, citations, and quotations (almost all of which are hyperlinked) because some of the questions below ask about things that many people have very strong feelings about, such as the outcome of the 2024 U.S. presidential election, in which case public opinions on such matters need to be especially well-supported. Lastly, references to my work are included in case any of the *TLT* readers are interested in knowing more about my work over the last 30 plus years.

For those who could not attend JALT2024, could you summarize the main takeaways of your joint opening plenary presentation with Dr. Liying Cheng?

For our joint opening plenary presentation, the JALT2024 Conference Committee asked Liying and I to reflect on our professional and personal journeys—individually and together—as “visible minorities” (Curtis, Effiong, & Romney, 2023) in relation to one of the main conference themes of diversity. We acknowledged that the metaphor and analogy of “the journey” has been so well used, in different languages, over many centuries, that it may be considered by some to be something of a cliché. Nevertheless, we believe that, for international language educators like ourselves and our JALT audience, using “the journey” as a framing device for reflecting on our personal and professional experiences makes good sense and is entirely appropriate. One of the main points we hope our audience took away with them, and which we hope stayed with them as they attended different conference sessions, is that diversity is difficult. In our field of TESOL/foreign language education, we can get so wrapped up in the importance, the benefits, and the virtues of diversity, we forget just how much easier things can be when everyone in the room looks and sound similar, and/or when everyone comes from similar socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. Sameness is easy. Diversity is hard (Curtis, 2020).

Great point. Could you briefly discuss what you think are some of the biggest difficulties for diversity and how we can best troubleshoot them?

There are so many challenges and difficulties when translating the theories of diversity into truly diverse practices, many of which are more political than practical. The most dramatic and most recent example of political resistance to DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) initiatives on a scale and scope that we have not seen before comes from the current president of the U.S.A. and his administration. On the 20th of January this year, a written announcement was published on the U.S. government website (The White House, 2025) titled, *Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferring*. Leaving aside the meaningless overuse of words like “radical” by the Trump government, the first part of this “Presidential Action” announcement stated that, “The Biden Administration forced illegal and immoral discrimination programs, going by the name ‘diversity, equity, and inclusion’ (DEI), into virtually all aspects of the Federal Government, in areas ranging from airline safety to the military” (para. 2). For now—but perhaps not for long—there is no more powerful military, economic, and political force in the world today than the U.S.A. Therefore, when announcements like the one above are made, other world leaders, governments, and far-right groups believe they can follow suit and do the same.

Addressing DEI positions such as those held by the current U.S. government will take many years, but one approach is based on developing a greater understanding. For example, writing in the *Harvard Business Review*, Eric Shuman, Eric Knowles, and Amit Goldenberg (2023) presented their research finding that one of the best ways to overcome resistance to DEI is to understand what’s driving it. They found that, “DEI initiatives often involve significant organizational changes and thus can elicit threat and concern, particularly from members of majority groups, who have traditionally benefitted from being in the majority and may feel that their organizational status or resources are threatened” (para. 5). They also found that, “Some people resist DEI initiatives by downplaying inequality or bias or even denying that they exist at all. Denying is usually elicited [by] members of majority groups” (para. 11), and that, “In some cases, members of advantaged groups are willing to acknowledge that there is discrimination and inequality, but they distance themselves from it personally, by arguing that they themselves are unbiased and have never benefited from discrimination” (para. 14).

Returning to some of the main takeaways of my joint opening plenary presentation with Dr. Liying Cheng, another main point we made was that because our Cheng-Curtis family is from so many dif-

ferent linguistic and cultural contexts and countries, diversity is not just something we research and write about, publish and present on, it is something we live every day of our lives. That puts us in a different category from those people who may, for example, have lived their lives looking and sounding like most of the people around them but who still claim to know about diversity. We consider them to be experts in the theory of diversity, but without lived experience of being, for example, a visible minority, those experts' purported understanding of diversity will be stuck at the theoretical level, and they cannot make it to the practical plane of a deeper understanding. A third point we made was how much we in our field may seriously underestimate just how fierce the opposition to real diversity is in the world today, as we saw in the recent U.S. presidential elections, in which well over 70 million Americans voted—again, for the second time—for someone who has spent his entire life making hateful, racist statements, all of which are a matter of public record and extremely well-documented. And not just in the U.S.A., as we have seen a lurch to the (far) right in the recent election outcomes in a number of other countries as well, such as Italy, Finland, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, and the Czech Republic (Coi, 2024). “Death to Diversity” seems to be the rallying cry of those (far) right wing (pseudo-)political parties. The pressing question then becomes: What (if anything) can we do to save and grow real diversity?

My general feeling is diversity feels distant to those of the majority. Despite some people expressing surface-level empathy, is it true that we cannot truly feel others' pain so to speak?

I would agree with the surface-level versus deep-level sympathy/empathy difference you describe, and in some ways that is not surprising. For example, while working in U.K. hospitals for many years, before coming to language education, I witnessed and assisted with dozens of births. But even if I had helped with hundreds or even thousands of births, I would never, ever talk about the experience of childbirth from a woman's perspective. My point is that there are many experiences that we will never have, and while we might sympathize with someone who has had or is going through that experience, we cannot know what it really feels like unless we have experienced it ourselves, directly and firsthand. Another activity we took part in while working in hospitals was to have our eyes completely covered for many hours to have some small sense of what it is like to be born blind. But again, there is no way that my experience of not being able to see anything for a few hours—or for days or weeks or even

longer—would qualify me to talk about what it is like to be born blind. A similar activity, with specially designed earplugs, was used to help us have some kind of understanding of what it is like to be born deaf. And, although senses such as vision and hearing are not the same as skin colour or other visible differences, I do not expect even my closest White friends, who I have known for decades and who I love, to know anything about what my life has been like as a lifelong visible minority, compared with their experience of having lived their whole entire lives as White men in a White world (in this case, Canada), making them the most privileged group of people on this Earth.

Japan has often been described as ethnically and culturally homogeneous, where uniformity is valued in school and work life. How can educators effectively convince Japanese students of the importance of diversity?

Although I have been coming to Japan and to JALT conferences since the 1990s, I have not (so far) had the opportunity to spend an extended period of time there, so I must acknowledge that any comments I make about the contexts in Japan are the perspectives of an outsider. That said, I know from my decades of working with Japanese students, in and out for Japan, that Japan has often been described, as you say, as ethnically and culturally homogeneous, where uniformity is valued in school and work life. That description relates to the diversity is difficult point made above and may have something to do with the fundamentally—even fatally wrong—idea about purity; for example, misguided attempts to keep a language and/or a culture “pure.” As we can see, throughout human history, all such attempts have failed, and no matter what the (far) right populist, race-baiting, policy-free politicians say, all such attempts are doomed to fail because “diversity is life whereas purity is death” (Curtis, 2017a). Far beyond whatever political rhetoric may be embodied by the idea that “diversity is life and purity is death,” is a simple fact of all biological existence on Earth, true at the cellular level and even at the genetic level.

I point out to my students that Japanese genetics is actually quite diverse, ranging first from the original ancient Jomon people followed by the Yayoi and Kofun people from the Asian mainland to the Ainu, Okinawans, and others. I definitely think ideas of purity are pervasive in Japan. While these myths have been utilized to create solidarity in peoples' identities in nation-building activities, they are problematic because they have been used to “other” minorities and people who don't fit the mold.

To respond to the question, “How can educators effectively convince Japanese students of the importance of diversity?” one of the most important life lessons I learned was as a young, clinical biochemist, working in hospitals in the U.K. in the 1980s. When we were able to produce a truly pure strain of any organic entity, even the smallest change in the environmental conditions resulted in the almost immediate death of the entity because it had what we referred to as ZEA, or zero environmental adaptability. Perhaps one of the most horrifying twists of language for political purposes is the use of Charles Darwin’s notion of “survival of the fittest” by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party of Germany (and it is still used today by those who would like to see a return to such genocidal, eugenic times). Darwin meant that living organisms best suited or fitted to adapt to the environment and to changes in that environment would survive and thrive, not survival of the strongest, as it came to mean during the Holocaust. So, when I meet people who ask me why I have committed so much of my professional life to promoting diversity in all its many shades of meaning (Curtis & Romney, 2006), I explain to them why “diversity is life, purity is death” is not a political slogan, but as a fundamental fact of life, governing all life on Earth. That is why diversity is vital to the very survival of our species.

Very interesting perspective. Many young Japanese students have often been described as apolitical or apathetic towards politics with low voter turnout. Is it important that language teachers help students not only with their grammar and word choice, but also to become more interested in politics and politically aware? If so, how would you suggest doing so?

Keeping in mind my caveat above, about me being an outsider in Japan, I am aware of the problems of low voter turnout, especially among younger people, and not only in Japan, but in many other countries too, for some years now (Solijonov, 2016). Those people who have been shouting “death to diversity” may also be the same people shouting, “death to democracy,” and they are likely to be happy to see such political apathy, as that makes it easier for them to justify running authoritarian states and dictatorial regimes. “Well,” the dictators may say, “they do not care so much about your so-called democracy—otherwise, they would vote. Right? They don’t vote means they don’t care, so maybe they’d be better off without your high-and-mighty, self-righteous democracy. They want order, and we will give them that—whatever the pain and suffering required to create that order.” You do not need to look closely to see the many flaws in such

argumentative justifications, but such self-serving rationales raise the question of whether or not we as language teachers should “help students not only with their grammar and word choice, but also to become more interested in politics and politically aware.”

Regarding this question, context is critical (Curtis, 2017b), because in a number of countries in which I have spent time, becoming interested in politics and politically aware can be dangerous—up to and including life-threatening consequences. I will not risk offending any of the potential readers of this interview by naming those countries, but the countries which equate “pro-democracy” with “anti-government” are widely known as such. Therefore, if I as a teacher—as a figure of authority—were to encourage my students in those anti-democratic contexts and countries to become politically active, I may endanger their lives, the lives of their families, and my own life. I have seen real-life examples of well-meaning foreign teachers turning up in a country in which they did not understand the local and national politics, encouraging their students to become politically active, only to be fired, deported, imprisoned, or worse. Linguistically, then, the differences between “interested in politics,” “politically aware,” and “politically active” can be essential. The problem is that one tends to lead to the other, as interest is often followed (or preceded) by awareness, which often ends up being followed by action. Context is critical.

That’s a great point.

But where and when it is safe to do so, a great way of encouraging students to be “more interested in politics and politically aware” is to study the recent developments in South Korea, when (former) President Yoon Suk Yeol tried to unilaterally impose martial law, but which was met with fierce resistance from everyone, including those who were willing to risk their lives to protect their democracy and to prevent it from being overthrown (Ng et al., 2025). Studying recent events in South Korea could help students in Japan and elsewhere not take their democratic rights for granted.

Do you think there are any issues with how the ideas of diversity have been implemented and/or institutionalized in many countries? For example, affirmative action, identity politics, quotas or DEIA (or, as you suggested in your plenary, changing the acronym to IDEA) hiring practices, the woke movement, Black Lives Matter, et cetera, have been met with resistance from the hegemonic majority, and do you think they sometimes exacerbate the problem?

Yes, I have found that there are many issues with how the ideas of diversity have been implemented and/or institutionalized, one of which is the massive push-back against diversity from large, powerful, and extremely well-funded groups vigorously opposed to being more inclusive for fear of contaminating the perceived purity of their mainstream racial, cultural, and linguistic dominance. A good example of how small but very vocal and mainly well-meaning groups can sometimes make matters worse is the rise and fall of the word *Latinx*. As Luisa Torregrosa (2021) reported some years ago, that word “might have been intended to be more inclusive, but it actually can feel exclusionary to everyday people” (para. 5) and that, “Many Latinos say ‘Latinx’ offends or bothers them.” In 2024, Alicia Gonzalez (2024) explained despite the fact that *Latinx* “gained traction in academic and activist circles, particularly among those advocating for LGBTQ+ inclusivity ... traditional terms like Hispanic and Latino remain overwhelmingly preferred” (para. 2). Also in 2024, Marciela García asked: “Why is the term *Latinx* so strongly rejected by Latinos?” and reported that, “Despite increased awareness of the term, only 4% of Latino adults use *Latinx* to describe themselves according to a new report.”

Despite such facts and figures, I know of some academics who have written well-researched papers and submitted them to relevant, high-profile journals in their field, but who were told, in no uncertain terms, that unless they used the word *Latinx* throughout their work, their paper would not be published. So, while 4% of a population may not be a statistically insignificant number of individuals, pushback is inevitable when, for example, 4% of a population feels that the other 96% should be using language in a particular way for specific purposes. That represents a more than 20-fold proportional difference (96 vs 4), which can help explain—beyond Neo-Nazi beliefs about “racial purity”—why the resistance to more real diversity can be so great.

Another example of well-meaning, but largely misguided language use is the current fashion for putting pronouns in people’s email signatures. Most of the members of the many LGBTQ+ family, friends, and colleagues that I know personally and professionally do not indicate their preferred pronouns in their emails or text messages. When I ask them why not, they tell me that they believe such indications do little or nothing to bring about lasting, positive change in and for their communities, and sound more like virtue-signaling than genuine allyship. At worst, they tell me, such language use may even, inadvertently, play into the hands of the (far) right, as they can then ridicule and trivialize

important issues, in this case, within the LGBTQ+ community, by labeling them as extremists who want to tell everyone what to say and how to say it. And, while that is not the intention of any of the activists I work with, that may well be the perception among everyday people.

You also had a session at JALT2024 on new peace linguistics (NPL). Could you describe the main points of that workshop? Specifically, could you address the differences between peace linguistics and new peace linguistics? Also, is there a methodology you recommend for people interested in pursuing this line of research?

As I wrote in my 2022 book, *The New Peace Linguistics and The Role of Language in Conflict*, in 2017, I was invited to present at the annual, international Hawai’i TESOL Conference, where I learned about their peacebuilding programs. During my JALT2024 workshop, I shared with the audience some of the details of my upbringing in England in the 1960s and 1970s, which was the opposite of peace, as I grew up with a combination of domestic violence at home and race-based violence on the streets. I was, then, fascinated by the idea that peace was something that could be researched and written about, published and presented on, taught and learned, as we do in TESOL, JALT, et cetera. The following year, in 2018, I was invited to develop and teach what appeared to be—and still appears to be—the first university-level, credit-bearing course on peace linguistics (PL). In 2019, I co-taught the course with Brigham Young University Hawai’i (BYU-H) professor, Nancy Tarawhiti, who, as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon, or LDS), was able to bring to the PL course the faith-based connections that helped the course participants contextualize PL in relation to their belief systems.

One of the challenges of teaching such a new course was the lack of coursebooks on PL. In fact, at that time, no such books existed, and in an extensive search for PL teaching materials, I found that much of what did already exist under the title of PL was very heavy on the P and very light on the L. By that I mean the peace side of PL was the focal point, but the L part, in terms of in-depth, systematic analyses of language, was conspicuous by its absence. After analyzing the contents of many of the top journals in the fields of peace studies, peace research, and peace education, I was surprised and disappointed to see that almost none of them explicitly referred to the importance of language studies, language research, or language education (Curtis, 2018). At best, superficial lip service was paid to the importance of language, but usually language

was ignored, and most of what passed for PL at that time encouraged language teachers and learners to use language that would either avoid or de-escalate conflict, which is something most people probably do most of the time anyway. So, to address those oversights in the literature, I started carrying out in-depth, systematic analyses of the language of people in power, such as U.S. presidents, as it is they who have the nuclear launch codes, so it is they, not us in our language classrooms, who have the power to start wars, to end wars, or to bring an end to the world (Curtis, 2024a). A key principle of what has come to be called the new peace linguistics (sometimes referred to as applied peace linguistics) is to be able to distinguish between language used to communicate versus language used to manipulate.

Do you have any recommendations for textbooks for L2 learners to increase their media literacy?

Rather than textbooks on media literacy, which tend to be expensive and can sometimes quickly become dated, as the media landscape keeps changing—especially now with AI-driven media development—I usually recommend free, online resources. For example, the Media & Learning Association (MLA, [n.d.]) is an international, non-profit organization created in 2012 and is based in Belgium, so it has a more European focus. But in 2023, the MLA newsletter featured more than 60 articles on digital and media literacy across Europe and beyond, and at the end of 2023, they published a piece on the top five featured articles on media literacy that year (details in the references list).

Could you provide some practical activities that would help teachers incorporate new peace linguistics into the classroom in Japan?

One example of a practical activity that language teachers and learners could make use of in classrooms in Japan helps to raise the awareness of how we not only use words to refer to objects in the world around us (“computer,” “keyboard,” “interview,” et cetera) but how our words shape our thoughts and feelings (Curtis, 2022). In the activity, students are paired up, and one is given a piece of paper on which is a silhouette of a man carrying a large rifle, wearing military clothes and carrying military gear. Unbeknownst to the pair of students, who cannot see each other’s pieces of paper, both of them have been given the same silhouette. But on one piece of paper, the caption reads, “A freedom fighter, defending their country and their people from an invasion of hostile forces,” while on the other, the caption reads, “A terrorist gunman, getting ready to start shooting innocent people as they

walk peacefully by.” Same picture, same number of words—but completely different meanings. In the activity, the students do not describe the image (as the description is already given in the caption), but they do talk about how the image makes them feel. It should be no surprise that most of the feelings elicited by the “freedom fighter” image were positive, and the opposite for the “terrorist gunman” image. The looks on the students’ faces when they show each other their pieces of paper and realize that they were describing the same image have included shock, disbelief, and sometimes even a tear has been shed in the intensity of that moment.

That’s a very interesting and powerful classroom activity. I’d like to try it.

This activity should only be done in a classroom where the teachers and students have gotten to know each well, who trust each other, and in an environment where the students feel safe in expressing some potentially intense feelings. I have then followed that activity with one in which I show a photograph of the 45th president of the U.S.A. crossing out the word “Corona” and replacing it with the word “China” in his printed script as he prepared to give a speech to his followers. Changing just one word in a single speech, given by one of the most powerful people on Earth, immediately resulted in a widely reported dramatic increase in verbal and physical attacks on Asian-looking people in the U.S.A. (see, for example, Viala-Gaufrey & Lindaman, 2021). Something that continues to surprise me is how often even people in our field—language teachers who do language for a living, whose profession and career are based on language—still appear to underestimate just how powerful a single word can be, especially when that word comes from someone in power. NPL is based on the fact that a word has the potential to be as damaging and destructive as a bullet or a bomb.

Yes, I agree that language is power and sometimes “the pen is mightier than the sword.” What would be your advice for better public discourse from leaders from around the world?

The short, simple answer to that would be: Stop talking! Epictetus, the Stoic philosopher of Ancient Greece, is often credited with saying, “We have two ears and one mouth so that we may listen twice as much as we speak.” Sadly, most of the world leaders that I have studied appear to have fallen in love with the sound of their own voice. And, while that is disappointing and highly problematic, perhaps it should not be a surprise, given the rise of social media (or anti-social media), in which the

loudest voices, saying the most outrageous things, garner the most followers, and therefore generate the most revenue. As a result of two decades of social media—Facebook was launched in 2004, and Twitter (aka X) in 2006—there now exists an entire generation of younger people who have grown up their whole lives seeing just how much attention narcissists can now get. And not just attention, but apparent fame and fortune too, although much of that may well be fake. Connecting Epictetus and Facebook/Twitter, across more than 2,000 years of human history, we can see that people who listen gain far few followers on such media, whereas people who talk constantly, even if they are always spouting complete nonsense, have disturbingly large numbers of followers.

So true. The social media machine, driven by the constant need to entertain/be entertained while also stoking fear and anger, has really caused a pandemic of sensationalism.

Latching onto that trend, and attempting to influence as many people as possible, world leaders such the 45th (and 47th) president of the U.S.A. exemplify an approach to communication in which constantly talking without any signs of listening or hearing appears to be the road to success and a way of becoming one of the most powerful people in the world (at least from the weapons-of-mass destruction military perspective). So, that would be my first communicative advice to world leaders for better public discourse: Talk less, listen more. Building on that advice, it would also make a world of difference if world leaders would listen more actively, and above all more empathetically, in which the emphasis is on understanding not just the words coming out of the other person's mouth, but also listening between the lines; for example, to hear what is *not* being said explicitly. A third piece of advice from me to world leaders would be for them to please stop behaving like angry, frightened five-year olds on the school playground, engaged in name-calling. Whoever said, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me" was apparently never on the receiving end of the kind of hateful name-calling engaged in by some five-year olds and some world leaders alike. I know, from decades of personal experience, just how much hurt those names can cause.

Then how do we get people to talk with each other—to actually listen to each other—instead of talking at each other?

In addition to my three pieces of advice above, the sad fact is that people cannot be made or forced

to really listen to anyone saying anything. Again—thinking of world leaders in connection with young children who cover their ears whilst making nonsensical la-la-la-la sounds with their mouths so they cannot hear what is being said—if someone is determined not to hear and not to listen, then there is little that can be done about that. Even so, the prepositional differences between “talking at,” “talking to,” and “talking with” are still important. When “talking at,” the speaker sees the listener as, at best, a passive recipient of the message being delivered by the words being said, and at worst, the listener is seen by the speaker as being an irrelevant object, just there to soak up the sound. “Talking to” is better, as the listener is seen as more of a person than an object, but not a person of importance, at least, from the speaker's point of view, not as important as the speaker, otherwise, the speaker would be “talking with.” In the latter, the speaker sees the listener as a partner in a conversational, communicative event, even if the listener is not seen as an equal partner, for example, because the speaker is in a position of authority over the listener.

A key question then is: How to move people from “talking at” and “talking to” to “talking with?” The answer may lie with the role of the listener, as in the three scenarios above, the speaker is in the dominant position. However, as language teaching-learning professionals, we know how much a listener's reactions and responses can influence what a speaker says and how they say it. In most countries, cultures, and interactional contexts, non-verbal (or paralinguistic) communication from the listener back to the speaker can have a significant effect. The human face is capable of making a myriad of different expressions (Cowen & Keltner, 2020), including joy, pain, hunger, anger, et cetera. But, for example, in tense conversations between friends or high-level international negotiations, a listener having a “poker face,” in which the facial expression is hard to read and appears to be “neutral,” can help to keep things calm, and avoid an unhelpful escalation of emotion. For example, if the listener hears something that makes them angry or sad or elicits some other emotional reaction deemed to be negative, and that listener's reaction is seen by the speaker, then the focus can shift from what is being said and heard to what is being communicated non-verbally, which can lead to a complete breakdown of communication. So, we must be as careful and as conscious with our non-verbal as with our verbal communication.

Great advice. I once was talking to a student from Europe and was surprised when he commented to me that

every country needs an enemy country. Is conflict, war, and tribalism just part of human nature, as seen with the ever-growing military-industrial complex around the world?

The view expressed by your student from Europe is not uncommon, but it is contested. For example, Brian Ferguson (2018), a professor of anthropology at Rutgers University in the U.S.A., has written extensively on this topic, and he has pointed out that, “Debate over war and human nature will not soon be resolved” (para. 28). There are some who claim that historical records of human civilizations have always left artifacts that are evidence of war, for example, fossilized weapons. But according to Ferguson’s research: “War is hardly ubiquitous and does not go back endlessly in the archaeological record ... early finds provide little if any evidence suggesting war was a fact of life” (para. 10–para. 27). And he concluded that, “The high level of killing often reported in history, ethnography or later archaeology is contradicted in the earliest archaeological findings around the globe” (Ferguson, 2018, para. 29). But the ancient principle of “safety in numbers” does appear to have held throughout human history, perhaps going all the way back to our earliest ancestors when we had to band together to stay alive. From those bands probably came tribes, but tribalism does not appear to have predisposed us to war, and it is likely that tribes working together, rather going to war with each other, is how we as a species have thrived and survived.

However, looking at the world today, including the wars between Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Palestine, as well as the armed conflicts in Syria, Sudan, and elsewhere, the view of your student from Europe—and of many other people too—is that war between humans is inevitable. The good news, then, appears to be that war has not been a constant throughout human history, which means that it does not always have to be a part of our future. The bad news is that the infamous military-industrial complex is “more powerful than ever,” according to researchers like William Hartung and Benjamin Freeman (2023). They found that the complex that U.S. President Eisenhower “warned Americans about more than 60 years ago is still alive and well. In fact, it’s consuming many more tax dollars and feeding far larger weapons producers than when Ike [Eisenhower] raised the alarm” (para. 1). It seems, then, that the two things—wars and the military-industrial complex—are not the same and that one is not necessarily reliant on the other, which can give us hope that the future of humanity does not have to be as war-torn as its past.

You mentioned in your plenary talk that the level of education was a key factor in the results of the 2024 U.S. election. However, there were many highly educated people who voted the way they did. I find it challenging to change people’s minds once their core beliefs have been set. Can we really change people’s minds? Was it really an ill-informed electorate? Is it impossible to get people out of their media bubbles?

In November 2024, the Research Department of the Statista organization, which I have found to be a reliable source of data, reported that, “According to exit polling in ten key states of the 2024 presidential election in the United States, almost two-thirds of voters who had never attended college reported voting for Donald Trump. In comparison, a similar share of voters with advanced degrees reported voting for Kamala Harris” (Tierney, 2024, para. 1). The results of those polls, and of others, involving tens of thousands of voters, clearly show the influence of education as a crucial factor in the results of the 2024 U.S. presidential election. For example, reporting for *Inside Higher Ed*, Johanna Alonso (2024) explained that “College-educated voters were more likely to vote for Vice President Kamala Harris than Donald Trump across all demographics,” with the gap being “greatest among white voters and men.” More specifically, “college graduates ... individuals with a bachelor’s or advanced degree ... made up 43 percent of the electorate this year. Of that group, 55 percent voted for Vice President Kamala Harris and 42 percent voted for Donald Trump.” Not only that, but: “The numbers were almost exactly reversed among those who hadn’t graduated college, 42 percent of whom voted for Harris and 56 percent of whom voted for Trump,” and the bottom line is that “college graduates voted for Harris by 13 points more than they did Trump.”

It should, then, be no surprise that Trump has publicly stated that he loves the poorly educated (Fares & Chereus, 2016). And even though he also included, in that 2016 comment, a reference to “the highly educated,” in the 2016 Nevada election, which is where and when Trump declared his love for “the poorly educated,” the CNN entrance polls showed that nearly 60% of voters with a high school education or less voted for Trump (Hafner, 2016). If we compare those figures with the final results of the 2024 U.S. presidential election, there can be no doubt that education—or the lack thereof—was clearly a deciding factor in the outcome. To be clear, approximately 75 million electors voted for Harris, while approximately 77 million voted for Trump—making a difference of just 1.5% (48.4% vs 49.9%). In the winner-takes-all election-outcomes game that has made a mockery of true democratic principles in the U.S.A.

and elsewhere, the fact that the difference was such a little percentage does not matter. But as educators, we know that the less education someone has, the more likely they are to believe, for example, whatever is posted on anti-social media. They are also less likely to change their minds and be open to reason, due to a limited capacity for critical thinking, and their inability to distinguish between an obviously demonstrable lie and a factual statement supported with reliable data (Curtis, 2024b).

We have also seen in recent political elections that economic issues often drive voters' choices of candidate. How can we get people to think beyond their wallet and become more mindful, open, tolerant, accepting, and caring of other social issues like diversity? Or is there little hope with greed and selfishness winning out?

Whilst I was writing my initial responses to these questions (at the beginning of 2025), Justin Trudeau resigned as the Prime Minister of Canada (where our home base is). One of the big issues that led to that resignation was immigration, specifically the feeling amongst many Canadians that too many immigrants had been allowed to come here, which is why our healthcare, housing, and education systems are in such states of disrepair and dysfunction. Unfortunately, in the 25 years since we came as immigrants to this big, beautiful country, those three human rights—access to affordable, quality healthcare, housing, and education—have been increasingly politicized by all Canadian political parties. That is the real reason for the dramatic and harmful decline in those services, in one of the richest countries in the world. Immigration is not the problem here, especially given that Canada as a modern nation would not exist without immigration. Apart from the original Indigenous peoples who called their home “Kanata,” every other person who has ever set foot on Canadian soil is, by definition, an immigrant. No immigrants, no Canada. This same anti-immigrant sentiment has been cultivated by other (far) right-wing world leaders, including the 45th/47th U.S. president, who has blamed immigrants for everything bad over many decades, up to and including his most recent proclamations about launching the “largest deportation in American history” and his promises to “deport millions on ‘Day One’” (Bianco, 2024, para. 1).

As the first president of the U.S.A., George Washington (1732–1799) famously described America as “the Great Experiment” (Richardson, 2018), which has, since then, also been described as a failing or failed experiment (Collins, 2020; Goidel, 2013). What would be a fascinating socio-political exper-

iment would be for countries like Canada and the U.S.A. to ask everyone who has emigrated to their countries in the last, say, 25 years or so, since the dawn of the new millennium, to go back to their home countries. Not permanently, just as part of the experiment. Very quickly, the economies of the countries would collapse, as it is invariably the immigrants who do the low-pay, long-hour, no-prospect jobs that the locals do not want to do (as my parents did in England in the 1950s and 60s). After the economies collapsed, the immigrants would be invited back, to save those countries once again, as we always end up doing. A great deal of research, including some of my own (Curtis & Cheng, 2001), has shown that people change when they are forced to change, in cases where not to change would be to their detriment. In other words, we change, as not changing would be worse for us than making that change. Having economies collapse due to anti-immigration policies would be an effective way of helping people who are vigorously and even violently opposed to immigration, diversity, and democracy become “more mindful, open, tolerant, accepting, and caring of other social issues like diversity.”

Now that you are a well-established scholar, will you ever reclaim your original name and perhaps become “The scholar formerly known as Andy Curtis?” Are you in favor of L2 English language learners choosing a nickname or a traditionally Caucasian sounding name? I’ve noticed that many of my Chinese students choose to have a nickname while this isn’t the case for most Japanese students.

Prince Rogers Nelson was the full name of the musician who came to be known simply as “Prince” (1958–2016). In 1993, after a falling out with his record label, Prince changed his name and formally adopted the heart symbol, which he called the Love Symbol, instead of using a word for his name. As a symbol cannot be said, Prince was known at that time as “the Artist Formerly Known as Prince.” As I have always been a big fan of Prince, I do like the idea of “the scholar formerly known as Andy Curtis.” My dad and I did talk about me changing my family name/surname back to his, which was Sookdeo (my Mum’s maiden names were Persaud and Sookram). But after he was killed, I decided to keep it as Curtis. Lying’s family name is Cheng, my son’s and grandson’s surname are Yang, but my sister Sandra, in England, has kept Sookdeo, so the family name will probably live on.

Having been made to study the works of Shakespeare at high school in England in the 1980s, I did not expect to find myself teaching it decades later

as a high school teacher. As a result, in the play, *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet's Act 2, Scene 2 soliloquy on the balcony has stayed with me: "Tis but thy name that is my enemy; Thou art thyself ... O, be some other name! That which we call a rose, By any other name would smell as sweet ... And for that name which is no part of thee, Take all myself." About "L2 English language learners choosing a nickname or a traditionally Caucasian sounding name" and your observation that many of your "Chinese students choose to have a nickname while this isn't the case for most Japanese students," I think that may have a lot to do with whether or not their English language teachers can accurately pronounce non-English names without mangling them beyond recognition.

Final question: JALT is celebrating its 50th year as an association. How do you foresee the state of English Language Teaching in 50 years and any guesses on what the plenary speaker of the JALT2075 conference will be discussing?

Now there's a great question to end on! As I am now in my early 60s, I know I will not be around in 50 years' time, in 2075. But our son, Jack, turns 37 this year, so he may be around, and our grandson, Juan Sebastián, will be just four years old in June, so he should be around—as long as we have not destroyed our entire planet Earth by then in the name of corporate profits! I also met a number of younger JALT board members at JALT2024, including Emily Choong, who may also still be there at JALT2075, so how cool would it be if someone remembered this interview and referred to it at JALT2075! Any attempts to predict the future are, of course, fraught with peril, as these days we struggle to know what the world is coming to from one day to the next, much less half-a-century from now. In one vision of the future, language teaching and learning will no longer exist, as the translation technologies will have become so advanced that such teaching-learning will no longer be necessary.

As well as Prince, I am also still a big fan of the British humourist and sci-fi author, Douglas Adams (1952–2001), who died tragically at the age of just 49, from undiagnosed coronary artery disease, apparently immediately after working out at a private gym. This is one reason why I now go to our local gym—a low-cost, public one—three times a week. In his enormously successful radio, book, and television cult sci-fi series, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Adams described a creature called the Babel Fish. Once inserted into the ear, the small, yellow, leech-like fish "feeds on brainwave energy received not from its own carrier, but from those around it ... and then excretes into the mind of its carrier a telepathic

matrix formed by combining the conscious thought frequencies with nerve signals picked up from the speech centres of the brain which has supplied them ... if you stick a Babel fish in your ear you can instantly understand anything said to you in any form of language" (Adams as quoted by Lim, 2018, para. 1). I hope that's not the case, as recent research, using functional magnetic resonance imaging, has shown that bi- and multi-lingual brains are different from those of monolingual language users (Midrigan-Ciuchina et al., 2024). And such research seems to show that those of us who know multiple languages have multiple ways of understanding the world, which may turn out to be one of our best hopes for world peace (as comedically highlighted by Sandra Bullock in her 2000 movie, *Miss Congeniality*). JALT2075: World Peace Through Global Multilingualism. I'd be happy to attend that conference!

Thank you, Dr. Curtis, for your detailed and thought-provoking responses!

And thank you, Torrin, for this opportunity to address so many important, large, and complex questions. I appreciate this opportunity to share more details of my work with the readers of *TLT*, and I look forward to this being the beginning of an on-going dialogue with JALT members.

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Lorraine Kipling & Caroline Hutchinson

We welcome submissions for the My Share column. Submissions should be up to 600 words describing a successful technique or lesson plan you have used that can be replicated by readers, and should conform to the My Share format (see the guidelines on our website below).

Email: jaltpubs.tlt.my.share@jalt.org • Web: <https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/myshare>

Hello, and welcome to the July/August edition of My Share. A warm welcome also to Caroline Hutchinson, who has joined me as Co-editor! Caroline and I are old colleagues, and I am happy to be working with her again on this special column, in which readers share their original classroom activities for the benefit of the TLT community.

As usual, we have an interesting mix of activities on offer this time. First up, Jon Pollack focuses on relative clauses to make sentence building fun and collaborative. Next, Gordon Ross Danford gets students racing to practice tricky pronunciation in numbers. Finally, in a break from My Share convention, we have two articles from the same author. Robert J. Lowe's activities help students understand conventions for in-text citations and reference lists, and they naturally belong together.

Have you developed an activity that you'd like to share? Is it your own work, accessible, and adaptable to different classroom contexts? Send it in to us, or email with any questions, at jaltpubs.tlt.my.share@jalt.org. We're looking forward to hearing from you!

—Lorraine Kipling

Hello to everyone in the TLT community! Many thanks to Lorraine and the TLT team for helping me get up to speed as Co-editor. I hope that through this column, we can share practical insights from teachers with diverse backgrounds, teaching contexts, and approaches, into teaching, the thing that unites us.

—Caroline Hutchinson

Relative Clause Roundabout

Jon Pollack

Chubu University

jw.pollack@yahoo.com

Quick Guide

- » **Keywords:** *Relative clauses, collaborative, group work, sharing ideas*
- » **Learner English level:** *High beginner, low intermediate*

- » **Learner maturity:** *University, high school*
- » **Preparation time:** *10 minutes*
- » **Activity time:** *10-20 minutes, depending on class/group size*
- » **Materials:** *Blackboard, chalk, worksheet (see Appendix)*

This sentence-building activity helps students practice simple relative clauses as a collaborative effort. Once in groups, every student begins by writing a main clause, then passes their paper to a partner for them to add a relative clause (e.g., Student A: "I bought a book" → Student B: "that was a bestseller"). Each paper circulates within the group until it returns to the original student. This idea-sharing process enhances students' understanding of relative clauses by showing them how to add details to sentences without making them too long or confusing, while also helping them connect ideas smoothly so their sentences flow better.

Preparation

Step 1: Print one worksheet per student. The one provided in the Appendix shows an example of the activity and gives space for students to write their own answers. Feel free to change the examples.

Step 2: Bring a timer to class

Procedure

Step 1: Explain how relative clauses are used to combine two sentences or ideas together. This reduces the need for separate sentences, making their English sound more natural and fluent.

Step 2: Write the following chart on the board.

Sentence 1	Sentence 2
My mom has a friend.	<u>She</u> saw a UFO.
↓	
Main clause	Relative clause
My mom has a friend <u>who</u> saw a UFO.	

Step 3: Read the sentence, “My mom has a friend who saw a UFO,” emphasizing that *who*, the relative pronoun, refers to a *friend*. Clarify that *who* is used for people, *which* is used for things or animals, and *that* can be used for people, things, and animals.

Step 4: Break down the grammatical components by writing the following on the board, then show how these components relate to the example sentence.

- Main clause = subject + verb + noun
- Relative clause = relative pronoun + verb + (adjective) + noun

Step 5: Divide the class into groups of 5-10 students and have them sit in group circles.

Step 6: Give each student a worksheet

Step 7: Have students write a main clause on their worksheet. If they struggle, provide examples on the board, such as “*We met a man*” / “*I bought a smart-phone*” / “*She has a bag*”

Step 8: Once everyone is finished, have them pass their paper to the student on their left.

Step 9: Instruct the students to write down a relative clause on the next line that connects to the original main clause. Remind the students that they can write down silly answers, as long as they are grammatically correct. For example, “*We met a man who smelled like cheese.*” Give students 2 minutes to write their ideas down.

Step 10: Once everyone is finished, have them pass the paper again to the student on their left. Tell them again to finish the original sentence by writing a new relative clause on the next line. Rinse and repeat until the worksheets circle back to the original student. After a few rounds, their papers should look something like this:

Main clause	Relative clause
Student A: <i>My mom has a friend</i>	Student B: <i>who likes aliens and UFOs.</i> Student C: <i>that is smart.</i> Student D: <i>who has a rich husband.</i>

Step 11: Once the students receive their original paper back, give them about 3-5 minutes to read all the responses and share them with their friends. Tell the students to select their favorite sentence.

Step 12: Have students come up to the board and write their favorite sentence for everyone to see. Once the board is full, review each sentence with the class, making corrections if needed.

Conclusion

Practicing relative clauses in this way allows students to interact with the grammar and structure of relative clauses in a creative and playful way, subconsciously reinforcing their understanding of the grammatical concept. In my experience, students enjoy adding humor and their own personality to the activity, making the language-learning experience more meaningful and memorable.

Appendix

The appendix is available from the online version of this article at <https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/myshare/home>

Race to 100 Against the Clock

Gordon Ross Danford

Mie University

dgross@edu.mie-u.ac.jp

Quick Guide

- » **Keywords:** *Numbers, pronunciation, collaborative, active learning, competitive*
- » **Learner English level:** *Beginner to intermediate*
- » **Learner maturity:** *Elementary to junior high*
- » **Preparation time:** *15 minutes*
- » **Activity time:** *30-40 minutes*
- » **Materials:** *Flashcards, objects to pass (baton, etc.), stopwatch or timer, time sheet (see Appendix)*

Working out how to pronounce numbers in English can be tricky even for advanced learners. This activity was created as a fun way to build a strong foundation of pronunciation, particularly in differentiating *-teens* and *-ties*, while also helping students understand the English numbering system. It works best as competition between groups, as they race against the clock to see which group can count to 100 the fastest. The competitive element adds spice to what could otherwise become just another drill, while the cooperation required to perform well promotes teamwork.

Preparation

Step 1: Prepare flash cards with the numbers from one to 20 as well as the subsequent multiples of ten from 30 to 100.

Step 2: Prepare a stopwatch or timer.

Step 3: Prepare three objects for students to pass as they say their numbers. Anything that is cheap, sturdy, and easy to pass will do. A cardboard tube makes an excellent baton.

Step 4: Print out the time sheet to record each group's times (see Appendix) or prepare your own.

Procedure

Step 1: Using the flashcards, practice pronouncing the numbers from one to 20 and multiples of 10 as a class. Emphasize the 'n' sound at the end of the *-teens* and exaggerate the 'ee' sound at the end of the multiples of 10.

Step 2: Once most of the students can associate the numbers with their English names when they hear them, introduce the 'Race to 100' activity.

Step 3: Have students sit in a circle. Explain that they will count around the circle to 100.

Step 4: Get two students sitting next to each other to do *janken* to determine which direction to go around the circle. The winner says 'one', the loser 'two', the next student 'three', and so on until 100 is reached. Use the flashcards as reminders. Students should listen closely so they can say the correct number on their turn.

Step 5: Introduce the object to pass. Have students count around the circle while passing the object. If someone gets stuck, others can help, but each student must say their number by themselves before passing the object.

Step 6: Introduce the stopwatch and time sheet. Tell students they will race against other groups to see how fast they can count around the circle to 100.

Step 7: Divide the class into three groups and give each group an object to pass. Have them make circles and give them 5-10 minutes to practice.

Step 8: Rotate between groups, time them as they count to 100, and record their results on the time sheet. Waiting groups should watch and listen carefully. Ensure each group gets the same number of chances. The group with the fastest time at the end of the lesson wins.

Variation

This activity can be done as a competition between separate classes at the same grade level if the instructor sees those classes on a regular basis.

Conclusion

This activity promotes teamwork and concentration while also improving pronunciation and listening skills. To do well in the activity, students need to cooperate, listen closely, and speak clearly. They enjoy seeing the result of their efforts, which builds confidence and motivation.

Appendix

The appendix is available from the online version of this article at <https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/myshare/home>

Teaching In-Text Referencing

Robert J. Lowe

Ochanomizu University

lowe.robert.james@ocha.ac.jp

Quick Guide

- » **Keywords:** *Academic writing, referencing*
- » **Learner English level:** *Intermediate+*
- » **Learner maturity:** *Undergraduate*
- » **Preparation time:** *10-20 minutes*
- » **Activity time:** *30-40 minutes*
- » **Materials:** *Worksheets containing three example texts (see Appendices) style guide (e.g., APA (7th edition)), way to display questions (board/slides)*

This activity helps learners to understand when and how to include references in academic writing. Correct referencing is an essential skill, which may be unfamiliar to many students. This activity provides an opportunity to learn the rules through examining both good and bad models. It uses APA (7th edition) referencing conventions, focuses on traditional academic sources (books, book chapters, and journal articles), and should be adaptable to other sources and referencing styles.

Preparation

Step 1: Prepare an academic passage (100-200 words) on any topic, with three in-text references and a reference list. See Appendix A for my example text on the theme of Language Death. The in-text references should include: one reference to a general idea, containing author name and date

(e.g., '(Harrison, 2008)'); one reference to a piece of specific information, including author name, date, and page numbers (e.g., 'Báez, et al. (2018) [info] (p. 447)'); and one reference to a quote, including author name, date, and page numbers (e.g., 'Crystal (2003), argues, "[quote]" (p. 66)'). Use a resource such as the Purdue University APA style guide (Purdue University, n.d.) to check referencing conventions.

Step 2: Copy the passage and remove the references (see Appendix B).

Step 3: Prepare another passage on a new topic with three references. The in-text referencing should contain multiple errors, such as missing years or page numbers (e.g., "Crystal, p. 66") The text should be designed so that correct answers can be inferred based on the reference list (see Appendix C).

Step 4: Make worksheets containing all three texts to distribute to students.

Procedure

Step 1: Instruct students to read Appendix B (the one with references removed) and discuss the following question (displayed on board or slide):

- *What information is missing from this passage?*

Elicit that references are missing, making it difficult to know where information comes from.

Step 2: Ask students to read Appendix A (the one with references included), and discuss:

- *What information has been added to this passage?* (Answer: references)
- *What do the numbers '447' and '66' indicate?* (Answer: page references)
- *Why are the references different each time?* (Answer: they apply to different kinds of information: an idea, specific information, and a quotation)

Elicit ideas and provide the correct answers.

Step 4: Ask students to look at the text again, and discuss:

- *What information do you need to give when you reference...*
 - ...an idea?*
 - ...specific information?*
 - ...a quotation?*

Step 5: Explain that for the general idea of a text, only a name and year are required. For specific information or a quotation, the page number is also required. Mention that "et al." is used when there are more than two authors. Explain that there are two ways of giving a quotation. One is to give the

name and year before the quotation and the page number after the quotation (e.g., 'According to Jones (2006), "[quote]" (p.66)'). The other is to give the name, year, and page number after the quotation (e.g., "[quote]" (Jones, 2006, p.66)').

Step 6: Ask students to read the final passage (Appendix C) and work together to check the in-text references. Tell them to think about what kind of information is being provided in each case, to see if the in-text references are following the patterns they have studied, and, if not, to use the reference list to make corrections. For example, the reference to "(Crystal)" should read "(Crystal, 2003)." The publication year can be found in the reference list (see Appendix C for full answer key).

Step 7: Ask pairs to compare their corrections.

Step 8: Elicit answers and clarify, as required.

Conclusion

Through clear models, this activity helps students understand when and how to include references in their work. By working in groups and making corrections to references, the students will gain a deeper understanding of the rules of APA referencing than they would from simply following examples.

References

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Appendices

The appendices are available from the online version of this article at <https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/myshare/home>

Making Academic Reference Lists

Robert J. Lowe

Ochanomizu University

lowe.robert.james@ocha.ac.jp

Quick Guide

- » **Keywords:** *Academic writing, referencing*
- » **Learner English level:** *Intermediate+*
- » **Learner maturity:** *Undergraduate*

- » Preparation time: 10-20 minutes
- » Activity time: 60-90 minutes
- » Materials: Two handouts containing reference lists (see Appendices), style guide (e.g., APA (7th edition)), sticky notes

Students may be aware that they should cite sources in academic writing but may not be familiar with the conventions of making reference lists. In this activity, students learn formatting rules, correct mistakes, and practice writing their own references. This is a follow-up to the previous activity on in-text references and also uses APA (7th edition) referencing conventions on books, book chapters, and journal articles. As before, it can be adapted to include other sources and referencing styles.

Preparation

Step 1: Prepare a handout containing a reference list including books, chapters in edited works, and journal articles (see Appendix A).

Step 2: Prepare another handout containing a reference list with numerous errors (see Appendix B). Make sure one or two sources are accurately referenced. Some of the errors should be obvious. For example, in the reference 'Adams, T. E., Holman Jones, S., & Ellis, C. *Autoethnography*. Oxford University Press, 2015,' the year is incorrectly placed (it should appear after the authors' names). Other errors should be subtle, such as incorrect capitalization or italicization. For example, in 'McKinley, J. (2019). *Evolving The TESOL Teaching-Research Nexus*. *TESOL Quarterly*, 53(3), 875-884. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.509>', the title of the article is written in title case rather than sentence case, and the title of the article is italicized, rather than the name of the journal and the volume number.

Step 3: Collect a variety (enough for one between two students) of books, edited books, and physical copies of journals. For edited works and journals, indicate a chapter or article with a sticky note.

Procedure

Step 1: Give students the correct reference list (Appendix A), and ask them to discuss the following questions:

- In what order are the references written?
- Which of these references are for books, which are for chapters in edited works, and which are for journal articles?
- What are the rules for referencing each kind of source?

- What is a "DOI"?

Elicit answers (see answer key in Appendix A).

Step 2: Explain the rules for referencing each kind of source, using the reference list as a model. Mention that every source used in the in-text references must be included in the reference list, and vice-versa.

Step 3: Give students the second handout (Appendix B) and ask them to work in pairs to correct the errors. Monitor and help as necessary.

Step 4: Ask pairs to share and compare their ideas. Then, go through corrections as a whole class (see Appendix B for Answer Key).

Step 5: Give one of the books or journals prepared earlier to each pair and tell them to write a reference in the style they have learnt. Monitor and help with issues such as finding the year of publication on the copyright page, identifying the authors' surnames, and finding DOI numbers.

Step 6: Allow 5-10 minutes for the students to complete this task. Then tell them to pass their materials clockwise around the room to another pair, and practice again.

Step 7: After students have written five or six references, ask them to swap their reference list with another pair and give feedback on any errors they see.

Conclusion

Students unfamiliar with academic writing may approach reference lists haphazardly. This activity is an effective way of helping students to write reference lists accurately. Through correcting examples, students will gain a deeper familiarity with referencing styles than they might by just copying from models.

Appendices

The appendices are available from the online version of this article at <https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/myshare/home>





Sarah Deutchman & Edward Escobar

In this column, we discuss the latest developments in ed-tech, as well as tried and tested apps and platforms, and the integration between teaching and technology. We invite readers to submit articles on their areas of interest. Please contact the editors before submitting.

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A Case for Using A.I.-Generated Images in the Classroom

Thomas Entwistle

British Council, Japan

In today's digital age, A.I.-generated images are presenting a unique challenge to many industries and sectors. For example, many in the television and movie industry are becoming increasingly worried about the looming threat of A.I. on their livelihoods and intellectual property, as a recent controversy over Studio Ghibli-style A.I. image rendering went viral (Urbain, 2025). Furthermore, incorporating A.I. language learning tools, such as large language models like ChatGPT, and A.I. material creators, like Canva and Midjourney, have had a mixed reception from learners (Ahmed et al., 2025).

However, utilizing image rendering A.I.s is a great way to supplement materials, engage learners, promote inclusivity and representation, save teachers' time, and foster meaningful class discussion and debate. This article will outline some of the A.I. image generators available and go on to highlight and give examples of the benefits of using them. Finally, this article will mention some of the limitations for teachers of using A.I. picture generators.

What's Out There

There are an ever-increasing number of A.I. image-creating platforms out there to choose from. From subscription-based models like Adobe CC and Midjourney, which is hosted on Discord, to free sites, such as ChatGPT and Perchance.org. Each platform is slightly different with some limiting the number of images you can create per day, for example ChatGPT and Midjourney, while others are limitless, like Perchance.org. For that reason, I will briefly describe the image-creating process on Perchance.org.

Figure 1

QR Code Link to Perchance.org A.I. Image Generator



Perchance.org

Scan the QR code (Figure 1) which will take you to Perchance.org. Once on the webpage, you will see a description box to enter an image prompt, an anti-description box for things you don't want to appear in your image, a drop-down box of a wide range of art styles to choose from: from professional photo, to oil painting, to claymation, the option for landscape, square, or portrait images, and the number of images you'd like the A.I. to generate (the maximum being 30 at a time on the desktop). After your images have been generated you have the option to 'heart' particular images to save them or regenerate a particular image by pressing the circular arrows. See Figure 2 for an example image.

Figure 2

Example of a Perchance.org Generated Image



Note. The following are the prompts used to generate the image: Japanese university student, reading at home, evening time, wearing traditional clothes; Art Style: Claymation; Shape: Landscape.

Most A.I. generators have a similar system, but others are less user-friendly. For instance, on Midjourney the user just enters a prompt. Rather than having drop-down boxes, the user must add in different parameters for the A.I. to follow. For instance, one needs to add the --ar parameter followed by the desired aspect ratio that is desired (e.g., --ar 16:9) for the generated images to be a certain size and shape.

The Benefits of Incorporating A.I. Generated Images in One's Classes

I have been using A.I. rendered images in many ways for the past few years. Here are some of the benefits and ways in which I have utilized A.I. created imagery:

- A.I. generated pictures can be used as supplementary visual aids for listening and reading activities. High-quality, visually appealing images can help activate schemata, add extra context to the activity, and be more engaging for the students than stock photos from suppliers such as Getty Images.
- Worries over copyright and Creative Commons licenses do not apply to most A.I. rendering sites and platforms. This means that the images can be used for in-class materials and for commercial use. However, while some image-generation platforms, like OpenAI's DALL-E, allow users to use the generated pictures freely, others may impose restrictions. So, always check the terms of service.
- Mass-produced textbooks from large international publishers such as Cambridge and Oxford University Press focus on diverse representation in their publications to ensure inclusivity in their imagery and artwork. While this ought to be lauded, in a monolingual context like Japan, this can lead to students becoming less engaged with the material as they don't see themselves represented as much (Entwistle, n.d.). Using A.I. image generators can be used to create material that motivates students to see their imagined future identities (Kanno & Norton, 2003). I used A.I. pictures in a lesson to have students think about their future after graduating by using real stories of ex-students from our department (see Figure 3).
- In my experience, Google searching for specific images to help supplement one's lesson can be time consuming and often ends in a dead end. Admittedly, there is a knack to A.I. prompt writing that takes a little time getting

used to, but once you get over that wrinkle, generating your own image is often much quicker than lengthy Google searches.

- With higher-level learners, I had students compare a real piece of art by 80s artist Leroy Neiman, and a piece generated by A.I. (see Figure 4). This was used as the base of a wider discussion about A.I., the arts, and the future.

Figure 3

Midjourney Generated Image of an Ex-Student Who Went on to Become a Flight Attendant



Figure 4

A.I. Art Versus Real Art: Which One is Which?



The list above is not exhaustive as there are many other possibilities for the use of A.I.-produced images in English language education.

The Limitations of Using A.I. Image Generators

Of course, using A.I. image generators is not without its limitations. Currently, many generators have problems rendering certain anatomical features like hands and fingers, especially with free generators like Perchance.org. Often there will be either too many or too few fingers, or the fingers will be merged into the object the person is holding. However, often this is not an issue if you are willing

to overlook minor inconsistencies. See Figure 5 for an example of an image with problematic digits on hands.

Also, if your image prompt is overly complex, it can be a little time-consuming before you get an image you find satisfactory. Like any new technology, prompt writing is a learning curve, and I have found it gets easier relatively quickly.

Figure 5

Example of an Inaccurate Hand Rendering from Midjourney



Conclusion

Even though there is a great deal of suspicion based around A.I. and its place in the classroom (Sumakul et al., 2022), A.I. is not going to be going anywhere anytime soon so we should be looking for ways to leverage its usefulness. Incorporating A.I. rendered images into class materials can help supplement lessons, motivate students through increased representation, save teachers' time, and spark meaningful discussion.

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Using Wordwall for Warm-Up and Review Activities

Angelo Morales

angelomoralesph@gmail.com

Recent research continues to show that more and more EFL/ESL classrooms, not only in Japan but in other countries (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Malaysia), have been utilizing gamification with the aim to facilitate English learning (Zhang & Hasim, 2023). Reported benefits of gamification include immediate feedback, development of social learning, and increased motivation (Gil-Acirón, 2022). These benefits have led to the creation of various educational gaming programs, such as Kahoot!, Quizizz, Factile, and Baamboozle. Wordwall (wordwall.net) is another online platform that teachers can use to easily create interactive activities. The games on Wordwall may be used in both online and face-to-face classroom settings. It offers different subscription plans for schools and individuals. This article will focus on how Wordwall may be used for warm-up or review activities.

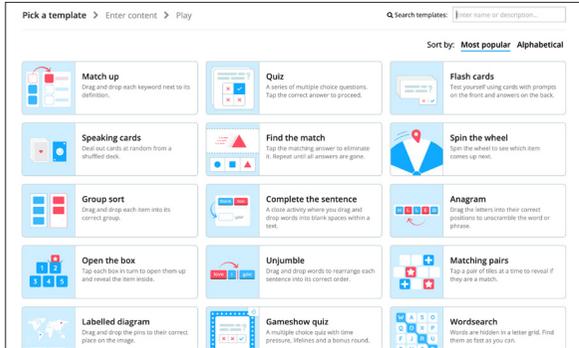
How to Create Activities

Choose a Template

There are 18 templates available for all membership plans (see Figure 1). I like to use different templates for different activities. For example, Word-search, Flip Tiles, and Matching Pairs are good for vocabulary activities. Additionally, Spell the Word may be ideal for spelling practice. One way to do it is to provide an image of the word to be spelled. To add a listening component, Wordwall has an *add sound* feature. This allows me to type in the spelling of the word and generate audio for it. For impromptu speaking and writing activities, Spin the Wheel, Flash Cards, Flip Tiles, and Open the Box work well. I often use Spin the Wheel because it is easy to prepare and can be used for various grammar targets or just a simple game like Name 3 (e.g., fruits) or Name

5 (e.g., things in a classroom). For grammar-related games or activities, Complete the Sentence, Quiz, and Gameshow Quiz can be used.

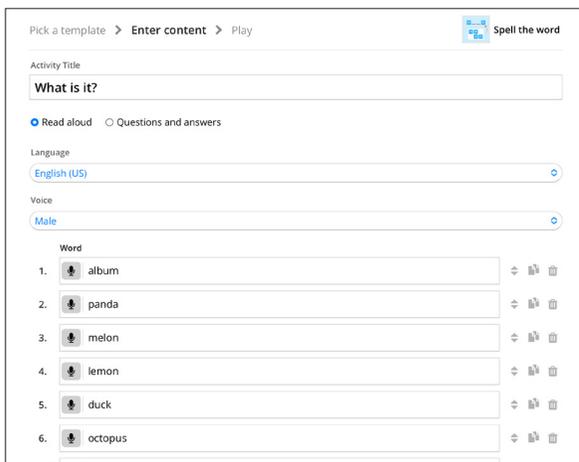
Figure 1
Free Standard Templates for Activities



Enter Your Content

After selecting a template, type in the content (see Figure 2). Some templates offer an option to search and upload a photo to accompany the text. This makes it easier for the teacher because the image is already next to the word. Some templates also have a text to speech feature, which makes them suitable for listening activities.

Figure 2
Enter Your Activity Content



The teacher can also select from about 20 visual styles to suit the theme of the activity or the age level of the students. Autumn, spring, winter, and Christmas visual styles create a mood for the season while the primary or classroom visual styles may help reduce any visual distractions. There are also

six font choices. For the junior high and high school level classes at the *eikaiwa* (English conversation) school where I taught, the visual styles had no significant effect on student interest in the activity.

Implementation in the Classroom

Wordwall gives the teacher the flexibility on how to implement their activities in both an online classroom setting and a face-to-face learning environment. In addition to ensuring the activity meets the lesson objectives, the following are some other questions to consider:

- Who are the students? How many are there?
- What resources are available? How can the activities be shared (e.g., through smart board, TV, tablets or devices, internet connectivity)?
- Will the activity be teacher-led or student-led?
- Will a group of students share one device?
- How will the activity be monitored?
- How will feedback be provided?

Advantages and Drawbacks of Using Wordwall

The 18 standard templates give the teacher plenty of choices for activities to create (see Figures 3 and 4). However, unlike other platforms that allow the teacher to import questions from a source file, the teacher has to type the content or copy and paste from a source file (Khánh, 2021). I subscribed to both the standard and pro plans for a few months, and I was able to create activities using the pro templates. Having access to activities created with pro templates enables me to use them for other language targets.

Figure 3
The Spell the Word Activity May be Used for Vocabulary Activities

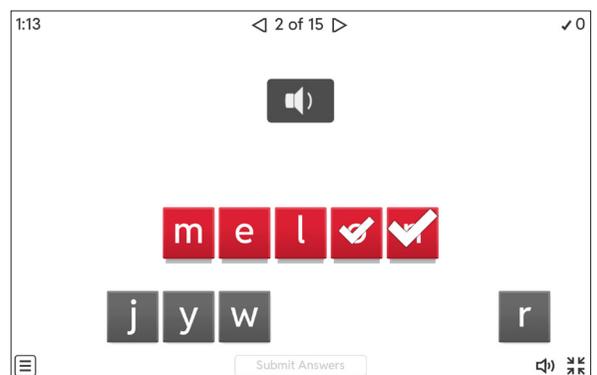
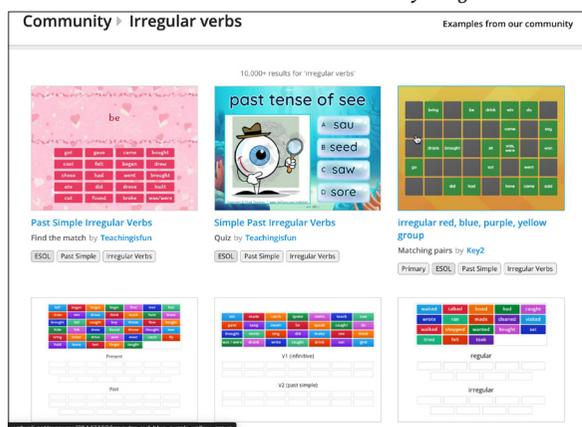


Figure 7

Pre-Made Activities Via the Community Page



Conclusion

Wordwall is a recommended resource for review activities, for warm-up activities, or as a filler activity in case there are a few minutes left before the class ends. While the basic free plan only allows five free activities, the teacher has the option to edit the activities to meet the class needs/objectives.

Alternatively, the teacher may consider subscribing to a standard or pro plan for a short period of time to gain access to the pro templates and create activities using said templates. Teachers who opt not to create a Wordwall account have the option to access pre-made activities that meet their lesson objectives. Overall, Wordwall provides teachers the opportunity to gamify their lessons through various activities. The teacher may customize the activities to suit their class needs. Activities offer the flexibility to be used for speaking, reading, listening, and writing activities.

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[JALT PRAXIS] YOUNGER LEARNERS



Martin Sedaghat & Emily MacFarlane

The *Younger Learners* column provides language teachers of children and teenagers with advice and guidance for making the most of their classes. Teachers with an interest in this field are also encouraged to submit articles and ideas to the editors at the address below. We also welcome questions about teaching and will endeavour to answer them in this column.

Email: jaltpubs.tlt.y@jalt.org

Beyond Memorisation:
A Dynamic Approach to
English Presentations

Kye Marksteiner

In today's fast-paced world, strong presentation skills are crucial across all disciplines, whether in class, at events, or in future career settings. The elementary English curriculum (MEXT, 2017) highlights speaking skills, separating them into two categories: speaking as an interaction and speaking as a product (i.e., presentations). In fact, most ele-

mentary school English units will include some form of presentation as an assessment. This is further reinforced in junior high and high school curriculums, stressing the need for presentation skills throughout education.

However, presentations are more than just memorising a script. To truly master them, students must develop clear articulation, appropriate volume, varied tempo, and effective body language—all while engaging their audience. In my experience as an assistant language teacher (ALT), I observed that many students felt anxious about public speaking and relied on rote memorisation as a result. Tackling this issue led to me developing a more interactive and engaging approach that focuses on continuous interaction in English at all stages of learning. Furthermore, I now use what I call “interactive pre-

sentations:” presentations that involve the audience and encourage real-time communication.

This article contains a step-by-step methodology that I applied in various English units during my time as an ALT. Although I focus on one unit as a case study, I believe these methods are adaptable to a variety of educational settings and grade levels. I hope to provide practical tools for educators to help students develop dynamic presentations that enhance both their language skills and overall communication abilities.

Context and Learning Goals

In this article, I will be looking at Unit 6 of the *New Horizon Elementary 6* textbook (Tokyo Shoseki, 2004), where students discuss endangered animals using simple sentences (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Language Targets

発表内容	
1	Let's save the <u>koalas</u> . (〇〇を守ろう！)
2	<u>Koalas</u> live in the <u>forest</u> . (〇〇は～に住んでいます。)
3	<u>Forest loss</u> is a big <u>problem</u> . (～は大きな問題です。)
4	We can <u>plant trees</u> . (私たちは～ができます。)

In traditional elementary English classrooms, goals often focus on mastering specific content, language structures, or vocabulary. A typical goal for this unit might be: “Present about what we can do for endangered animals.” A lesson goal may look like: “Let’s learn the English words to talk about the problems animals face with our classmates.” Even though these goals give students a clear idea of what to expect, goals that focus solely on language (i.e., “present” and “learn the English”) can lead to an overemphasis on memorisation and language skills, rather than on actually using English to achieve a purpose. Without a deeper engagement with the content, activities and the final presentation can easily turn into memorising a script or dialogue.

Instead, I prefer an inquiry-based approach, such as: “Let’s research the problems animals face and discuss how to help.” This goal encourages both vocabulary development and critical thinking about real-world issues, rather than just language acquisition. Updating this goal also incentivises ongoing

assessment focused on the learning process. Unlike traditional goals with vague expressions like, “let’s learn,” “discuss,” or “research” allow teachers to assess students’ participation in discussions, research tasks, and problem-solving activities. My approach sets the expectation that students will be assessed on their engagement with the content, with guiding questions to help students strategise their learning, like:

- “Why are some animals in danger?”
- “What can we do to help them?”
- “How do we talk about environmental issues [in English]?”

Simple Japanese support, such as explaining phrases like, “Why are some animals in danger?” can aid understanding. Although we could simplify the goals in English, having them in Japanese first helps elementary students grasp the central idea before diving into English activities. Ultimately, we are assessing their engagement with the unit’s language, not their comprehension of the English used in the goals.

Modelling the Final Interactive Presentation

Traditionally, teachers model the final presentation at the start of the unit, usually demonstrating it live or showing textbook materials. These models tend to have simple and rigid sentence structures (see Figure 2). This strict rigidity often leads to students replicating the model and simply substituting key words to suit their chosen animal (see the underlined words in Figure 2), as students feel discouraged from experimenting with new language.

Figure 2
An Example Model Presentation

Sea Turtles

- ① Where do sea turtles live?
- ② Sea turtles live in the sea.
- ③ Let's save the sea turtles!
- ④ Plastic is a big problem.
- ⑤ We can do the 4Rs.
- ⑥ Thank you!



Reduce
+

Reduce
+

4R

Recycle
+

Reuse
+

My approach is to instead begin the unit by modelling the “interactive presentation.” Students may expect to remain quiet and attentive during this model initially, as they would for any traditional classroom presentation. However, I break this

pattern of passive listening by immediately asking direct questions, prompting students to move from silent listeners to active, engaged participants. In this unit, I began my presentation with the classic three-hint quiz, where students must guess the animal I'm thinking of. Then, I shared data about the declining koala population, encouraging students to think critically about the "what" (i.e., what is causing the koala population to fall?).

This approach brought out lively discussions in both English and Japanese. With encouragement from the homeroom teacher and myself, students shared their thoughts about the causes of koala endangerment in English. Some students enthusiastically shouted "Fire!" or asked, "Do you eat koala meat [in Australia]?" These moments allowed me to show photos of habitat destruction (i.e., "forest loss") and elicit from students what we can do to help the koalas, such as planting trees or saving paper.

The language in my model presentation was initially complex for the students, but this was intentional. Teachers can use this method to model communicating difficult or unfamiliar vocabulary to an audience and show students how meaning can still be understood even without knowing every word—a concept I will explore further in this article.

Building a Shared Vocabulary

After interacting with the teachers during the model presentation, students become more engaged and eager to use the new language they've been exposed to. Even though textbooks often include vocabulary lists or dictionaries, I encourage students to generate their own language resources.

To do this, we revisit the unit goal and an inquiry question, such as, "Why are some animals in danger?" From there, we ask our students to brainstorm relevant vocabulary in both Japanese and English based on their existing linguistic resources. In my example, students provided "pollution" in Japanese and "no food" in English. This brainstorming session allowed us to create language tools, like word walls or flashcards, to further assist our students. I often hand-draw vocabulary generated in these sessions (see Figures 3, 4, and 5) and display them in the classroom. I also provide students with scanned digital copies, enabling them to review and access the vocabulary at any time. We then use these resources in activities alongside the included vocabulary in the textbook. By involving students in this process, we give them ownership over their learning and thus make it more likely that students will remember what they have learned.

The ultimate goal is not for students to merely memorize these new words, but for students to create a shared vocabulary that enables effective communication. Although students still learn the language targets alongside this generated vocabulary, this approach provides students with the tools necessary to engage in deeper, more authentic conversations in English.

Figure 3
"Plastic" Flash Card

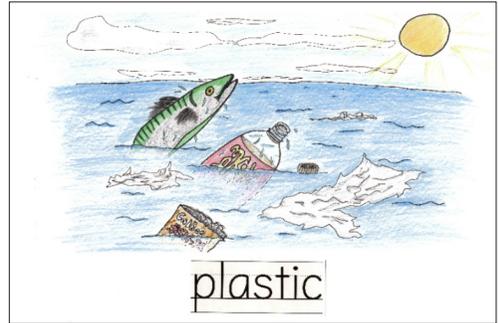


Figure 4
"Disease" Flash Card

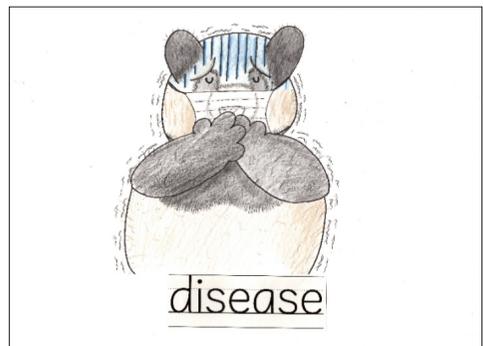
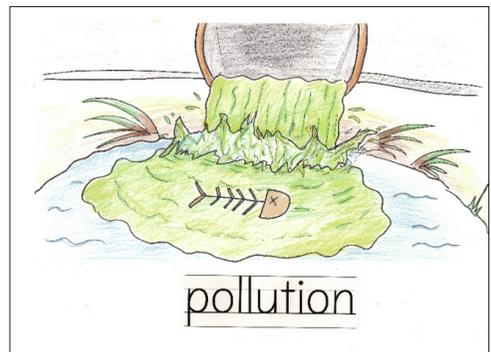


Figure 5
"Pollution" Flash Card



Supporting Planning and Collaborative Research (ICT Tool: LoiLoNote)

Early in the animal unit, students formed groups and chose an animal to focus on for their inquiry. We utilised the digital tool LoiLoNote for this stage, which allows students to collaborate in real-time, organise data, share ideas, and delegate tasks through its 'shared notebook' feature. For example, one student researched an animal's habitat, while another looked for threats to that animal's survival, then both students contributed their data through the shared notebook. This delegation of responsibility guaranteed that research was fairly divided among group members and that each student could take responsibility for their section.

Students collaborated in real-time, adding data to the notebook, brainstorming ideas, and used the information to talk with their peers in English-speaking tasks. This collaborative tool ensured active engagement for every group member and gave them ownership of their learning. While LoiLoNote was only used in the research phase for this unit, it could also be used for collaborative production by delegating sections of a poster (see Figure 6 for an example from another unit). The tool helps students build teamwork and communication skills, both of which are crucial to their success.

Figure 6
A Collaborative Poster About a Foreign Country



Creating Collaborative Presentations: (ICT Tool: Google Apps)

Once the research phase concluded, students transitioned to creating their presentations. They were tasked with developing a collaborative presentation using Google Slides. We set clear expectations from the beginning and informed students that a key part of their assessment would focus

on how they interacted with the audience while presenting. This encouraged them to start developing strategies that went beyond simply presenting information, and to focus on how to engage the audience throughout their presentation.

Using Google Classroom, we created a space where students could access the presentation slides and any relevant resources. This was used in tandem with their research notes in LoiLoNote. With Google Slides, students were able to work on slides simultaneously and contribute ideas, images, and text to various sections to build their presentation (Figures 7 to 10).

Figure 7
Presentation Start



Figure 8
Introducing Context



Figure 9
Establishing Problems



Figure 10

Discovering Solutions



Students created visually appealing presentations by embedding images, videos, and animations to support their points. They also discussed and planned where each member would speak, and shared strategies on how to engage the audience in English. In this way, students practiced communication skills with each other, even while creating the presentation.

Designing Presentation Strategies

As part of the creation process, students planned strategies to increase audience interaction and engagement during their presentation. Below are some key tools and strategies I recommend for any educator interested in using this interactive approach for their own classes.

Presentation Tools

- Displaying photos or illustrations
- Using visual aids to communicate difficult vocabulary not learned in class
- Including interesting animations
- Incorporating YouTube videos or audio
- Using props or realia
- Using gestures and body language and pointing at what area of a poster or slide they're talking about
- Using target language from previous learning

Interactive Engagement Strategies

- Using three-hint quizzes to begin a presentation or break up long speaking segments
- Asking the audience simple questions, such as “Do you know/like...?” to encourage participation
- Randomly selecting audience members to answer an open-ended question, such as “What ...do you like?”

- “Opening the floor” for the audience to ask questions
- Performing mini-skits to relate learning to the audience’s lives
- Giving the audience prompting questions to guess the contents of the presentation (Figure 11)
- Quizzing the audience (Figure 12). Then, audience members need to guess or choose from a list of options

Figure 11

Questioning the Audience

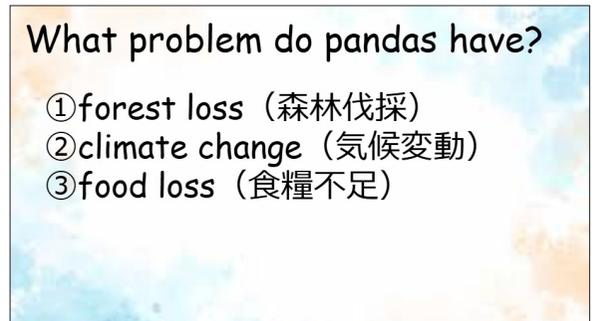


Figure 12

Using Trivia Questions in Presentations



These strategies not only make the presentations more engaging, but also encourage real-time communication, requiring students to think critically and respond dynamically both as a presenter and as the audience.

Feedback and Rehearsal

In my classes, feedback comes in three forms: peer feedback, teacher feedback, and self-reflection. Peer feedback is used frequently during the rehearsal stage. Rehearsing is crucial for helping students build confidence and refine their presentation skills. It allows them to practice speaking, improve fluency, and develop their overall presentation style.

Although we have groups practice together, we also have students practice individually using LoiLoNote, using a function that records their voice or takes a video. This tool allows them to review and improve their performance at their own pace either in class or at home. Students often share these recordings with the teacher or peers for constructive peer feedback.

This is where self-reflection is important in the rehearsal process. I encourage students to assess their own recordings, focusing on aspects like clarity, engagement, and the use of language. This self-assessment helps students become more aware of their strengths and areas for growth, which they can address before the final presentation.

Lastly, the homeroom teacher and I also provide general feedback to the class, focusing on body language, gestures, and audience engagement strategies. For example, we might suggest maintaining eye contact or using pauses or demonstrate techniques for handling mistakes during the presentation. We avoid singling out individual students for criticism but praise strong efforts when observed. This helps build a collaborative learning environment where students share ideas for improving their presentations.

Post-Presentation Assessment and Reflection

In this interactive presentation approach, assessment focuses on both the process and the product. Teachers observe students throughout each stage: research, collaboration, rehearsal, and delivery; formatively assessing how well students articulate ideas and engage with the content. Meanwhile, the homeroom teacher and I provide continuous feedback to help students improve.

For summative assessment, we use an “A/B/C” grading system, where we evaluate not only the content of their presentation, but also the use of body language, gestures, and audience engagement. An “A” student demonstrates minimal errors, uses a variety of language structures, and actively engages the audience through strategies, like asking questions or creating interactive moments. Most students will fall into the “A” or “B” range, with very few landing in the “C” level. Scores are kept private and shared individually.

Post-presentation reflection is also equally important. After their presentations, students write private comments on a self-reflection sheet on what went well and what could be improved. Peer feedback is given through tools like the stream in Google Classroom, where students can leave constructive comments in English and Japanese. We pre-teach useful phrases like “nice voice” or “it was interesting” to help students interact in English. These reflections, along with feedback, enables

student self-awareness and helps them set goals for future presentations.

Finally, although I am cautious about relying on physical rewards, I do recognise their motivational value. Students often receive stickers for positive engagement, and students vote anonymously for awards like:

- Best Presentation
- Best Design
- Best Effort and Planning (teacher-decided)

Winners receive certificates, and the winners of the Best Presentation have their presentations recorded and broadcast throughout the school, offering them the opportunity to showcase their efforts and serve as role models for other grades. The winners of the Best Design have their posters or slides printed and displayed throughout the school.

Conclusion

By incorporating interactive strategies, collaborative learning, and ICT tools, our students gained confidence and developed strong presentation skills. They transformed from anxious speakers to real communicators, practicing language in context. The skills they have gained will help them not only in English, but in any future presentation. I hope educators will also be able to use these strategies to promote interaction in their classrooms.

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Kye Marksteiner is an experienced elementary school educator with over a decade of teaching English in Miyagi, Japan. Holding a Master’s in Teaching for Primary Education from the University of New England in Australia, Kye’s diverse career also includes experience as a homeroom teacher in Sydney. Passionate about building dynamic and engaging classroom environments, he focuses on encouraging active language use and supporting students at every stage of their language learning journey. kmarkste@gmail.com



Recently Received

Julie Kimura & Derek Keever

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A list of texts and resource materials for language teachers is available for book reviews in *TLT* and *JALT Journal*. If none of the titles we have listed appeal to you or are not suitable for your teaching context, please feel free

to contact us to suggest alternate titles. We invite publishers to submit complete sets of materials to Julie Kimura at the Publishers' Review Copies Liaison postal address listed on the Staff page on the inside cover of *The Language Teacher*.

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An up-to-date index of books available for review can be found at <https://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/recently-received>

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Books for Students (reviews published in *TLT*)

Contact: Julie Kimura — jaltpubs.tlt.pub.review@jalt.org

! **Breakthroughs: Japanese women entrepreneurs**—Tanner, P. 2024. [This coursebook comprises 20 chapters based on 20 Japanese women entrepreneurs. Each chapter begins with a dictation exercise, followed by a vocabulary exercise, which helps students prepare for a 600-word reading passage. Chapters end with comprehension and discussion questions.]

* **Everyday science and technology: News you can use**—Knudsen, J. (Annot. Y. Satake). Nan'un-do, 2024. [Science and technology make front-page news every day. The readings in this coursebook are presented in technical, yet accessible language. Twenty need-to-know topics offer readers a look at great discoveries, key breakthroughs, and game-changing innovations. The subtitle, *News you can use*, reflects the hope that the book will provide a go-to manual for navigating through this exciting yet perplexing moment in history. A teacher's manual, an audio CD, and a review test are available.]

Magic speaking—Kim, C., Lee, J., & Wilburn, J. e-future, 2024. [This three-book series is written to help young learners master an elementary level of conversational English. Each unit contains 10 easy-to-follow lessons, which offer ample opportunities for practice and review. Resources, such as MP3 files, flashcards, and answer keys, are available through the publisher's website.]

TOEFL® skills 2—Graham-Marr, A., Naismith, B., & Castro, A. Abax ELT, 2022. [All three titles in this series are geared towards learners at the CEFR A2/B1 level, but this book is suitable for students aiming for an iBT score between 40 and 55. There are six topic-based units, each of which has a focus on language and a focus on the test itself. Activities that focus on language help students develop the skills they need for success on the test. Activities that focus on the test are done under time pressure in order to help students get used to the time constraints of the test. Audio is available through the publisher's website.]

! **The yellow sticker girl**—Gudgeon, S. ELI Readers, 2023. [This graded reader is about a girl from the north of England whose family has big problems. Themes of the story include family, food waste, poverty, and bullying. In addition to the story, there are post-reading activities to support comprehension, as well as productive language skills. CEFR A2. Audio download is available.]

* **Our world: How technology will change our lives tomorrow**—Murray, A. & Passos, A. Nan'un-do, 2024. [The 15 units of this coursebook are designed so that students can hone all four skills in an engaged and meaningful way. A CLIL approach introduces technologies that foster progress towards SDG goals. This second book in the series places a greater emphasis on critical thinking by introducing case studies that can be used for small group discussions and debates. Audio files are available for students to download, and a manual is available for teachers.]

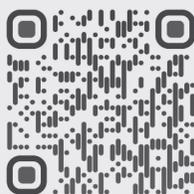
* **What are global Englishes? A CLIL course for learners of English**—Kane Hinohara, E. Perceptia Press, 2025. [This 15-unit coursebook is scaffolded for learners and provides a mix of communicative tasks, receptive tasks, and focus on form through teaching NAWL vocabulary and academic language skills. Topics progress from considering what global Englishes are, learning about the history and spread of English, and what the future holds for global Englishes. This coursebook is suitable for CLIL courses, introductory linguistics courses, and English seminars. A teacher's guide will be available shortly through the publisher's website.]

For 2025, the JALT
Accessibility in Language Learning (ALL) SIG
is happy to announce the continuation of its

ALL Learning Incentive Funds for Teachers (LIFT) scholarship program

In the program's inaugural year,
four ALL SIG members
were awarded scholarships
to complete online certification courses
for professional development
on inclusion and accessibility.

Registration for the second cohort
will open in August 2025.
Curious about the available courses?
Want to know how to
qualify for the scholarship?





David McMurray

Graduate students and teaching assistants are invited to submit compositions in the form of a speech, appeal, memoir, essay, conference review, or interview on the policy and practice of language education. Master's and doctoral thesis supervisors are also welcome to contribute or encourage their students to join this vibrant debate. Grounded in the author's reading, practicum, or empirical research, contributions are expected to share an impassioned presentation of opinions in 1,000 words or less. *Teaching Assistance* is not a peer-reviewed column.

Email: jaltpubs.tlt.ta@jalt.org

This issue's column features an impassioned essay by a teaching assistant who reflects on her educational journey from China to Japan. Studying to become a language teacher, Huang Siyuan is currently at the crossroads of debating whether it is better to employ traditional exam-oriented learning styles or more creative learning styles in her own classroom. The author assesses the problems of examination-oriented education in English teaching in China and puts forward teaching strategies that she has learned in Japan to synergistically improve the quality of English education.

When East Meets West in English Education

Huang Siyuan

The International University of Kagoshima Graduate School

I grew up in a very traditional Chinese family. My parents were both teachers: My father taught physical education, and my mother taught English. Because of my mother's profession, I was exposed to the English language at a young age. Like everything I learned in my hometown of Hebei, China, I learned to read and write English by traditional methods. I can also recite long Chinese poems, I know multiplication tables by heart, and can rhyme off the capital cities of 100 countries. I adopted an exam-oriented memorization approach to learning English and all its grammatical forms. I never questioned this learning process. I was able to meet nationwide educational standards and achieved good grades. According to the English Curriculum Standards issued by China's Ministry of Education (2022), which includes both the compulsory education and senior high school stages, students in the compulsory education phase are expected to comprehend spoken English at a speed of approximately 100–120 words per minute, possess a vocabulary of about 1,600 words, read at a speed of 50–70 words per minute, and be able to write narrative or practical texts of around 80 words with correct grammar. At the high school

level, students should understand listening materials at 130–150 words per minute, have a vocabulary of about 3,500 words, read at a speed of 70–90 words per minute, and be able to write argumentative essays or reports of over 120 words with clear structure. However, my devotion to rote memorization began to change shortly after I moved to Japan.

Upon arriving in Japan, I noticed that the local language teaching methods—whether for Japanese or English—emphasized student autonomy. When I attended a language school in Tokyo, the teacher would ask each of my classmates and me to translate sentences or to construct sentences using picture prompts. I was surprised that not only was everyone's answer different, but each answer was considered to be correct. Yet, I remained fixated on seeking a single correct answer from the teacher, as my traditional upbringing had conditioned me to believe that only the teacher's answer was authoritative. This was a constraint ingrained in me by the conventional Chinese education system. It took me several months to fully adapt to this more individualized approach to learning. That said, as a beneficiary of Chinese-style education, I did not entirely dismiss its merits. When applying for graduate school, I took a TOEIC test to enhance my résumé, and the advantages of the exam-focused Chinese education became evident. Drawing on my lifelong habits, I quickly analyzed the test's patterns, reviewed grammar in the way my mother had instructed me, practiced listening comprehension repeatedly, and relied heavily on intensive mock exams. Almost all of my tutors were Chinese, each highly skilled in test-taking strategies and familiar with question patterns. Through these methods, I managed to score 700 on the TOEIC after just a short preparation period of a few months. Although this score may not be exceptionally high, I was quite satisfied, especially considering that it had been six years since I had studied English systematically—I had barely studied English since high school. I believe that Chinese people truly excel at exams because they can decipher the underlying rules. I believe that it is precisely due to the rigorous demands of the Chinese education system that I was able to achieve a satisfying score on the TOEIC exam. My

solid foundational knowledge, built through years of structured learning, played a crucial role in my performance.

My First Step in Western Education

In July, 2024, I passed the entrance examination and enrolled at a privately run graduate school located in Kagoshima. During orientation for the first semester, I selected an English course that promised to help enrollees understand and talk about a variety of special topics. The course instructor was a Canadian, who introduced me to Western-style education for the first time in my academic life. Initially, I struggled significantly with this new learning approach. I felt extremely shy about public speaking, feared opening my mouth in class, and avoided interacting with classmates from Japan, Hong Kong, and Korea. I relied entirely on translation apps, as if my brain had lost its ability to think independently. During my first presentation, the instructor not only pointed out my shortcomings but asked my classmates to also critique my presentation style. Admittedly, I had kept my head down reading mechanically from my script, failed to engage with the audience, and displayed stiff body language.

For my second presentation, I rebounded from these mistakes. From topic selection to content development, I crafted an entire speech independently without relying on translation tools or AI tools such as ChatGPT. I shared a story about stepping out on a *city walk* (a trending term on Chinese social media that literally means strolling around an urban area in a relaxed, aimless way). I talked about exploring a city and visiting temples to more deeply experience its history and culture. To add some personal interest, I included anecdotes about interactions I had with my boyfriend at that time, including our blessings for academic success rather than romantic relationships. Incidentally, we went our separate ways following that trip. Intrigued by my presentation in the classroom, the audience asked me to lead them all on a campus walk (see Figure 1). I got positive feedback and was praised for my presentation skills. To this day, I consider this to be my most interesting and satisfying presentation.

Negotiating My Identity as a TA and as a Participant in Classes

The second semester of my graduate studies brought an unexpected opportunity—the professor of the English class on special topics invited me to serve as a teaching assistant (TA) for two undergraduate English courses, each with 40 Japanese students.

My initial apprehension about my linguistic capabilities (both English proficiency and Japanese ability to provide clear instructions) gave way to surprising competence during the first English session (see Figure 2). In a Travel English course, an engaging video introduction captivated the undergraduate students, and then I took the students on a campus walk through a forest to compose haiku about spring blossoms on the trees—an experience that dissolved my anxieties and instilled professional confidence. Together, the students and I disproved the idiom “can’t see the forest for the trees.”

In the second course, English Education, the students practiced role-playing simulations. Everyone adopted teaching personas such as a parent, a principal, or a junior high school student. I was a TA, but in class I became an assistant language teacher.

Figure 1

Campus Walk During an English Class on Special Topics



Figure 2

Haiku Composition Activity



By fully immersing myself as both participant and observer, I gained multidimensional insights into pedagogical effectiveness and learner needs. The instructor differentiated his approach between these courses: Travel English emphasizes conversational fluency through relaxed atmospheres, whereas English Education maintains rigorous standards for prospective classroom instructors.

From my new perspective, the role of a TA represents a unique third-party vantage point in the classroom dynamic—one that facilitates the instructor's achievement of pedagogical objectives while actively promoting student engagement throughout the learning process. There is a profound Chinese proverb that states, "Those closely involved cannot see as clearly as those outside" (*dang ju zhe mi pang guan zhe qing*), which perfectly encapsulates why educational settings require an observant outsider to objectively identify potential disconnects between educators and learners. Furthermore, for aspiring language teachers like myself, the opportunity to observe seasoned professors in action constitutes the most accelerated form of professional development. This triangular dynamic—encompassing instructors, students, and teaching assistants—creates mutually beneficial synergies that elevate the entire educational experience.

Collision or Harmony

As someone who embodies an amalgamation of Eastern and Western educational philosophies, the stark contrast in pedagogical approaches has granted me exceptional insight into developing more effective, learner-centric teaching methodologies. The Chinese education system, with its examination-oriented focus, emphasizes standardized answers and knowledge transmission, cultivating formidable linguistic foundations and exceptional test-taking abilities through intensive drilling exercises. Conversely, western education seems to prioritize practical applications, emphasizing the cultivation of critical thinking and individual expression through immersive, context-rich learning experiences that develop real-world language competencies. My personal journey as a learner has empirically demonstrated how perfectly these two systems can complement each other: Chinese education provides the structural framework and foundational knowledge, while Western approaches promote creative potential and practical skills.

An ideal foreign language education system can strategically integrate the strengths of both paradigms—not only establishing comprehensive knowledge networks, but also intensifying the

development of applied competencies. The ultimate purpose of language acquisition extends far beyond mere academic study; it aims to culminate in practical implementation. This principle of learning for application represents not just the essence of English education, but indeed the fundamental objective of mastering any language. The Chinese approach builds the cognitive architecture through systematic repetition and precision, while Western methods bring this architecture to life through authentic communication scenarios. Zhang and Hui (2024) suggested that with the increasing intensity of social competition, the issue of exam-oriented education in English teaching has become increasingly serious. Although exam-oriented education can, to some extent, help select English talents and improve students' knowledge of the language, its excessive emphasis on test scores has led to negative consequences, such as continuously escalating competition. The researchers also suggested that more attention should be paid to cultivating students' creative thinking in English rather than focusing solely on exam results. Allowing students to use English in various real-life contexts not only enhances their practical language skills but also stimulates their imagination and creativity.

Chinese language teachers are gradually transforming their teaching methods, according to Chen (2023) who critiqued *The English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools* set by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2020). The standards explain the basic principles that should be followed in grammar teaching practice under the background of the new curriculum standards. For example, it includes a design for teaching the cases of modal verbs in senior high school English classes based on these principles. Teachers are encouraged to explore the combination and application of the basic principles in the teaching of new curriculum standards and senior high school English grammar teaching by following these cascading four steps in each class:

1. introduce the topic while exploring the grammatical form
2. explore the topic while identifying the grammatical form
3. expand the topic while exploring the grammatical rules
4. sublimate the topic while applying the grammatical rules

These steps can enable students to understand, analyze, summarize, and use the grammatical rules in the context of the theme and cultivate their comprehensive language skills.

Of Course Harmony

The dual perspective I have gained allows me to identify precisely when students need the disciplined structure of Eastern methods versus the creative freedom of Western approaches. During grammar instruction, the meticulous Chinese focus on form and accuracy prevents fossilization of errors. Yet, when developing communicative competence, Western-style task-based learning and project work prove indispensable. My experience as a TA has shown me how to artfully transition between these modes—perhaps beginning a lesson with explicit grammar instruction (Eastern approach) before transitioning to student-led discussions or presentations (Western approach).

The metacognitive awareness developed through this cultural and educational duality represents an invaluable asset in contemporary language education. It enables me to diagnose whether a student's difficulty in language acquisition stems from insufficient foundational knowledge (addressed through Eastern methods) or lack of practical application opportunities (remedied through Western techniques). By offering precise diagnosis and enabling the application of tailored instruction, this approach establishes optimal language acquisition conditions that surpass the capabilities of either system alone.

Ultimately, the synthesis I have developed suggests that language education must be both

systematic and organic, precise and creative, and structured and spontaneous. The Eastern tradition provides the necessary scaffolding, while the Western approach teaches learners how to build creative structures to implement in real-world contexts. In light of the continued globalization of education, such integrative models will become increasingly vital in preparing students not just to learn a language as defined by vocabulary and grammar, but to live and work through it—truly fulfilling the highest purpose of language learning.

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[JALT PRAXIS] WRITERS' WORKSHOP



Jerry Talandis Jr. & Daniel Chesmore

The Writers' Workshop is a collaborative endeavour of the JALT Writers' Peer Support Group (PSG). Articles in the column provide advice and support for novice writers, experienced writers, or nearly anyone who is looking to write for academic purposes. If you would like to submit a paper for consideration, please contact us.

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Culling Voices: Meditations on the Academic Voice

Daniel Chesmore

Doshisha International High School

The nature of academic voice can be a thorn in the side of any aspiring writer—or accomplished one for that matter. Does one use the abstract third person and the passive voice, or take a personal tone using first person and more active language? Do you find your favourite scholar and

try to mimic them, or do you do what most do and try to sound as smart as possible in the hope that it sounds right and no one will notice? The academic voice is a bit of a thorny issue. My colleague Jerry Talandis Jr. (2023) has presented a wonderful guide of how to develop the practical skills for an academic voice. This article will look at the theoretical side of the academic voice, why we use it, what it is not, and how we can use it to support our writing.

What is the Academic Voice

To maintain consistency with Talandis Jr.'s (2023) column, we will continue to use Gardner's (2010) characterisation of the academic voice: "To me, your

writer's voice is the expression of YOU on the page. It's that simple—and that complicated ... Voice is all about your originality and having the courage to express it" (para. 4–para. 5). To build on this, Castelló and Iñesta (2012) discuss how the academic voice develops to become part of a writer's social identity as an academic author and researcher. At its very foundations is the academic voice. We can strip away aspects of style or social contrivance and reduce the academic voice to its simplest form, it is you on the page. This is something all writers should remember—that there is no difference between the writer and their voice.

Why Do We Use It

The academic voice is used to convey a sense of objectivity (whether people are capable of being objective shall be set to one side as we do not need that headache). It shows to the reader that the writer has considered their opinions and researched and refined their idea until it is ready. Personal and emotive language is discouraged so as to not cloud the work. The passive voice is used to show the results of the action rather than the actor (Oyewola, 2025). Each point raised is supported by evidence and sources. The writer can use this evidence with the academic voice to show that they have researched and engaged with the topic and its wider issues. This process and tone gives credence to the writer's argument, showing that this is a considered opinion rather than random thoughts hastily thrown on the page (University of Arizona Global Campus Writing Center, n.d.).

This process of writing makes the writer stop and consider what they are going to say and how they are going to say it. At its core, the academic voice should bring the writer to a point of clarity, where they are able to distill down their thoughts and present a clear thesis. This process works alongside essay structuring (Chesmore, 2025). Through the academic voice, the writer is striving for clarity, in terms of the argument, language, and style. Through this, the reader comes away with a new level of understanding, and the writer has proven the merit of their work.

What It is Not

There is a trend, born by the worm of self-doubt, for writers to obfuscate their thesis behind an erudite shroud of sesquipedalian language in the hope that it will somehow impart a scholarly arete. Instead, one is left with the literary equivalent of Welsh Rarebit: it sounds fancy but ultimately it is just cheese on toast. Orwell (The Orwell Foundation, n.d.) makes

the argument that there is a divide between one's real and declared aims, that the writer "turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish spurting out ink" to hide the gap between the two (para. 22). The insecurity that we all face at times over whether our work has any merit or not can be assayed through esoteric vocabulary.

Likewise, unless one is rather good, it is not written as one speaks. It is not a tangled mass of slang, terms and concepts thrown together in a morass of counter-culture expression—which does nothing more than cause a reader to lie down in a dark room. We have to be aware of the difference between written and spoken work. The academic voice is not a tangle of slang terms and concepts thrown together to create an impenetrable morass. It is certainly not drier than a cream cracker in a dehumidifier, that is for sure.

What is understandable for new writers is to conflate the idea that the academic voice must be cold, sterile, and objective thing devoid of all character. Looking back to the definition of terms, we can see that this is not the case, for all writers are not boring at the very least.

For all of this, the overriding thing the academic voice is not inaccessible. As Sword et al. (2024) discusses, the academic voice, regardless of level, should not be inaccessible. This is an issue, which the discipline has struggled with over the years: That work should only be accessible to those who can parse the meaning, which frankly is a bit silly; Nothing is gained for anyone involved. The research and craft of the writer is rendered worthless if the reader cannot understand what is being said. These examples illustrate the pitfalls of the academic voice and should be avoided by all writers.

How Can We Use It

Through this essay, we have looked at what the academic voice is and is not. We have an idea of why we use it but not an understanding of how we should use it—not in the practical sense of word choice, structure, and the like, but rather, looking at how we can use the academic voice to best support our work. For example, how we can use technical language without sounding like a bipedal dictionary; how to not be a cuttlefish; how to avoid stripping all life from the work in the quest for objectivity; and most of all, how not to be boring?

To begin with, and to put one's head into the lion's mouth, we can give up on the idea of objectivity. "We no longer need give up our humanity for the illusion

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The Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT)

- A professional organization formed in 1976
- 1976年に設立された学術学会
- Working to improve language learning and teaching, particularly in a Japanese context
- 語学の学習と教育の向上を図ることを目的としています
- Almost 3,000 members in Japan and overseas
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Meetings and conferences sponsored by local chapters and special interest groups (SIGs) are held throughout Japan. Presentation and research areas include:

Bilingualism • CALL • College and university education • Cooperative learning • Gender awareness in language education • Global issues in language education • Japanese as a second language • Learner autonomy • Lifelong language learning • Materials development • Pragmatics, pronunciation, second language acquisition • Teaching children • Testing and evaluation

支部及び分野別研究部会による例会や研究会は日本各地で開催され、以下の分野での発表や研究報告が行われます。バイリンガルイズム、CALL、大学外国語教育、共同学習、ジェンダーと語学学習、グローバル問題、日本語教育、自主的学習、語用論・発音・第二言語習得、児童語学教育、生涯語学教育、試験と評価、教材開発等。

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- AJET—The Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching
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All members receive annual subscriptions to *The Language Teacher* and *JALT Journal*, and member discounts for meetings and conferences. *The Language Teacher*や*JALT Journal*等の出版物が1年間送付されます。また例会や大会に割引価格で参加できます。

- Regular 一般会員: ¥13,000
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JALT Central Office

Level 20, Marunouchi Trust Tower—Main,
1-8-3 Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-0005 JAPAN
JALT事務局: 〒100-0005東京都千代田区丸の内1-8-3
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of objective knowledge” (Richardson, 1997, p. 16). When we write something, we are arguing a point; accepted or not, it remains the same. Even something seemingly sterile as a conference report has some element of “you” in it. Whether you are arguing if it was good or not, the matter remains the same.

If we have followed our essay structure, have a clear thesis on the page, and have done our research, then we are well on our way to avoiding a cuttlefish situation. These steps are not just to prove that we have done something, but to prove to ourselves that we know what we are talking about. As Orwell (The Orwell Foundation, n.d.) said, the issue arises in the gap between our real and declared aims. Through our research, we will have closed that space and found some confidence. From there, we can begin to look at our vocabulary choice.

When considering our word choice, it is best to think of going to a dinner party. Obviously, we need formal attire and the disciplinary specific language. However, turning up in a gold tuxedo would be rather garish, to say the least. In our flashy duds, any chance of nuance or emphasis is lost. Instead, we need to think of our word choice like an accessory—a nice tie pin, pocket square, broach, or what have you draws the viewer’s eye and adds to the overall image. The same is true for the language we use around our disciplinary specific language. We must be aware that the words we use raise discourse, whether consciously or unconsciously (Lillis, 1997). It is up to us as the writer to take control of these wordings.

Through all of this, we have to remember to maintain a sense of self. If we strip away everything nonessential, or if we have removed all that is “us” in our writing, then our voice is with “nothing but sound and the sound of a voice can only find its fleeting moment of meaning” (Potgieter & Smit, 2008, p. 225). We can use various strategies to show our voice. We do not have to be cold and clinical as writers anymore. Nor should such things be viewed as unprofessional. So long as these tools are used appropriately, then they can only improve your work and lend power to your voice (Mitchell, 2017).

Conclusion

“Merely getting a voice into one’s writing is not enough” (Elbow, 2007, p. 8). At its core, English can be either worryingly precise or frustratingly vague in its approach to meaning. It is up to the writer to ensure that their idea, their thesis, is presented clearly and concisely so that a reader can grasp its meaning. Yet this clarity does not mean the re-

moval of the self. As we have seen, the academic voice is no longer a cold austere thing, but rather it is evolving into something more. There are more opportunities for writers to impart some of themselves—some of their passion for the topic—to their work. For new writers, they can begin to find their own academic voice earlier in their career.

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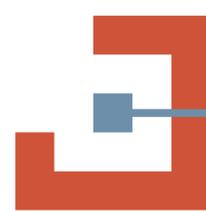
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