

Teaching Reading to University Students:

Anne of Green Gables as the Text

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Introduction

Since the 1980s, a lot of private colleges and universities have been founded in Japan. The number of colleges and universities increased from 523 in 1992 to 783 in 2012 (NHK NEWSWEB). Especially within the last decade, the environment in higher education has drastically changed. Universities have been reorganizing and renaming Departments to attract high school students. In 2010, 57.2 % of high school graduates entered college or university (Monbukagakushou). Moreover, with the exception of highly competitive universities, students can easily enter higher education. As a result, students from diverse educational backgrounds enter higher education institutions, and the teachers' roles are considerably more demanding. In English Departments, it is sometimes hard for students to read original texts. They haven't read many literary books—even the translated versions—until after graduating high school. Taking this into account, I believe that teachers' tasks are not only to teach new knowledge or give new information for learning but also to enthusiastically guide, facilitate, and lead struggling students to achieve their goals. In the course, *Literature in English Speaking Countries*, the teacher chose *Anne of Green Gables* (*Anne*, hereafter) as the text. In a Canadian bookstore, *Anne* is categorized in the 9-12-year-old reading level. However, it is not easy for Japanese university students to comprehend the text in its original language without using a dictionary, translations, and a teacher's explanation. The teacher wanted to challenge students to read *Anne* in the class. The reason the teacher chose this text was because it is popular among students and was easy to obtain in Japan. Carrell (2003) points out that “since the early 1950s, for example, the book has been one of the most widely read works of Western literature in Japan” (p. 307). Because of its popularity, even if students do not read the book (either original or translation), it is assumed that students have watched the movie version, the theatre version (musical), or the animated version. My major goal of observing this course is determining how the teacher can motivate students to read and how the teacher can facilitate students to comprehend the content of the text. To achieve the goal, choice of the text is important. Once the teacher chose *Anne*, the teacher decided to introduce multimodal reading. This included supplementary

educational materials, such as a Japanese translation of the text, references written in Japanese, maps of Canada and Prince Edward Island, pictures, and a DVD. As description of nature and its colors in the Prince Edward Island is beyond students' imagination, the teacher thought they needed visual aid. In addition, to check students' understanding, the teacher offered fill-in-the-blank handouts in each chapter. This research was conducted at a university in three classes during the spring term from April to July in 2011 and 2012, and showed how the teacher tried to encourage students' learning and motivate students to read through 15 classes, each class lasting 90 minutes.

Participants and The Actual Conditions

Each class had twenty students who majored in English Literature, Linguistics, or English Teaching Education. All students were Japanese. The course was elective; therefore, students who took the course were assumed to be interested in literature. However, most of the students had not read literary books in their original text. It is expected that *Anne* in the Japanese translation will be welcomed by students because of its familiarity and popularity. In contrast to the teacher's expectations, however, eight out of twenty students read *Anne* in its Japanese translation and three watched the musical in 2011; ten out of 41 students read *Anne*, two watched the musical, one watched the movie, and three watched the animated version in 2012 (appendix 1 and 2). Facing this fact, the teacher set a goal and emphasized two points: 1) The teacher designed the course so that students could always reflect on their own understanding of the text and experience enjoyment from reading. 2) The teacher tried to enhance students' motivation to read. Additionally, the teaching style led students to be front and centre and to be active readers.

Teaching Method

Grenfell and Harris (1999) state that "the most dominant second-language teaching methodology in recent times is probably the grammar-translation method" (p. 11). However, the grammar-translation method used in instruction is also one factor to demotivate students in second-language learning (Kikuchi, 2009). However, for students who study foreign language, it is difficult to interpret literary texts without translation, as Ellis (2002) emphasizes that "teaching grammar can have a beneficial effect on learners' interlanguage development" (p. 20). Especially in this course, the teacher believed that teaching grammar and explaining linguistically complex sentences were necessary for the situation. For example, without the grammatical knowledge such as the subjunctive mood, students could not comprehend Anne's imaginative world. In other words, in reading *Anne*,

acquisition of the subjunctive mood is essential. In addition to introducing the grammar-translation method, an issue of vocabulary has to be considered. It is a critical problem for English as Foreign Language students when they read an original text. Students experience difficulty and an unwillingness to read when they face unknown words in the text. In reading *Anne*, students were faced with a lot of new vocabulary which describe the nature of Prince Edward Island. Therefore, the teacher directed students not to look up every unknown word in the text. Instead, the teacher required that students understand main events and characters' thoughts in each chapter. The teacher especially led students to comprehend Anne's mental growth along with Marilla's affection for Anne.

Consequently, to achieve the first goal, the teacher chose to not stick with the traditional teacher-centred grammar-translation method, but to try and let students be active readers in the class. As the teacher wanted to check students' understanding, and considering that "students need to be more actively engaged in practicing responding to literature" (Beach, Appleman, Hynds & Wilhelm, 2006, p. 5.) to experience enjoyment of reading, she introduced student-centred presentation in the class. In this presentation, students were required to make a handout and refer to important points and events in each chapter. Students could translate some passages or sentences if it was necessary, and the teacher facilitated and helped students proceed in their presentations. During and after students' presentations, the teacher gave positive comments and added explanation in detail, such as the history of Prince Edward Island, woman suffrage, the prohibition campaign in Canada, and quotations from the Bible and other literary works. Along with a presenter's handout, the teacher also prepared a handout. For the first seven weeks, the teacher distributed a handout that focused on explaining important events in the text (appendix 3). Gradually, the teacher made fill-in-the-blank type handouts (appendix 4) to check students' comprehension.

To Motivate and Facilitate Students' Learning

As Hedge (2000) claims, I believe that the teacher's responsibilities in helping students' achieve their goals are "to motivate reading by selecting or creating appropriate texts, to design useful reading tasks, to set up effective classroom procedures, ... and to create a supportive environment for practicing reading" (p. 205). Above all, how a teacher can motivate students' learning is most important. The teacher believed that it was crucial to construct a syllabus to draw out students' motivation for reading. What kinds of activities induce students' motivation to read literary texts and what kind of assessment to know students' achievement are of great concern for both students and the teacher. For that reason, the teacher decided to refer to Dörnyei's (2001) strategies in the class. The teacher tried to "[d]evelop a personal relationship with your students." (p. 39), "[i]ncrease student motivation by actively promoting learner autonomy." (p. 108), and "[p]rovide students with positive

information feedback” (p. 125) in the class. An explanation of how each strategy is introduced in the class follows.

To develop a personal relationship with your students, the teacher introduced a B6 size written reflection card every week, in which students ask questions in the text to check their own understanding or write their comments about the class freely. In the first class, the teacher conducted questionnaires to students, asking about their expectations, anxiety, and their personal goals. Their main anxiety was whether they could read the long original text and pass the course. Most students stated that his/her main goals were to interpret the text correctly, write an essay, and pass the test. Considering students’ anxiety and concerns, in the second week, the teacher provided students with positive feedback (Dörnyei, 2001). Furthermore, the learning environment should be noted. Since the teacher is in charge of creating a safe environment for students, s/he needs to create a supportive and stress-reduced class environment. In Japan, it is usual that students are silent during the class, and those who have a question ask the teacher after class. However, if they ask questions during the class, they can understand clearly at the time the question is posed. Therefore, the teacher tried to create a safe environment and set a question time in which students could ask questions and express their opinions freely during the class.

Assessment

Assessment methods have to be aligned with course learning outcomes. The teacher distributed the assessment methods over the course to reduce students’ stress and provide feedback with students on progress towards achieving their outcomes. To evaluate whether students achieved the expected outcome, the teacher introduced four points in assessment.

First, students were required to attend the class. At the end of each class, the teacher let students write a reflection card in which students wrote their questions in the text or comments, and the teacher checked them. The next week, at the beginning of the class, the teacher gave feedback on the students’ reflection cards. As Hall (2001) claims, “effective feedback is timely, frequent, and ongoing” (p. 85). The teacher often noticed students’ misunderstanding of the text by checking students’ reflection cards. The teacher always followed up students’ misinterpretation. Lastly, the teacher never forgot to encourage students by giving positive feedback to motivate them to read further in the text.

Second, students were required to do a presentation of each chapter (accounting for 25 percent). In the first class, the teacher demonstrated how to do a presentation using a handout. For sophomores, it was not easy to do presentations because of their lack of experience. However, it is necessary for students to learn the presentation techniques such as development of ideas, organization, and communication skills, and feel a sense of achievement in higher education. The teacher suggested that

students can make groups of two or three to ease their mental pressure.

Third, students were required to write a 1200-word short essay (accounting for 25 percent). The criteria for writing an essay were given to students in advance. Students could choose a topic or any topics about *Anne* in which they were interested.

Lastly, the term examination (accounting for 50 percent) was required. In the examination, students had to translate sentences from English into Japanese. The chosen sentences were already explained in the class. Moreover, students were to answer essay questions in which they can show their interpretation of characters in the text.

Results and Discussion

The teacher has to be a facilitator, a guide, and lead students to attain their goals. The problem is: how can a teacher facilitate students? As I mentioned in the introduction, if I take into account the condition of this reading class, the teacher decided to utilize various kinds of aids, skills, and methods to motivate students to learn and to read the text. In addition, the teacher tried to create a relaxed and feedback-rich classroom atmosphere that might facilitate students to speak out freely. After fifteen-week classes, students answered written questionnaires about the course anonymously. One out of twenty students did not finish the course in 2011. Two out of forty students did not finish the course in 2012. However, nineteen students in 2011 and thirty eight students in 2012 who could pass the course reflected that they learned a lot from the class. An additional longitudinal research will be necessary. However, the fact that all students passed the course with A+, A, and B+ marks shows that students were motivated to learn and studied hard. Several students wrote, “Although I haven’t read *Anne* before, gradually I engaged to read the text. I want to read further chapters.” Other wrote, “I enjoyed watching DVD. I should have read *Anne* when I was a girl”. Moreover, many students wrote, “Handout from the teacher was very helpful in preparing for the exam,” and some wrote, “To make out a handout was not easy for me and felt nervous to do the presentation, but when I accomplished it, I felt a sense of achievement.” Several students reported, “I had to read the text a few times to make the handout concisely and as a result, I could understand the text very well.” One critique in 2012 was that the students wanted to read more than two chapters in the class when a chapter was short. Also, a chance for discussion among students after a presenter or presenters should be planned. However, mostly, the teacher received positive comments from students. By taking this class, many students realized that they wanted to read more, finish reading the text, and know about the author of *Anne* as well. Although students read only fifteen chapters by the end of term and it is true that some students misinterpreted sentences in the text, their enthusiasm for reading increased. Furthermore, the strategies used to interpret the text—such as a detailed handout in each chapter distributed by the teacher (the

handout distributed by the teacher counts twenty-six pages), student-centered presentations, a handout from the presenter, essay writing, and watching the DVD—all motivate students to be active readers. As the text proceeded, students' motivation for reading was enhanced, and as a result, students' understanding of the text also improved and led to acquisition of the target language. In the process of helping students to achieve their goals, the teacher recognized that students experienced joy for reading the text in its original language and students could experience success (Lightbown & Spada, 2006) and a sense of achievement. Considering current university students' reading ability and their actual knowledge of literary works, teachers have to consider multiple modes of aid to scaffold students' learning.

Footnotes

¹ In 2011, the majority is sophomores, but two students out of twenty are seniors who dropped from the class in a previous year. In 2012, out of 41 students, four are seniors and two are juniors.

² In this university, the marking scale is as follows. A+: 100-90; A: 89-80; B: 79-70; C: 69-60; F (fail): less than 59.

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Appendix 1

2011 Spring Term

Question 1: Have you read *Anne of Green Gables* in translation?

n=20

Yes=8 ; No= 12

Question 2: If yes, when did you read *Anne of Green Gables*?

	G1~6	G7~9	G10~12
When	8	0	0
Percentage (%)	0.4	0	0

Question 3: Have you watched the musical, the movie or the animated cartoon of *Anne of Green Gables*?

n=20

Yes=3 ; No= 17

Question 4: If yes, which version of *Anne of Green Gables* did you watch: the musical, the movie, or the animated cartoon on TV?

	musical	movie	animated cartoon
Which	3	0	0
Percentage (%)	0.15	0	0

Appendix 2

2012 Spring Term

Question 1: Have you read *Anne of Green Gables* in translation?

n=41

Yes=10 ; No= 31

Question 2: If yes, when did you read *Anne of Green Gables*?

	G1~6	G7~9	G10~12
When	5	5	0
Percentage (%)	0.12	0.12	0

Question 3: Have you watched the musical, the movie or the animated cartoon of *Anne of Green Gables*?

n=41

Yes=6 ; No= 35

Question 4: If yes, which version of *Anne of Green Gables* did you watch: the musical, the movie, or the animated cartoon on TV?

	musical	movie	animated cartoon
Which	2	1	3
Percentage (%)	0.048	0.024	0.073

Appendix 3

Chapter 4: Morning at Green Gables

1. “Oh, wasn’t it beautiful? Wasn’t it a lovely place? Suppose she wasn’t really going to stay here! She would imagine she was. There was scope for imagination here.” (p. 37. ll. 18~21)
 その後に続く自然描写 (p. 37. l. 22~ p. 38. l. 2)
2. マリラの素っ気ない口調とその理由:
 “It’s time you were dressed,” she said curtly. Marilla really did not know how to talk the child, and her uncomfortable ignorance made her crisp and curt when she did not mean to be.”
 (p. 38. ll. 23~ 26)
3. この家に必要とされたいアン: (p. 39. ll. 9~11)
 “I’ve just been imagining that it was really me you wanted after all and that I was to stay here for ever and ever.”
4. 悲しみを想像することと現実の悲しみのギャップ
 “I feel that I have a good deal to bear up under. It’s all very well to read about sorrows and imagine yourself living through them heroically, but it’s not so nice when you really come to have them, is it?” (p. 39. ll. 35~38)
5. マシューの気質 : “That was Matthew’s way— take a whim into his head and cling to it with the most amazing silent persistency— a persistency ten times more potent and effectual in its very silence than if he had talked it out.”
 (p. 40. ll. 17~20)

Appendix 4

Chapter 12: A Solemn Vow and Promise

1. 大げさなレイチェル夫人

“Mrs. Rachel says she thought she would sink through the floor when she saw you come in all rigged out like that (wear flowers on her hat).” (p. 88, ll. 21-23)

2. ダイアナと友達になれるか心配するアン

“Oh, Marilla, I’m frightened. What if she shouldn’t like me! It would be the most tragical disappointment of my life.” (p. 89, ll. 20-22)

マリラがみたアン様子は、()。

名前のスペルについて:最後に()をつけることを緊張しながらも Mrs. Barry に伝える。 (p. 90)

3. swear の2つの意味 (p. 91, l. 26)

i : ii :

4. ダイアナと友達になって、

“Oh, Marilla, I’m the happiest girl on Prince Edward Island this very moment. I assure you I’ll say my prayers with right good-will tonight.” (p. 92, ll. 10-13)

5. アン性格

マシューが買ってきてくれた()をダイアナに()。マリラはアンが()。子どもが()なのは大人が嫌うことだ。 (p. 93, l. 13~)

6. マリラの気持ち

“Dear me, it’s only three weeks since she came, and it seems as if she’d been here always. I can’t imagine the place without her.” (p. 93, ll. 19-21)