

[The Article]

English *Manga* Version of *The Tale of Genji* as a Text: Nourishing Communication Skills, Creativity, and Originality in English (1)

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In the last research paper published in 2010, we concluded that “for our current college students, who do not have a habit of reading books nor have high motivation for studying, our trial, using bilingual version manga as a text and letting them do tanka production both in Japanese and English using bilingual version of *The Tale of Genji* was effective to improve their creativity and raise their motivation.”¹⁾

We are now facing the problem of degradation of scholastic ability among those who seek for higher education though high percentages of high school students go to colleges or universities in Japan. Among 700 Japanese universities and colleges, approximately 30% of these institutions carry out so-called “remedial education.” These students were brought up with what we call “more relaxed education policy.” Our current college students are of course children of “more relaxed education policy.” They lack of mental and social maturity, steady study habits, and they do not acquire habit of reading. As a result, we have to deal with the students whose English communication level is quite low at first. With the problems mentioned above in mind, as English teachers, we have continued to do

the research. In the research, we have aimed for four goals in our English class, “Communication Skills 1”, a compulsory class for our freshman students.

The aims are to 1) increase students' communicative ability using local literature, 2) build up 150 vocabularies, 3) promote English writing skills, and 4) enhance students' creativity and originality. Number of classes taken for this research was 14 classes, 90 minutes in each class. The research participants were 36 freshman students, majoring in International Communication and Culture. The TOEIC score's range is quite wide from 280 to 750 but their average TOEIC score is 350.

The research questions are 1) to improve students' English communication ability, whether the usage of local literature effective? 2) whether the usage of manga would motivate students to build up their vocabulary? 3) whether the usage of *The Tale of Genji* promote their English writing skills? 4) whether tanka production enhance students' creativity and originality. In this research paper, we would like to focus on 1), 2), and 3.)

I

Choice of the Reading Material

- Bilingual Manga Version of *The Tale of Genji* -

As for the reading material, we choose one of the world classics, *The Tale of Genji* again. Its length is twice as long as that of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and the original version of *The Tale of Genji* is very difficult for it is written in old Japanese which even we adults would have trouble reading unless we study and learn the pattern of the grammar of Heian Era Japanese. Yet though most students have limited knowledge about Japanese tradition and culture, many have learned the original text of *The Tale of Genji* in their high school days and we have found out that they are at least familiar with the main storyline. If we choose materials such as *Beowulf* or *Ramayana*, most students would likely to have no clue about the main storyline. By re-learning the masterpiece of Japanese literature using bilingual version, the students have shown that they can develop communication skills in English in our previous research.

Therefore, we have selected bilingual manga version of *The Tale of Genji* as a text again because our students are used to reading manga, even though they are not accustomed to reading novels. By reading the story with pictures, the students can understand the nuance and therefore, can understand the meaning of the words such as “should,” “would,” and “must” by the facial expressions of the characters in manga.

Furthermore, since it is written in both Japanese and English, the students do not have to use the dictionary for unfamiliar words. As Dornyei points out, “A simple but effective way to raise task interest is to connect the topic with things that students already finds interesting or hold in esteem. In reading, guessing unfamiliar words is important, since looking up the dictionary often distracts the understanding of the context.”

For tasks, we choose 1) Vocabulary building, 2) Improving grammatical usage and writing skills, and 3) Enhancing creativity and originality. As for task number 1, we tried to confirm students' improvement on vocabulary building. As for task number 2, we tried to promote English writing skills. And as for the task number 3, we tried to promote students' originality and creativity.

As for methods, on the 1st week, we gave the students 150-word vocabulary quiz to measure their vocabulary range. They were also given an assignment to find auxiliary verbs on the text. On the 2nd week, we reviewed the results of 150-word vocabulary quiz. From the 3rd to 13th week, the students wrote sentences using auxiliary verbs, and they also made their original tanka. At the last class, we gave the students 150-word vocabulary quiz again.

II

Vocabulary Building

As for the research question 2) whether the usage of manga would motivate students to build up their vocabulary?, we planned the following method for our

students taking “Communication Skills 1” class.

1st week, we gave the students 150-word vocabulary.

2nd week, we reviewed the results of 150-word quiz.

At the last class, we gave the students the same 150-word vocabulary quiz again.

For the 150-word vocabulary quiz, 150 words were chosen from the beginning part of *The Tale of Genji*. The list of the 150-words quiz is as follows:

1. upturned, 2. sparrow, 3. Buddhist priest, 4. living quarters, 5. virtuous, 6. wonder, 7. resemble, 8. wild cherry blossom, 9. troublesome, 10. creature, 11. sin, 12. captive, 13. crow, 14. disheveled, 15. combed out, 16. mature, 17. relieved, 18. already, 19. careless, 20. behavior, 21. expect, 22. pull down, 23. attendants, 24. incognito, 25. otherwise, 26. scenery, 27. fascinated, 28. hide, 29. tomboy, 30. in a hurry, 31. stranger, 32. pardon me, 33. recover, 34. valet, 35. eternally, 36. bright, 37. soul, 38. kidding, 39. refuse, 40. delighted, 41. what on earth, 42. nun, 43. passed away, 44. niece, 45. no wonder, 46. heartbreaking, 47. maintain, 48. without, 49. make a living, 50. abrupt offer, 51. entrust, 52. empathize, 53. frivolous, 54. appreciate, 55. idle whim, 56. suitable, 57. rice wine, 58. splendid, 59. congratulations, 60. grown-up, 61. chasing, 62. hopeless, 63. crying, 64. palace, 65. treated, 66. duties, 67. appearance, 68. ugly, 69. treasure, 70. miserable, 71. generously, 72. complain, 73. imperfect, 74. greet, 75. completely, 76. kidding, 77. sorrowful, 78. quite, 79. lost, 80. welcome home, 81. cheer you up, 82. noble lady, 83. absence, 84. butterfly, 85. lawful, 86. offering, 87. considering,

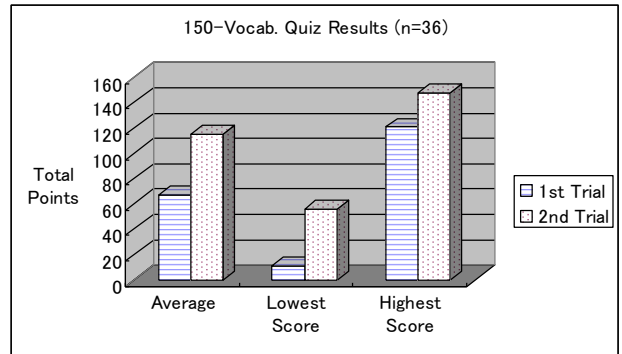
88. stay single, 89. naturally, 90. admiring, 91. satisfied, 92. decide, 93. exchange, 94. relationship, 95. alone, 96. disagreeable, 97. enough, 98. reason, 99. horrid, 100. supposed to, 101. take care, 102. painful, 103. unlucky day, 104. certainly, 105. event, 106. auspicious, 107. beside, 108. formal, 109. arrange, 110. support, 111. obscurity, 112. mistress, 113. moreover, 114. proper, 115. agree with, 116. trust, 117. forgive, 118. somehow, 119. feel sorry for, 120. suddenly, 121. glad, 122. allowed to, 123. side-by-side, 124. held, 125. reach, 126. sailing, 127. guided by, 128. funny, 129. lying, 130. embarrassed, 131. trimmed, 132. typical, 133. since, 134. day by day, 135. wrong, 136. image, 137. on the contrary, 138. vivid, 139. anxious, 140. noticed, 141. improve, 142. promotion, 143. concern, 144. prosperity, 145. consult, 146. conduct, 147. destroy, 148. carelessness, 149. suffer, 150. disturb.

The students were given 25 minutes for quiz time and 15 minutes for correcting their own paper. At the beginning, students seem to have much difficulty finishing up the vocabulary quiz because there were many unknown or unfamiliar words for them. However, by letting them correct their own paper right after the test, they could see which words were difficult and unfamiliar right away and could reinforce their memory by writing in the correct words. Seeing the pictures when writing in the correct words also helped them memorizing new words visually.

For the second trial, the students were given the same time as their first trial, 25 minutes for the quiz time and 15 minutes for the correcting time. Before correcting their second trial vocabulary quiz, the

results of their first trial was given to each student. By doing so, the students were able to see the comparison of the two results and could feel the improvement which would lead to raising their motivation.

Presumably due to the convenience and easiness of the text, students' motivation had gone high and it is proved by the results of the vocabulary quiz results. It is evident from the graph on the right that the score of the students raised substantially at the 2nd trial. All the students scored better on their 2nd trial. The graph below shows the average score of the 1st trial was 67 and at the 2nd trial, it went up to 115. And the lowest score of the 1st trial was 11 and at the 2nd trial, it became 56. The highest score of the 1st trial was 121 and at the 2nd trial, it became 148.



In Japan, English grammar is usually only taught by translating English sentences or phrases into Japanese. A reading text is used for teaching grammar, and by reading the contexts, students are expected to learn the proper usage of auxiliary verbs. However, in the textbook which Chiharu Kobayashi has edited, auxiliary verbs are dealt in only one chapter. In a whole academic year, probably only about twenty minutes are allowed to explain about auxiliary verbs in total. As a result, it becomes very hard for the students to grasp the multi-meaning of auxiliary verbs.

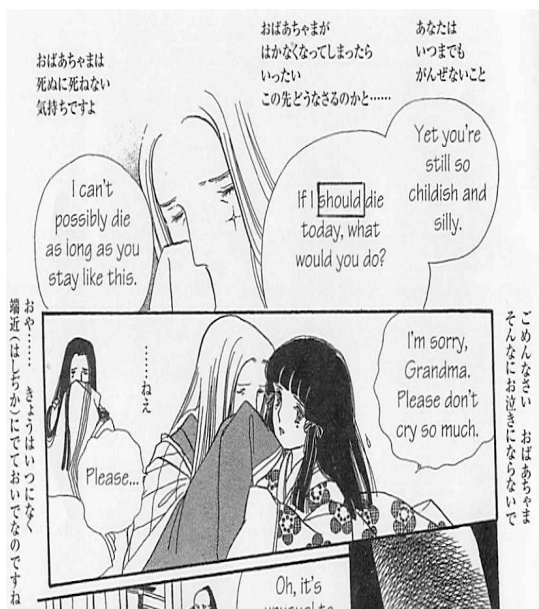
For example, students are taught “should” and “ought to” are the same in its meaning. But actually, “should” has many subtle meanings according to the context. In our research, we focused on ‘auxiliary verbs’ because unlike nouns or verbs, the meaning of auxiliary verbs are not clear and that the students seem to have much difficulty learning auxiliary verbs.

In this research, the students were to read the bilingual version text both in Japanese and English and pick out what they think are auxiliary verbs. We have chosen “should,” “must,” and “would” from the auxiliary verbs the students have found in the text as a start.

III

Promoting English Writing Skills -Why are auxiliary verbs difficult? -

The Japanese language has its own peculiar sentence structure and writing system and has little in common with other languages of the world. Particles are used to indicate part of speech and auxiliary verbs such as “nai (not),” and “darou (probably)” play an important role in sentence structure. Japanese auxiliary verbs do not show the actual facts that happened but are often used to show proposition or supposition of the speaker. Therefore, we could observe the speaker's true inner feelings through their use of auxiliary verbs.



If I should die today, what would you do?

The above sentence includes two auxiliary verbs, “would” and “should.” Should is used in conditional clause here. The speaker is princess’ grandmother. Although the grandmother is now old, she does not think she is going to die today. Should in this context includes the meaning that objects to the present fact.



You must be kidding.

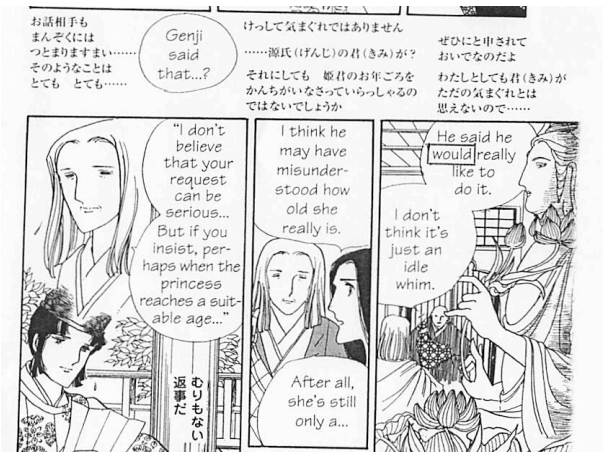
This is a very comical scene that shows how the attendant's guessing is not correct one. Genji would like to stay because he had met the princess but the attendant does not know about it. The speaker's face shows his doubtful feelings about his master Genji's reaction.

He has been an attendant of Genji since childhood and that it is clear his facial expression that he is guessing what is Genji's real thoughts are.

The students were to take a look at sample auxiliary verbs with the pictures. We explained to the students about the usage of each auxiliary verb by using the pictures of the manga that correspond with those auxiliary verbs. Then the students were asked to write their own sentences using the auxiliary verbs we have chosen. Following are the examples of what students have written.

1) should

- A) If I should be hospitalized now, what would you do?
- B) If I should marry tomorrow, what would you do?
- C) If I should come to dislike you, what would you do?
- D) If I should disappear now, what would my family do?



“He said he would really like to do it.”

In this sense, “would” is used to reinforce Genji’s strong will that he strongly wishes to live with the princess through monk.

E) If I should be involved in the accident, what would you do?

2) must

- A) Your face turns red, so you must be angry.
- B) I saw the boy waving to me. That must be my brother.
- C) He calls me every day, he must be loving me.
- D) Your don't look at me, you must be telling a lie.
- E) I have heard he passed the exam. He must be happy now.

3) would

- A) She said she would go to the flower shop.
- B) In this summer, I would go scuba diving.
- C) He said he would visit Korea and try to eat authentic Korean food.
- D) My mother said she would go shopping with me.
- E) My sister said she would save more money for her wedding.

The students showed no hesitation when they were asked to write sentences using the auxiliary verbs given to them. The sample sentences show that the students understood the meanings of the auxiliary verbs just from the instructions we have given. By using manga, students understood how to use “should” in conditional clause.

By using manga, students were able to understand auxiliary verbs visually through characters’ facial expression, words, and situation. The strips of the pictures, the expressions of the characters enabled the student to feel the psychological descriptions of the characters. Thereby, the students could easily understand the usage of rather ambiguous auxiliary verbs by using manga as a text.

Conclusion

From the results of the 150-vocabulary quiz, we can conclude that using bilingual version manga helped the students raise their motivation to learn English. Definitely, we need to provide a reading material with contents, which students will

be interested in and be able to understand, in order to improve vocabulary building for those students who lack studying habits. Bilingual manga version of *The Tale of Genji* was an appropriate text for our students and it helped students to learn and build up new vocabulary.

As for promoting English writing skill, focusing on the auxiliary verbs was a very effective introduction to raise students' motivation. Writing English sentences is the most difficult task for students who lack the grammar knowledge. Yet by writing English sentences with full understanding of the auxiliary verbs they are to use, they were able to write English sentences without hesitation. This understanding, that once they learn writing a sentence in English is not so hard, we believe it would encourage the students to write longer sentences in English.

As a conclusion, for our current college students, who do not have a habit of reading books nor have high motivation for studying, our trial, using bilingual version manga as a text to build up vocabulary and writing skills are quite successful. Using bilingual version of *The Tale of Genji* was clearly an effective method to improve students' creativity. Accordingly, it surely helped raising students' motivation to learn English.

This is the first part of summarizing paper on the presentation at the 9th Asia TEFL International Conference held at Seoul, Korea, with the title "English Manga Version of *The Tale of Genji* as a Text: Nourishing Communication Skills, Creativity, and Originality in English."

Notes

¹⁾ Refer to "Cultural awareness, motivation, and English language acquisition: - Using the manga version of *The Tale of Genji* (2)" *Bull, Toita Women's College*, 53.

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