

## English Manga Version of *The Tale of Genji* as a Text: Nourishing Communication Skills, Creativity, and Originality in English (2)

Miho Sato and Chiharu Kobayashi

Dept. of International Communication and Culture

The degradation of scholastic ability among those who seek for higher education is now a serious problem in Japan. Despite the high percentages of high school students going to colleges or universities, approximately 30% of 700 Japanese universities and colleges carry out so-called “remedial education.” This is because we have to accept students who were brought up with what we call “more relaxed education policy.” Many of them lack of mental and social maturity, steady study habits, and they do not acquire reading habit. As a result, we have to face with the students whose English communication level is quite low. Of course, some of the students’ levels are quite high but since majority of the students have problems mentioned above in mind, as English teachers, we have been trying to continue to do the research: Using bilingual version of *The Tale of Genji* to nourish communication skills, creativity, and originality in English.

To do our 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. The number of classes taken for this research were 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 and 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. The research questions 1), 2), and a part of 3) have been discussed and analyzed in our last paper, “English Manga Version of *The Tale of Genji* as a Text: Nourishing Communication Skills, Creativity, and Originality in English (1).” i) In this paper, we would focus on the latter part of 3) whether the usage of *The Tale of Genji* promote their English writing skills? and 4) whether tanka production enhance students’ creativity and originality and overall evaluation of the research.

### I

#### Enhancing Students’ Creativity and Originality - The Effectiveness of Tanka Production -

To enhance students’ creativity and originality, as one of the tasks, students were asked to make tanka of their own in English. This was also done to raise students’ motivation to learn about their own culture. And by learning their own culture, it would also arise their motivation to learn more about other cultures.

Most students were quite hesitant to make their original tanka though they all know that tanka is one form of Japanese poetry, consisting of five lines of 5, 7, 5, 7 and 7 syllables. They say that they have never made one even in Japanese. However, once they started writing one, it did not take much time for them to complete their task. This is probably due to the fact that tanka is

a short form of lyric poetry. When writing tanka, one concentrate on the beauty of life and nature, and a feeling of yearning becomes an important element. Therefore, once the student could visualize the scene or could recall the feeling, it becomes easier for them to actually write tanka.

When giving instructions, we first explained what it was like writing tanka during Heian Era. It was quite popular for both women and men. Women of the high status were not allowed to go outside alone. So the young noblemen could not meet with those ladies easily. They imagined what the woman is like through a rumor or the reputation of the woman. And if he wanted to see her, he first needed to send a letter and love poetry, tanka, to that woman. Through the exchange of the letters and love poetry, they could then both acknowledge the characteristic of the other person. And when he is finally approved by the lady, he could then visit her house. When he visits her house for three consecutive nights, on the third day, they get officially married. Tanka played an important role for both women and men.

Through tanka, as mentioned above, people evaluated how sophisticated or how elegant the writer was. The choice of the paper, choice of the flower, plant, and scent attached to the letter, the actual writing on the paper, they all signified the character of the writer. We thought letting students learn about how tanka was used during Heian Era, it would make it easier for them to create their own tanka. It is because even though our students are not so enthusiastic about writing anything in English, they are quite used to writing their feelings in short spare sentences in cell phone mails.

The students were to first make tanka in Japanese with 5,7,5,7,7 syllables and then they were to translate it into English. This process was necessary because writing poetry in English is too difficult task but they can at least write a poem in Japanese. And once they have some materials, they can then able to translate it into English. The students were to write tanka either to :1) her lover (could be a real person or an imaginary lover) or 2) write about a season she really likes.

Most of the students complained they could not write tanka at first. But we let them discuss among themselves about the topics and also, as they began to do the task using power point, we found that our students, who have difficulty in writing English composition, showed originality and creativity in writing tanka.



Summer sky  
Under the sunshine  
Besides the waterside  
Overwhelmed by the scenery  
My thoughts wonder with the waves

The above example shows that the student tried to express the waves of the ocean by using pop up letters. And the student uses blue when describing summer and ocean, yellow for sunshine and bright orange to describe how overwhelmed she was.



This lovely season  
From my window  
Feeling autumn breeze  
Cool night air  
Soothing my heart

The student has chosen the picture of dusk that emphasizes the cool feeling the air would bring. And the color of the dusk also matches with the autumn.



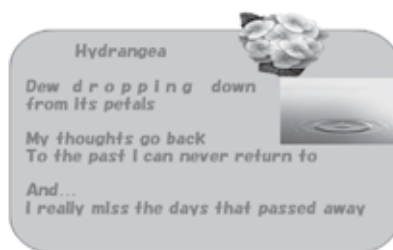
Autumn has come  
Moon viewing,  
Halloween  
Many happy events  
Suddenly,  
I notice winter is approaching

The student has picked pictures of Halloween and moon viewing and combined the two. When writing email, one often uses pictures to show how they feel or what they would like to tell. Also from the below example, it is evident that the selection of the picture plays an import part in the process of making tanka.



Winter comes  
Wake up in the morning  
I watch through the window  
Snowflakes are falling  
I forget the coldness  
My hear leaps

The below example shows that the student has combined the season and her feelings by connecting seasonal flower and dropping of the dew.



Hydrangea  
Dew dropping down from its petals  
My thoughts go back / To  
the past I can never return to  
And... I really miss the days that  
passed away

We walk together  
Thinking of our future life  
I kiss gently on your cheek  
While you walk beside me.



We walk together  
Thinking of our future life  
I kiss gently on your cheek  
While you walk beside me

By selecting the image of the married couple, one can easily imagine how the couple would spend their days, walking side by side.



I love you  
 I want to be your "dearest one"  
 Like her  
 I want to be loved by you...

The above tanka shows the student's straightforward, pure, and honest feelings.

As you can see from the examples, writing tanka assignment was quite successful. It is probably because in case of writing tanka, we are free from thinking English grammar as we write English composition. Therefore, we assume for the beginners of composition classes, Tanka production is very appropriate.

## II

### Promoting English Writing Skills

#### -Effective Approach to Understanding Auxiliary Verbs-

In our latest paper, ii) we have examined why it is difficult for Japanese students to grasp the meaning of auxiliary verbs. Because the Japanese language has its own peculiar sentence structure and writing style, it has little in common with other languages of the world. Japanese auxiliary verbs do not show the actual facts that happened but are often used to show proposition or supposition of the speaker. Therefore, when using Japanese, the speaker's true inner feelings could be revealed through their use of auxiliary verbs. Yet when writing in English, one typical usage of auxiliary verbs is to help express grammatical tense, aspect, mood and

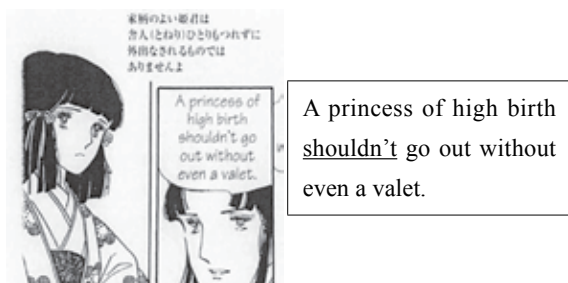
voice. They typically appear together with a main verb; the auxiliary is said to "help" the main verb.

In Japan, English grammar is usually taught by translating English sentences or phrases into Japanese. And amount of the time spent is very short that students are often left with not fully understanding the usage of auxiliary verbs. A reading text is used for teaching grammar, and by reading the contexts, students are expected to learn the proper usage of auxiliary verbs. Yet how can those students, with limited time and just by reading the text, will be able to grasp the multi-meaning of auxiliary verbs?

For example, students are taught "should" and "ought to" are the same in its meaning. But of course, "should" has many subtle meanings according to the context. In our research, we focused on the 'auxiliary verbs' because unlike nouns or verbs, the meaning of auxiliary verbs are not clear to the Japanese students and it seems they have much difficulty in learning auxiliary verbs than other grammar.

As for the task, the students were to read the bilingual version text both in Japanese and English and pay special attention to the auxiliary verbs we have chosen: "should," "must," and "would" which we have discussed in our last paper. After teaching "should," "must," and "would," we have decided to teach them "shouldn't" to the students. This step was necessary because when logically speaking, "shouldn't" is not a simple negative form of "should."

For example, "must" has a meaning of "have to" or "need to" but "mustn't" has a meaning of "cannot do," "forbidden," or "do not have to." "Shouldn't," in a same context, if taught separately from "should," we felt it would increase students' depth of understanding. For example, grammatically negative form of "You should take off your shoes here" would be "You shouldn't take off your shoes here." However, this sentence suggests the situation that the floor is too dirty that you had better not take off your shoes, and it is unnatural. "You do not have to take off your shoes," or "You need not take off your shoes" sounds more natural.



The above picture shows how the princess, future Lady Murasaki thinks she herself feels that should not walk alone and the expression of princess shows she is reluctantly accepting prince Genji's words.

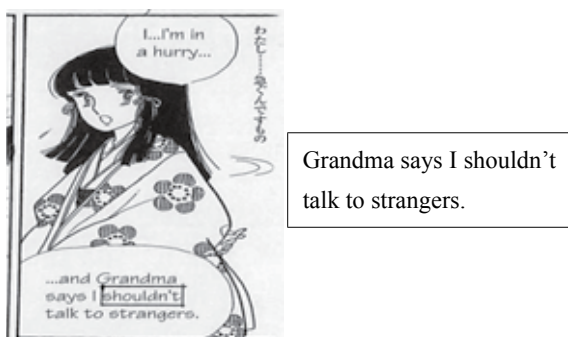
hurry and that she is reluctant to the offer of Genji, the stranger at this time.



The above is the whole page of the previous sample. The strips of the pictures, the expressions of the characters enable the reader to feel the psychological descriptions of the characters. With the help of the picture, students could easily understand Lady Murasaki's inner feelings.

The princess' complicated feelings towards Genji can be seen here. When Genji reveals his favorable feeling, the reader can notice the change of princess' feeling that she, too, begins to hold a favorable feeling for him.

The students were to take a look at the 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. The below examples are of what students have written using "shouldn't":



- A) You should not tell a lie.
- B) I should not keep late hours if I want to get up early in the morning.
- C) My father's words should not be ignored
- D) Teachers should not use dirty words.
- E) I shouldn't eat sweets at night.

Students were able to write the above sample sentences in a very short time without hesitation. By using manga, students understood how to use "shouldn't," after learning the usage of "should," "must," and "would." The students were able to understand auxiliary verbs visually through characters' facial expression, words, and situation. The strips of the pictures also helped the student to see the whole picture and grasp the details of the psychological descriptions of the characters. Thereby,

The above picture shows how princess is really in a

the students could easily apprehend the usage of rather ambiguous auxiliary verbs.

### Conclusion

From the samples of tanka, we can conclude that bilingual version manga was one of the best textbooks for our students to enhance their creativity and originality when giving them a task of tanka making. By learning the similarity between tanka and cell phone emails, the students realized making tanka was not a hard task but rather a fun task that would enhance their creativity and originality. The usage of the PowerPoint also made the task easier for them for the students of today are used to sending cell phone emails with pictures attached to it. Using some tools that are familiar with the students is effective for raising their motivation.

As for promoting English writing skills, teaching simple auxiliary verbs and negative form of them 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, both affirmative and negative form, they could then write English sentences without hesitation. And 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 for a conclusion, for our current college students, who do not have the habit of reading books nor understanding of English grammar, our method of using bilingual version manga, which they like to read, are quite successful to enhance their creativity and originality, and to understand the aspects of English grammar, and promoting writing skills. 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.

For further study, we would like to research other reading materials that are appropriate for our students.

We feel current popular manga, such as “Nodame Cantabile” and “Fruits Basket” would be suitable for our students for both stories are about young girl searching for her dream so students can identify with the characters. With “Fruits Basket,” you can learn about Japanese zodiac, too.

This is the second 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

- i English Manga Version of *The Tale of Genji* as a Text: Nourishing Communication Skills, Creativity, and Originality in English (1) 戸板女子短期大学『研究年報』第54号、pp 33-40
- ii English Manga Version of *The Tale of Genji* as a Text: Nourishing Communication Skills, Creativity, and Originality in English (1) 戸板女子短期大学『研究年報』第54号、pp 33-40

### References

- Allen, K. and Ingulsrud, J. E. (2008) Strategies used by children when reading manga. *J. Kanda Univ. Int. Stud.*, 20, 23-41.
- Asakiyumemishi *Perfect Book: Genji Monogatari (Bessatsu Takarajima 880)*. (2003) Takarajima-sha, Tokyo.
- Dornyei, Z. (2001) *Motivational strategies in the language classroom*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Konaka, Y. (1992) A comparative study of Japanese and American culture - The illustrated Tale of Genji -. *J. Lang. and Cult. (Chubu University)*, 3, 123-142.
- Lady Murasaki, *The Tale of Genji (Dover Thrift Ed.)*. Waley, A. (trans.) (2000) Dover Publications, New York, NY.
- Matsui, R. (2006). A research on the reception of

Japanese manga in Europe and America, focusing on the popularity of Shoujo. *J. Socio-Cult. Res. Inst.*, 8, 176-185.

Miyake, M. (2002) A study of transfer from Japanese into English - features seen in a manga the 'Kindaichi Files' -. *Kawasaki J. of Med. Welfare*, 8, 89-101.

Miyake, M. (2004) Report on classroom activities: improving English production by having learners contrast Japanese and English expressions from a manga. *Kawasaki J. Med. Welfare*, 10, 31-43.

Murasaki Shikibu [b. 978?] *A string of flowers, united... Love poems from The Tale of Genji*. Reichhold, J. with Kawamura, H. (trans.) (2003) Stone Bridge Press, Berkeley, CA.

Nishigami, H. (1998) *Manga crisis*. *Bull. Takarazuka Univ. Art Design*, 20, 37-51.

Sasamoto, J. (1998) Characteristics of Manga as the medium of communication. *Spec. Issue Jpn Soc. Sci. Design*, 6, 70-73.

Sato, M. and Kobayashi, C. (2009) Cultural awareness, motivation, and English language acquisition: - Using the manga version of *The Tale of Genji* - (1). *Bull. Toita Women's College*, 52, 23-36.

Sato, M. and Kobayashi, C. (2010) Cultural awareness, motivation, and English language acquisition: - Using the manga version of *The Tale of Genji* - (2). *Bull. Toita Women's College*, 53, 15-19.

Savignion, S. J. (1997) *Communicative competence: theory and classroom practice*. MacGraw-Hill, New York, NY.

Shimizu, Y. and Konaka, Y. (ed.) (1989) *The illustrated Tale of Genji*. Shinjinbutsu Orai, Tokyo.

Shirane, H. (ed.) (1893) *Envisioning The Tale of Genji; media, gender, and cultural production*. Colombia University Press, New York, NY.

Suzuki, H. (2008) *Chishiki zero kara no The Tale of Genji (Reader's Guide to The Tale of Genji)*. Gentosha, Tokyo.

Toma, U. (2008) Japanese manga: its history and structure. *Aoyama J. Bus*, 43, 71-108.

Yamato, W. (2006) *The Tale of Genji*; Stars. Atkin, S. and Toyozaki, Y. (trans.), Kodansha Bilingual Comics, Tokyo.

Yamato, W. (2006) *The Tale of Genji*; Flowers. Atkin, S. and Toyozaki, Y. (trans.), Kodansha Bilingual Comics, Tokyo.