Using Manga in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Peter HOWELL

Institute for Foreign Language Research and Education

Hiroshima University

BACKGROUND

It has been traditional to use elite rather than popular culture in foreign language teaching. As an advanced-level examination student of foreign languages in Northern Ireland in the late 1970s, I learnt to read Albert Camus' *L'Étranger* and Berthold Brecht's *Leben des Galilei,* using translation methods probably not unfamiliar to many Japanese students of English. When I continued my language studies at the University of St. Andrews, the degree courses were heavily focused on the study of canonical literature. The approach was one suited to a situation where only small numbers of students studied foreign languages. Since Communicative Language Teaching became, at least in Western theoretical discourse, the dominant approach to foreign language teaching in the 1980s and beyond, a number of books have been published outlining ways (other than translation) in which literature can be used in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. Examples are Lazar (1993) and Parkinson and Reid Thomas (2000). However, although the methods suggested are innovative, the verbal arts remain the quintessentially 19th century literary staples of poetry, novels, and theatre. Popular arts such as song, cinema and comic books are not covered.

Moreover, the literary academy has in the 20th century voiced political objections that popular culture lacks the 'moral seriousness' required for a critical mind, and that it is merely part of the strategy of bread and circuses used since Roman times to keep the masses satisfied with their relative poverty and lack of power, deploying the worst prejudices and stereotypes of mass psychology. However, the reverse has also been argued — notably by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu — that high-cultural tastes are used to create a *cultural capital* that helps stratify society and ultimately supports elites in maintaining their grip on the levers of power. And in recent decades the research tradition pioneered by Henry Jenkins (2012) has shown that fans of popular culture are not necessarily the passive and sad dupes of cultural opium, but on the contrary read and interpret popular culture in independent, creative and empowering ways. Therefore, an argument can be made that it is morally and politically defensible to use popular culture in T.E.F.L.

This paper will be the first of three planned papers outlining my own ways of using the popular verbal arts in T.E.F.L. It will deal with comic books, in particular English translations of Japanese comic books or *manga*. I have previously described how English translators can skilfully overcome considerable linguistic and cultural barriers (Howell 2001) and others have highlighted the possibilities for individual Japanese learners to use manga to study English (Furukawa and Miyashita 2008), but not much appears to have been written about how an

entire course of lessons could be conducted using Japanese comic books and their translations.

WHAT MATERIALS WERE USED?

I wanted to use comic books that Japanese students might already have an interest in, and might want to read on their own, independently of any formal educational setting. Bilingual materials were also a priority, and thus it was decided to try English translations of manga in parallel with their Japanese originals. The classroom activities for each lesson were built around four consecutive pages (two photocopied sheets) from a Japanese manga together with the corresponding four pages from the English translation. To capitalize on the dramatic power of the narrative form and add an aspect of performativity to the classes, pages were chosen focussing as far as possible on dyadic dialogue between two characters. In this respect, it was helpful to the classes that one of the salient differences between manga and American comic books is that third-person recitative is largely absent from the former, the textual information being overwhelmingly composed of dialogue and sound effects. Although the English versions do of course constitute derivatively creative texts, they are skilful and free translations, sometimes created by pivot translation in which a native Japanese translator will make a literal translation of the original which will then be edited into natural-sounding dialogue by a native English dialogue writer. As a result, the texts encountered by the students in the classes contain a wide range of linguistic features typical of naturally-occurring English conversation as summarized by writers such as Scott Thornbury and Diana Slade (2006): vague language, fillers, discourse markers, inserts, appraisal language, routines and lexical phrases.

Another of the salient differences between Japanese and American comic books is that the range of genres in manga is much wider than in American comics, which tend to be dominated by the super-hero genre published by both D.C. Comics and Marvel. Having said that, two stories were chosen from a genre familiar to American comic book readers, namely science-fiction. These were *Battle Angel Alita* (original title: 銃夢) by Kishiro Yukito, translated by Fred Burke & Sterling Bell and Matt Thorn; and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (original title: 新世紀エヴァンゲリオン) by Sadamoto Yoshiyuki, adapted into English by Fred Burke. The latter story is well known to and popular with many Japanese people (and importantly with young males), not so much due to the manga but to the animated T.V. series on which it is based. The former story, a cyberpunk manga set in a dystopian future, is less well known. It is violent and action-orientated, but it was possible to focus on a small sub-plot featuring a brief love interest of the main character, Alita. Alita's boyfriend is Hugo, who meets an unpleasant end whilst attempting to escape from the dystopian world. His grisly demise usually has quite an impact on the students, so this is the story I like to use at the beginning of the course. The other stories used can be classified as romance and romantic-comedy, genres it is not so easy to find in the world of American or British comic books. The romance story presently used in the class is *Sand Chronicles* (original title 砂時計) by Ashihara Hinako, translated and adapted by Watabe Kinami and John Werry. It is set in Shimane, a neighbour prefecture to Hiroshima, and features a country-city dichotomy that seems to resonate well with students. Previously I have used the

romantic comedy *Maison Ikkoku* (original title めぞん一刻) by Takahashi Rumiko, translated by Gerard Jones and Matt Thorn. It is an older manga, first published in 1980, and less familiar to today's students. I have also used *Nodame Cantabile* by Ninomiya Tomoko. *Nodame* differs from the other works used in that, in addition to the adaptation for the American market by David and Eriko Walsh, it is also published bilingually in Japan with an English translation by Tamaki Yuriko. Using two translations possibly overloads students and I myself prefer the more adult and melancholic resonance of *Sand Chronicles*. It is also possible to lend interested students a copy of its Japanese TV drama adaptation, which hopefully boosts the resonance of the class for a few people. To summarize, the sequence of materials used presently in the 15-week course is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Sequencing of Manga Used in a 15-week Course

Week 1	*Battle Angel Alita* / 銃夢
Week 2	*Battle Angel Alita* / 銃夢
Week 3	*Battle Angel Alita* / 銃夢
Week 4	*Battle Angel Alita* / 銃夢
Week 5	*Battle Angel Alita* / 銃夢
Week 6	*Sand Chronicles* / 砂時計
Week 7	*Sand Chronicles* / 砂時計
Week 8	*Sand Chronicles* / 砂時計
Week 9	*Sand Chronicles* / 砂時計
Week 10	*Sand Chronicles* / 砂時計
Week 11	*Evangelion* / 新世紀エヴァンゲリオン
Week 12	*Evangelion* / 新世紀エヴァンゲリオン
Week 13	*Evangelion* / 新世紀エヴァンゲリオン
Week 14	*Evangelion* / 新世紀エヴァンゲリオン
Week 15	*Evangelion* / 新世紀エヴァンゲリオン

WHAT EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY WAS ADOPTED?

The planning for the course was based on a humanistic approach to language teaching. This is an approach which prioritizes emotional and social outcomes over the cognitive and the linguistic. My view is that the main problem facing foreign language educators is the widespread sense of lack of meaning and negative emotional response to our instructional programs. It is a general educational problem, not restricted only to foreign language instruction. As the well-known positive psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi said more than two decades ago:

  – *it seems increasingly clear that the chief impediments to learning are not cognitive in nature. It is not that students cannot learn, it is that they do not wish to* (Csikszentmihalyi 1991).

Dick Allwright, the specialist in T.E.F.L. classroom observation, has used the term *QoCL* ("Quality of Classroom Life") as a key indicator of success in English Language Teaching. In order to secure a high quality of classroom life, it is desirable to introduce into lessons a high level of *social safety*, whilst at the same offering some scope for *social play*. Social safety is a concern because "language learning is one of most face-threatening school subjects because of

the pressure of having to operate using a rather limited language code" (Dörnyei 2001). Peter Burden conducted research in Okayama, Japan and found that as many as 51% of students started to panic if they were called upon to speak in English in the class without having prepared in advance, prompting the researcher to call into question the value of English Q&A where students are expected to provide answers immediately in front of the whole class (Burden 2004). To reduce levels of anxiety and foster a sense of social safety, the following measures were adopted in the manga course:

- reduction of teacher correction (negative feedback)
- regularity of classroom routines
- bilingual classroom (not *all English*)
- acceptance of differing participation styles.

Students' output was corrected only in a casual and unsystematic way. Mainly it occurred when pairs had finished their writing activity ahead of schedule and the teacher therefore had time to look at what they had written and correct spelling and major, but easily correctable, grammatical errors *e.g.* subject-verb agreement. It was also possible to add mildly negative feedback, *e.g.* recasting, to overall positive feedback procedures. This was done when writing on the board interesting sentences from the student output for the purposes of highlighting and praise. I didn't always write the sentence verbatim on the board, but often recast it to improve it slightly. But, the fundamental point is that students were not graded or ranked on the quality of their output. The pattern of classroom activities was the same in every lesson and students quickly knew what they were expected to do. The intention was that such regularity would help create an atmosphere of social safety. Furthermore, although many activities required final output in English, the use of Japanese L1 was not discouraged or forbidden in the overall processes of the class. The input materials were all bilingual, so students were not overwhelmed by large numbers of unknown English words; they could always understand at least the gist of the meaning. Finally, it was accepted that students could participate in class in different styles. The teacher did not expect or encourage everyone to be enthusiastic and dynamic in pair- and group work. Quiet, succinct, even somewhat passive contributions to the class were welcomed.

Reducing anxiety is the negative part of securing a high quality of classroom life. The positive task is to foster a sense of social play. Guy Cook (2000) has reminded us of the potential of linguistic games in language teaching, but 'relational' play can be an important way of creating social relationships in the classroom. The standard T.E.F.L.-class configuration of pair work is very conducive to relationship building when combined with time within each class for free, creative writing (imagining and writing English dialogue for comic-book speech bubbles) and an aspect of play-acting, which allows participants to perform English under the guise of a fictional identity (reading aloud in large groups and in front of the whole class). Humour and (hopefully) laughter foster relaxation and enjoyment in the classroom and also help create a sense of community and solidarity, a feeling of class identity beyond the individual identities of the participating students. Humour was encouraged when it emerged through parodies and jokes inserted by students into their imagined dialogues and through performative aspects of

humour inserted into their readings aloud. 'Performative' aspects of humour may involve non-linguistic communication tools such as gestures and voice-quality alterations.

To summarize, the educational-philosophical approach of the course was to create a high quality of experience in the classroom by prioritizing a lack of anxiety and positive enjoyment.

WHAT CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES WERE USED?

Each 90-minute lesson in the course employed — as recommended by most current methodologists — a variety of activities in a variety of group configurations, calling into use all of the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Each class, however, used the same sequence of these activities, as displayed in Table 2. This was intended to create a sense of familiarity and security amongst the students in that they knew what was coming activity-wise in every class. Thus, although the materials changed every week, the lesson was what might be called a 'one pattern' class.

TABLE 2. Sequence of Lesson Activities

Sequence	Activity	Group Size during Activity
1.	Peer reading of rough translation	Individual class members
2.	Dictation	Individual class members
3.	Imaginative writing	Pairs
4.	Performative reading 1	Large groups
5.	Performative reading 2	Whole class
6.	Silent reading	Individual class members
7.	Rough translation	Individual class members

The class opened with the teacher randomly giving out to students the rough translations into English — written at the end of the previous week by their classmates — of the first of the two pages which were the focus for that particular week. This was explicitly a 'quick and dirty' translation of the original Japanese, not intended to be accurate, idiomatic or polished, not to be read, commented on, or assessed by the teacher in any way. The original text served merely as a prompt to stimulate rough written output in English. To each student translation, a blank 'Post-It'-type sticky message had been attached by the teacher. This was to enable students to write a brief English message to the translator, the content of which could be anything ranging from a comment on the translation, a phatic description of the weather, or an expression of their general fatigue at that time of the afternoon. When students seemed ready, the teacher then asked them to get up out of their seats and return the translations with their message to their originators. This served as a general warm-up and mingling activity — not all the students knew each other — and usually involved some confusion, for example, because the translators were absent that day or had not written their name.

The second activity in each lesson was dictation. In this activity the teacher dictated the speech bubbles of page 1 of the professionally-translated manga dialogue, following which photocopies were given out so that the students could check the spelling of the English text

they had written down. Sometimes this was followed by chanted repetition of the dialogue. The core of each lesson was the third activity, which consisted of free imaginative writing in pairs. I gave each pair (one group of three in the case of uneven numbers of students) a photocopy of page 2 of the manga with the dialogue blanked out. Their job was to imagine and write English dialogue in the blanks. They were given 20–25 minutes for this activity. They discussed the task in Japanese, but wrote the dialogue in English. I repeatedly encouraged them to write simple lines of English dialogue and to be playful in their writing, jokes and parodies being most welcome.

The fourth lesson activity required each pair to read their dialogue to their classmates. To do this, the class was divided into three or four large groups, each standing in a circular formation, one group remaining in the classroom and the others decamping to nearby lobbies of the teaching building. In order to alleviate student feelings of embarrassment, I did not listen to these read-alouds, but I did try to ensure they were actually being done by circulating to check. The use of Japanese was not discouraged, as it was sometimes necessary to clarify the meaning of the English dialogue. When each pair in the group had completed its read-aloud, the group's members were asked to choose which pair's dialogue they liked the most. Then, when all the groups had returned to the classroom, the 'chosen' pairs read their dialogue aloud for a second time, this time in front of the whole class. They were encouraged to be as dramatic as they liked in the readings, but the most important thing was the need for sufficient volume in order to be heard by students at the back of the class. After each pair's reading, I selected one interesting sentence and wrote it on the board. I commented on the sentence and asked the whole class to repeat it aloud after me, and when the read-alouds were finished, I asked the whole class to chant again all the four sentences on the blackboard.

After the students had listened to imagined dialogues in both large groups and plenary, copies were handed out of the original Japanese second page and its corresponding English translation. The students often found it interesting to compare their own imaginings with the original. I then read aloud the English translation and asked the students to chant in unison after me, sometimes drawing attention to words or linguistic points of interest. In occasional lessons efforts were made to enliven the chanting by variations such as shouted chants, whispered chants, and 'funny-voice' chants. Finally, copies were handed out of the first Japanese page that would figure in the following week's class and students were asked to write a rough translation in English, either in the margins or on the reverse blank side of the photocopy. When they had completed the translation, they handed it in to the teacher, who then attached a blank sticky note to it in readiness to begin the cycle of activities again the following week. On the rare occasions when time was running short, I asked that the translation be done as homework and put in the box on the door of my office.

WHAT WERE THE REACTIONS OF THE PARTICIPANTS?

First of all, a brief comment should be made about my own reaction to the course as the teacher and thus a major participant. I experienced a sense of pleasure in being the teacher and

some sense of curiosity as to how students would react to each week's manga pages and what kind of imagined dialogues they would come up with. The work-load of the class was essentially in the preparation and, given the learner-centred orientation, there was little instructional pressure to obtain and keep the attention of potentially sleepy students on Friday afternoons. I was glad that the students seemed to enjoy the classes, and that some will still stop and chat to me in English around the university despite the fact the course is finished. It should also be acknowledged, nevertheless, that not all students who enrolled in the course completed it. At least half a dozen students dropped out for various reasons, one of which may well be that the content and processes were not to their taste. It is also possible that there is a trade-off between perceived enjoyment and perceived usefulness in much E.F.L. teaching, and this seems to be confirmed in the rough numbers obtained from a simple questionnaire I administered in the final class, as shown below in Table 3.

TABLE 3. Responses to the Post-Course Questionnaire (numbers of students)

	The course was fun	The course was useful
Strongly agree	30	7
Agree	24	36
Neutral	0	10
Disagree	1	2
Strongly disagree	0	0

While allowing for some bias due to deference and reluctance to offend, these responses would seem to confirm that the course was enjoyable for the participants. It is noticeable that more than half of students strongly agreed that the course was fun. In the free comment space three of the students wrote as follows (the English translations are the author's):

- 身近なマンガという教材が使用されていたことで、すごく興味がわきました。外国のマンガも読んでみたいと思いました。楽しかったです。*(Using familiar manga as materials made the class very interesting and made me want to read foreign comics. It was fun.)*
- みんなのideaや発表がおもしろくて、授業のたびに元気をもらえました。*(Everyone's ideas and performances were fun and the class made me feel cheerful.)*
- *In this semester, I have some strict classes and am a little bit tired. So your class makes me refreshed and relaxed. (comment written in English)*

As to whether the course was useful, the numbers are less positive, with ten students expressing neutrality on the issue and only seven strongly agreeing. Nevertheless, a sizeable majority indicated that it was useful. Positive free comments included the following:

- 日本語を英語に訳すのが、最初は難しく感じましたが、だんだんと慣れて、辞書を使わずに訳せるようになりました。*(At first it was hard for me to translate Japanese into English, but I gradually got used to it and was able to translate without using a dictionary.)*
- 楽にやることで、英語を書くということへの抵抗が少しやわらいだのと、人にわかりやすい英語で表現しようとする力がついたと思います。*(My resistance to writing English decreased a little and I think I became able to express myself in English that was easy to understand.)*

A comment indicating enjoyment of the course whilst at the same expressing a negative view of its usefulness is the following:

– *I don't think this class is useful because I'm not good at making stories and writing English sentences. But I like Peter☺ So I was fun☺ I'm happy we greet each other always when we meet.*

REFLECTIONS AND DIRECTIONS FORWARD

The T.E.F.L. course described in this article is perhaps a little idiosyncratic. Nevertheless, it is the product of extensive personal research into popular culture, represented speech, and translation, combined with a philosophy of teaching developed over a number of years of experience. It also provides evidence to the teacher of his own pedagogic development in that it is bilingual and accepting of students' L1 in a way that would not have been possible for him when he first came to Japan. It combines 'communicative' activities (pair and group work, free imaginative writing) with traditional, 'old-fashioned' activities (translation, dictation, chanting). Despite the fact that, with 55 students, it was a far larger class than T.E.F.L. specialists would consider ideal, I enjoyed teaching it, many students enjoyed it this year, and previous participants have also personally communicated their positive memories. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that it may not match the needs of instrumentally-motivated students, that is to say students who wish to acquire English primarily as a tool to achieve specific rather than general purposes. It is also unlikely that it has a direct and measurable benefit in terms of second language acquisition. But my hope is that it fosters and sustains autonomous learning by participants, thereby indirectly functioning as a catalyst to individual S.L.A., probably in a minority of the participants.

Looking forward as to how this course could be further developed, I intend to look for other Japanese comic books that are available in English versions and that may resonate strongly with students, with a view to experimenting with them as part of the course. I will also try to have a receptive attitude to student feedback about the teaching of the course and ways in which it might be improved, for example by alternative and better activities. There is also the potential of non-Japanese comic books for English Language Teaching. It is perhaps unlikely that they would resonate as well with Japanese students when used as the only teaching materials, but I am presently considering and experimenting with marginal uses of comic books in movie-based materials such as *Spider-Man* and *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. The most ubiquitous American comic-book figure would seem to be *Batman*, who appears in a long succession of comic-book stories, some of which have been translated into Japanese, and also in a wide and interesting range of screen incarnations. There might, therefore, be scope for a course of lessons themed on the history of Batman.

REFERENCES

Allwright, D. (2006). Six Promising Directions in Applied Linguistics. In *Understanding the Language Classroom*, Gieve, S. and I.K. Miller (eds.) Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave

Macmillan.

Burden, P. (2004). The teacher as facilitator: Reducing anxiety in the EFL university classroom. *JALT Hokkaido Journal 8, 3-18*.

Cook, G. (2000). *Language Play, Language Learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1991). Thoughts about Education. In *Creating the Future: Perspectives on Educational Change*, Dickenson, D. (ed.)
http://education.jhu.edu/PD/newhorizons/future/creating_the_future/crfut_csikszent.cfm

Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Furukawa, A. and Miyashita, I. (2008). *Manga*で楽しく英語を学ぶ. Tokyo: Shogakukan.

Howell, P. (2001) Strategy and Style in English and French Translation of Japanese Comic-Books. *Edinburgh Working Papers in Applied Linguistics 11, 59-66*.

Jenkins, H. (2012). *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture (2nd edition)*. New York: Routledge.

Lazar, G. (1993). *Literature and Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Parkinson, B. and Reid Thomas, H. (2000). *Teaching Literature in a Second Language*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Thornbury, S. and Slade, D. (2006). *Conversation: From Description to Pedagogy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

要　約

英語教育におけるマンガを用いた新しい試み

ピーター・ハウエル
広島大学外国語教育研究センター

　本稿は、著者が英語教育でマンガを用いた際に行った新たな試みを説明するものである。この試みは、ソーシャル・セーフティーとソーシャル・プレイの概念を重視する人文主義的理念に基づいている。本稿では、15週間の授業課程の中で扱った対訳教材を提示し、コミュニケーション活動と伝統的教授法を調和した授業方法の手順を説明している。また、授業の参加者から得られた肯定的な反応も紹介している。本稿最終部では、授業に対する省察を要約し、マンガの利用に関する今後の展望を考察している。