

報告

大学の「読解」英語授業でオーセンティックな 文学作品を使うことについて

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要約：本論文は、三年生のための「読解」の英語授業の実施とその結果について報告する。本論文は、授業にオーセンティックな文学作品だけを使った結果、学生の読解スキルだけではなく一般的なコミュニケーション能力をも高めることができるということを紹介する。

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Using Authentic Literary Texts In A 'Reading Understanding Class' At A Japanese University

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Abstract: This paper describes the syllabus, the conducting and results of a 'Reading Understanding' course held at Tokushima University, which used only original, unedited literary texts. It will show that by using such authentic literary texts students improved not only their reading understanding skills, but also their general communicational skills and learnt how to analyze literary texts.

(Key words: English, higher education, English literature)

(1) Introduction

This paper will describe the proceedings and results of an 'English Reading Understanding' class held at Tokushima University's faculty of Integrated Arts and Sciences. Instead of using a textbook with edited texts dealing with a variety of political, sociological and cultural issues, only original, unedited literary texts of different genres were used in this course. The texts chosen were American/British short stories of the late 19th, 20th and 21st centuries.

By deciding to expose students to original literary texts instead of edited material, the teacher in charge of the course was following the strategy of Wendy Nakanishi, Mari Ota and Simon Bibby as used in their textbook 'Real Reads – An Introduction to Literature' (Perceptia Press 2014), which also features

exclusively original texts (as well as poetry).

The main reasons for the decision to use only original literary texts were based on the following four points:

(1) Giving students a sense of achievement: Knowing that they are working with a 'seemingly difficult' original English text and realizing that they are actually capable to not only understand this text's plot but also its deeper meaning gives students the feeling of having achieved something special.

(2) Learning cultural competence and understanding of foreign cultures: Literary texts convey aspects of their authors' culture and native country. By working with such original texts, besides acquiring English language skills students will also be able to glimpse into foreign cultures and gain cultural understanding.

(3) Working with authentic language: Literary texts

are exposing students to authentic language, showing them the variety and beauty of the English language.

(4) By exposing students to original, unedited literary texts, students will learn how to approach and work with literary texts in their original form as composed by their author. The result will be that students will be able to appraise literary texts and hopefully also develop an interest in literature of English speaking countries.

This report will describe the course's syllabus and the results of a questionnaire held after ten units.

(2) Syllabus

2.1 Course Objectives

Originally five third semester students (four female students, one male student) had signed up for the course. These students' English skills were on an intermediate and high intermediate level. After four units the male student quit the course due to 'having too many other obligations that made it impossible for him to sufficiently prepare for the class'.

During the course's first unit, students were asked about their interest in literature and whether they had any former experience of working with literary texts. While one student replied that she enjoyed reading novels (in Japanese only), all the other students admitted not having any interest in literature. All students had no former experience in analyzing (Japanese or English) literary works.

The course had the following objectives: The first one was to help students improve their 'reading understanding' skills by exposing them to a variety of texts of different genres and levels of difficulty and teach students how to analyze such literary texts. The second goal was to use these texts as a basis to debate the topics and themes they featured, e.g. aspects of American culture, social and cultural issues of Japan and other nations. Students should hereby become familiar with intercultural issues and American culture but also improve their oral English skills.

There was hardly any time spent with reading the texts in class: Students had to prepare most of the

texts at home, so that as much classroom time as possible could be spend with analyzing the texts and debating the topics students would find during this analysis.

2.2 Syllabus

The course's syllabus featured the following content:

- (1) Introduction to the course
- (2) Checklist 'Questions Helping to Analyze a Story' - explaining these questions and teaching a basic approach on how to analyze a story.
- (3) Lloyd Alexander: 'The Foundling' - analyzing a story by using the checklist handed out in unit (2).
- (4/5) Shirley Jackson: 'The Lottery' - analyzing the story and debating themes found out during this analysis. Debating the themes of 'traditions', 'rules' and 'family'.
- (6) Suzanne Kamata: 'Driving' - analyzing the story and meeting the story's author. Debating with the author aspects of the story, e. g. 'Japanese society as seen with the eyes of a foreigner living in Japan.'
- (7) Oscar Wilde: 'The Selfish Giant' - influence of Christianity on western literature.
- (8) J. R. R. Tolkien: Extract of 'Lord of the Rings' - learning the literary concepts of 'awe' and 'the sublime'. Preparing students for their final assignment of holding a presentation on a literary piece.
- (9) Self evaluation: Students reflect on the course's content, their personal progress and achievements.
- (10) Robert E. Howard: 'Old Garfield's Heart' - learning the literary concept of 'local color'. Learning about the history, mentality and culture of Texas. Defining 'The American Frontier Myth'. Robert E. Howard and his influence on the Fantasy genre.
- (11/12/13/14) Final presentations held by students.
- (16) Summarizing of course and students' achievements.

2.3 Choosing Appropriate Texts/Grading Students

The list of stories chosen for this course was based on the teacher's personal taste in literature as well as the teacher's admittedly very subjective assumption that students would (a) enjoy reading these stories and (b) that by analyzing and debating these stories

students could gain insight into aspects of western literature and culture.

Teachers interested in trying out a similar class are invited to also use the texts/stories of this course. As working with texts a teacher is personally enjoying might make teaching such a course (even) more enjoyable, the better option would be to use different texts.

Here are two examples illustrating the reasons why these stories were chosen for this course: Lloyd Alexander's 'The Foundling' was regarded as especially suitable for students to try out analyzing a story for the first time. Here students should understand that a thoroughly done analysis would show the deeper aspects of a seemingly superficial Fantasy story.

Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery' was chosen as it is not only one of America's most famous short stories but due to its controversial content would offer many topics to debate in class, e.g. 'is it good to follow unquestioningly traditions?'

The texts read in class had a volume between two to twenty pages. Students never complained when they had to prepare longer stories. This indicates that the stories caught students' interest and made the task of reading and preparing them enjoyable. In case of longer stories the teacher can also consider to give students two weeks time to prepare these texts.

The grading of students was based on their participation in class, the quality of their contributions (replying to teacher's questions, adding to debates etc.) and a presentation about an author and the deeper aspects of his/her work.

2.4 Proceedings and Observations

The course was held in the following way:

In units two and three students learnt how to approach/analyze a literary text. A list with questions that would help them to understand stories was handed out and the list's questions together with illustrating examples were explained in detail.

This checklist featured the following questions:

- How did the story make you feel?

- Is the setting clear?

- Who narrates the story? What is the effect of this narration?

- What is the conflict?

- What is the basic plot?

- What are the main themes?

- Who are the main characters? What are they like? What is their background?

- Are the characters three-dimensional?

- Which character did you like best? Which character did you like least?

- Is there a balance between the characters' thoughts and actions?

- Is there anything you didn't understand?

- What do you know about the author? How does this help you in understanding the story?

- What cultural traditions are evident in the story?

A slightly longer version of this list had already successfully been tried out in 'Creative Writing' classes taught by the course's teacher and had proven itself as very efficient to help Japanese students to understand literary texts.

Students were then told that this list of questions would be their most important working tool for this semester: Whenever they prepared a story for class they should read the story together with this checklist and answer all the questions on this list. It was pointed out though, that this list was not a complete list and contained only some of the most essential questions for analyzing a text.

As mentioned before, in order to have as much classroom time as possible for analyzing and debating the texts, students had to prepare these texts by reading and analyzing them at home. The results of their preparations were then presented and debated in class.

In the following unit students were for the first time presenting their analysis of Lloyd Alexander's 'The Foundling'. This story was chosen so that students could discover that a seemingly simply plotted Fantasy story offered insight on the question 'what is important in life?'

While the story's old fashioned English turned out to be a challenge for students, the analyzing of the story itself went unexpectedly well: Students had understood the questions of the checklist and had no problems to answer them. A debate about the question 'which choice would you have made if you were the story's hero' on the other hand turned out to be a mixed experience: Students were highly motivated to contribute but displayed a great lack of confidence in their English skills. In spite of being steadily encouraged by the teacher not to bother about perfect grammar and express their opinions in a simple manner, all students - probably due to not being used to this kind of teaching style - showed signs of distress when trying to talk about their impressions of the story: The class was several times interrupted by uncomfortable moments of silence when students stopped speaking in the midst of a sentence because they did not remember vocabulary they wanted to use or tried to figure out how to express themselves in grammatically perfect English.

This problem solved itself during the run of the course as students steadily gained self-confidence in using English. In order to help students gain this self-confidence the teacher continued to encourage students not to worry whether their English was grammatically correct or not when they spoke in class. The teacher interrupted students' contributions only in the very rare case when the meaning of the English used was fully incomprehensible.

The following two units were spent with analyzing and debating Shirley Jackson's famous short story 'The Lottery'. In this story, following an old tradition of unknown origin, a small community holds an annual lottery whose 'winner' is then being stoned to death by his fellow villagers.

This time students appeared to be more comfortable when presenting the results of their preparations and debating the story in English. There were still moments when some of the participants were lacking the necessary vocabulary or grammar to express their thoughts, but in comparison to the former unit these

breaks had become considerably less.

All students had clearly understood how to work with the checklist and also had no problems in finding the more obvious aspects of the story like 'the danger of obeying traditions without questioning them' or 'singling out minorities'. Furthermore, without the teacher's guidance, several students found out and addressed the technique of 'foreshadowing', which the author used to prepare the readers for the story's shocking ending.

A very interesting aspect to be observed was how frank some students were in stating their opinions in English: When talking about the theme of persecuting or singling out outsiders, one student addressed the so called *burakumin*, an even nowadays discriminated group in Japan and a topic highly taboo to talk about in Japan.

The following unit was dedicated to the topic 'Cultural Understanding'. Students had to read and prepare the story 'Driving' by Japan based writer Suzanne Kamata.

'Driving' tells the story of an American woman who is married with a Japanese and her conflicts with her Japanese environment and Japanese in-laws. The story was chosen because it was written from the point of view of the American main character reflecting on aspects of Japanese society and culture, which should offer sufficient material for a debate.

For this unit the story's author could be won to join the class to debate her story with students. Once again students displayed their growing confidence in using English by very actively communicating with the story's author. In class a variety of intercultural issues was debated, e.g. 'do young people have to live together with their parents after having married?' or 'have young people a responsibility to take care of their parents?' Students were asked to give their Japanese point of view while Mrs. Kamata explained how an American would regard these situations and the teacher in charge of the class added the German point of view.

The next two units saw a slight change in how

classes were conducted: For both units students did not, as usual, receive the texts one week in advance so they could prepare them at home, but instead were handed out these texts at the beginning of each class: One text was Oscar Wilde's 'The Selfish Giant', which was taken from Wendy Jones-Nakanishi's textbook 'Real Reads' and the other text was an excerpt from J. R. R. Tolkien's 'The Lord of the Rings'.

There were several intentions behind this change of strategy: In case of 'The Selfish Giant', the teacher in charge of the course wanted to see how students would respond to working with Jones-Nakanishi's textbook as well as finding out whether students were capable of understanding a short story without a longer period to prepare themselves.

While former units were dominated by an element of spontaneity as the topics that were to be debated came mostly up during the analyzing of the respective story, the 'Selfish Giant' unit used a selection of the exercises as given in the textbook. These exercises were (a) putting a mixed-up summary of the text into the correct order; (b) two exercises of text understanding in which students had to find the correct meaning of vocabulary and find the correct answers to questions concerning the story's content.

As an extra not featured in Jones-Nakanishi's textbook, the teacher took examples from the story and explained students about the influence of Christianity on western literature, adding further examples from C. S. Lewis' 'Narnia' tales.

Students enjoyed working with Jones-Nakanishi's textbook, although all of them agreed that the exercises were too easy for them as Jones-Nakanishi's textbook is more suited for the needs of students with lesser English skills.

The unit featuring an excerpt from the chapter 'The Great River' taken out of J. R. R. Tolkien's 'The Lord of the Rings' was intended to prepare students for holding a presentation about a book or writer whose work they enjoyed. In such a presentation students should not simply give an introduction to an author and his/her work but should also address a deeper

aspect of this author's work. In order to demonstrate this latter point, by analyzing the excerpt handed out, students could learn about 'the power of nature in Tolkien's work' and the concepts of 'awe' and 'sublime'. As an extra, in order to show students how very different the movie rendering of a book could become, the excerpt read in class was compared to how it was shown in the movie 'The Lord of the Rings'.

In the following unit students were asked for their feedback concerning the course. This feedback will be debated in the section 'Students' Feedback' to be found below.

The final unit before students' presentations was spent with Robert E. Howard's short story 'Old Garfield's Heart': Howard's story, a 'Weird Western' that combines elements of western and horror stories, introduced students not only to the literary concept of 'local color' but was also perfectly suited to teach aspects of American history and culture, like the history of Texas and Texan mentality and the myth of 'The American Frontier'. Furthermore, as Howard was a prominent Pulp Fiction writer and 'Old Garfield's Heart' was published in 'Weird Tales' - the longest running pulp magazine - the cultural influence of Pulp Fiction on modern entertainment forms like comics, TV and movies could also be addressed. This amount of topics, turned out to be too much for one unit though. A revised version of this course will be planned so that two units will be dedicated to this story.

2.5 Final Presentations

The final course units were spent with students' presentations: Students had to hold a fifteen to twenty minutes long presentation in English about a story of their choice. During this presentation students should give information about the story's author and procure the class with a summary of the chosen story's plot. Students should then use an excerpt (no longer than one page) of the text, demonstrate what they enjoyed about the story and facilitate a debate about this text.

Students were told to use only original texts for their presentations, a request that turned out to be the

source of an unexpected problem: While one student ordered the text she wanted to hold her presentation about from an online shop, the remaining three students decided to borrow the texts/books from Tokushima University's library. What they found available in Tokushima University's library's 'English Language Section' though were only edited texts or 'Easy Reader' versions (which are retellings written for learners of English.)!

Due to this lack of material in the university's library, students were then directed to websites where they could legally download for free the texts they needed for their presentations. The texts chosen by students were:

- Geoffrey Chaucer: 'Canterbury Tales'
- O. Henry: 'The Gift of the Magi'
- Jack London: 'White Fang'
- Kate Di Camillo: 'Because of Winn Dixie'

In their presentations students demonstrated again that they had understood how to analyze and appreciate a literary text. They also proved that they could find deeper aspects of a story. To give just one example: The student holding a presentation about Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales' pointed out feminist aspects in the passage she had chosen.

Although these presentations clearly showed that students understood and reached the course's objectives, in a future course a more extensive preparation for these presentations will be necessary: Although all students were third year students, all of their handouts showed an immense lack of knowledge concerning (a) how to produce a handout with meaningful information and (b) how to correctly write a list of 'reference works'. Considering though that students had successfully reached the course's goals, these are only minor quibbles.

(3) Students' Feedback

In unit 10 students were asked for a feedback concerning this course. The teacher designed a questionnaire with eight questions and the original idea was to let students fill out this questionnaire

anonymously. Due to the small number of students taking this course and the very positive class atmosphere, this approach was changed to the teacher openly asking students about their opinions. Such an open debate had the advantage that the teacher could ask for further information in case of unclear or especially interesting replies.

The questions and the replies given were:

(1) Why did you decide to take this course?

- Read in syllabus that Fantasy stories would be read in class. (2 students)
- Wanted to improve my reading skills.
- Just took the course because I needed the credits.

(2) What do you think you have learnt up to now in this course?

- Learnt about cultural differences.
- Learnt analyzing short stories (2 students)
- Speaking skills improved.

(3) Among the texts we read in class, which one do you think was the most difficult to understand?

Here two students voted for Alexander Lloyd's 'The Foundling' where the passages featuring archaic English were felt to be too difficult.

The remaining two students opted for Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery' as they regarded the story's content as too difficult to understand. This reply came as an honest surprise to the teacher, as his impression was that all students could find access to the deeper aspects of this story.

(4) How much time did you spend preparing for class?

- Read every day between one and two hours.
- Read three to four hours per week.
- Read on three days each week. Read each time about two hours.
- Read two to three hours per week.

(5) Which skills do you think you improved?

- (a) Faster reading and (b) became interested in literature.
- Started to use checklist to analyze movies.
- (a) Learnt analyzing stories and (b) stating my opinion.
- (a) Learnt analyzing stories and (b) want to read

more books from now on. Furthermore, felt that (c) English skills in general had significantly improved.

(6) What else would you like to read or do in this class?

- Read stories from different periods.
- Read Fantasy and Horror Stories.
- Read non-fiction texts.
- Watch movies and debate about their content.

(7) Is there anything you would like to see improved in this class?

Three students replied that they did not see the need for any improvement, while one student provided the following answer:

- Debating topics not in English but rather in Japanese
- These replies show that the course's premier goals as a 'Reading Understanding' class had been reached: As can be seen from the replies given to questions (2) and (5) students clearly felt that they had learnt to analyze a literary text. By attending this course they had become trained to find the deeper aspects of a story hidden under the layer of an interest catching plot. Although newspaper texts are different from literary texts, the training to understand literary texts should enable students to also easily understand newspaper texts.

Furthermore, the replies gathered show that students had gained not only interest in reading and literature but had also learnt about aspects of intercultural issues. As the necessity of raising Japanese students' international awareness is of greatest importance, a revised version of this course will include more texts comparing Japanese topics with foreign cultures.

Students also felt to have improved other skills like 'stating their opinion', 'being able to read faster' and gained confidence in using English.

Finally, students' replies to question (4) show that all of them spent an unexpected lot of time to prepare for the classes: While university guidelines demand that students spend between one hour to 90 minutes with studying outside of regular classroom time for each course taken, students of this 'Reading Understanding' class spent at least twice the amount of time required.

When asked whether they regarded spending so much time for the course as too much, some students replied that while they regarded the texts at times as very difficult to understand, none of them felt that their preparations were too time consuming. This strongly supports the importance of the 'fun factor' in language classes: In case of this class students obviously enjoyed reading the stories and in order to fully understand these stories did not mind the intensive extra-work of looking up unknown vocabulary or trying to understand more complex sentence structures.

(4) Conclusion

This paper described an ESL 'Reading Understanding' course held for students of Tokushima university's 'Faculty of Integrated Arts and Sciences' using authentic, literary texts. It was shown that by using such texts students efficiently learnt how to analyze and understand literary texts, finding topics hidden under the layer of the story's plot and became comfortable in debating these topics in English.

Edited texts (for use in textbooks) focus on aspects decided by the textbook's editors. This means, the editors have in advance decided topics into whose direction they wish to steer students' attention. This is certainly a perfectly legitimate way to plan and conduct a class and many teachers will doubtlessly be more comfortable with such an approach.

On the other hand, the use of unedited original texts without any leading questions added an element of spontaneity to the classroom atmosphere: Here students have the chance to discover and talk about topics which might not have been foreseen or expected by the teacher.

The use of such authentic texts resulted in students' studying time outside of the classroom rising to twice as much the time as demanded by university without students feeling pressured or complaining of having to spend too much time for preparing for classes.

During the course students became also more and more comfortable to use English and freely expressed

their opinions.

As this report also demonstrated, without any guiding by the teacher students found and addressed many (at times very controversial) topics in the texts read in class. This added an exciting element of 'spontaneity' to the classroom atmosphere. When students realized that they had the opportunity to influence the class with their contributions and that the teacher positively reacted to these contributions, the result was a further, obvious rise in students' confidence and willingness to use English to express their opinions in this language.

It needs to be pointed out though, that the positive results of this course could probably only be reached because of the extremely small number of participating students. In order to get students used to freely expressing themselves in English, to give each student sufficient speaking time in class and assure that each student prepares thoroughly for each class, the class size for such a course should not be higher than ten students. In case of such a number, group discussions and the presentations of their results will have to substitute the more direct interaction between teacher and students as described in this report.

This time the course featured texts selected by the teacher, based on the teacher's personal interests and his assumption that students would enjoy this selection too. This selection featured texts mostly belonging to the Fantasy genre. Seeing students' positive reaction to a text like Kamata's 'Driving', a revised version of this course will not so much focus on 'Fantasy' texts, but will rather include more texts that will allow Japanese students to compare their familiar environment with other cultures.

Considering all the positive results achieved in this course, teachers interested in holding a 'Reading Understanding' course using only authentic, literary texts are highly encouraged to do so.

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