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Aspects of English Language Teaching in Japanese Universities

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In this paper, the author reflects on his experiences of teaching English at the tertiary level in Japan, and reviews some of the recent articles and online tools that are relevant to Japanese university English language education. The author has spent 35 years working in Japan, mainly at the Institute for Foreign Language Research and Education, and has been involved in editing all the issues of *Hiroshima Studies in Language and Language Education*, which was first published in 1998. Consequently, the organization of the article is structured with reference to the activities of the institute, which are described in the background section of this article.

In an article of this length, the author can only cover some aspects of English language education at Japanese universities, and so in each section, he has chosen a small selection of articles and items that offer insights and innovations relevant to the situation in Japan. Many of the sections relate to the general English that is taught in students' first year of university study. In addition, a team from the institute has been involved in English for Specific Purposes in the field of medicine, and a small section has been created for this. Also, the author considers podcasting for English language education, an area in which he has been very involved for many years. In a final related section, he considers the impact of developing technology on English language education. While this paper has been structured around the activities of the institute and the situation at Hiroshima University, most of the reviewed articles and items have broad relevance to teaching at the tertiary level in Japan.

BACKGROUND

The Institute for Foreign Language Teaching and Education was founded in 2004, and its aim is the provision of effective foreign language education across the university. It currently has 21 teacher-researchers. Sixteen of these are involved in teaching and research on English language education. Other language specialists are involved in German, Spanish, and Chinese language education.

With regard to English language teaching, the institute's English language teachers are heavily involved in the provision of general English classes to undergraduate students. In the two-semester system that operated prior to 2018, teachers were allocated first-year courses based on one of the four skills of speaking (Communication IA), reading (Communication IB), writing (Communication IIA), and listening (Communication IIB). First-year students from some of the schools at Hiroshima University also took extra courses: Basic English Usage I (vocabulary and grammar) and English Usage II (vocabulary and grammar). These involve vocabulary learning and online self-study, and are integrated with the receptive skills courses. This has led to Japanese teachers of English taking charge of receptive skills classes, and a combination of foreign teachers and some Japanese teachers taking charge of productive skills classes. The organization of

these courses has become more complex in recent years due to the introduction of a four-term (quarter) system replacing the old two-semester system. The challenges of this change have been documented by Morita (2020). However, the responsibilities allocated to each teacher remain primarily on a skills basis. The author, an American, has been mainly involved in the productive skills classes, and in the review that follows the two productive skills sections have been grouped together, followed by the receptive skills, then by grammar and vocabulary to reflect the set-up of courses.

A further important area in the university is evaluation. Within an institution the size of Hiroshima University, containing schools ranging from Engineering to Letters, there is a wide range of English levels. The university uses exams such as TOEIC Listening and Reading to roughly gauge students' levels of English, but the responsibility for giving grades to students lies with the teachers themselves. A short section has been written on this important area.

Since 2012, a small group of teachers at the institute has been involved in teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to third-year medical students. The author has been involved in this from its inception, and a small section has been added to the article to consider ESP and content-based instruction.

The institute has for many years had an energetic podcasting group, and the author has been involved in this area from the start. A section of this paper is dedicated to this. A final section considers how developments in technology are changing English language teaching at Japanese universities.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Productive Skills

In this section, several aspects of productive-skills teaching are considered. In relation to speaking, teachers often need to consider the types of discourse that students engage in. Here, the author considers the difference between discussion activities and presentation activities. In relation to writing, the encouragement of activities that promote fluency is balanced with a consideration of the importance of corrective feedback.

Speaking

At Hiroshima University, where teachers have considerable control over their own teaching materials and the delivery of their courses, there is a wide range of possibilities for teaching. In this section, two different types of communication are considered: reciprocal activity in the form of group discussion amongst students, and non-reciprocal activity in which students make presentations.

“Small group discussions” are important because students can improve their communication skills while learning about important topics (Soranno, 2010). Mork (2020) argues that this type of activity can be problematic in Japan if students are politely reticent in groups or are lacking in confidence. To reduce this risk, he recommends giving each member of a group a specific role, along with a set of phrases useful for that role. For example, there can be: (a) a Leader who begins and closes the discussion with summaries; (b) a Moderator who makes sure everyone speaks, and steers the discussion in relevant directions; (c) a Timekeeper who makes sure the discussion has an appropriate introduction, flow, and conclusion; (d) a Recorder who takes notes and summarizes the discussion to non-members of the group in a follow-up activity; and (e) a Language Monitor who encourages only English usage, keeps track of key language problems, and later discusses these points with the recorder and perhaps the teacher. Mork argues that

allocating specific roles to students helps avoid one person dominating a discussion.

In relation to non-reciprocal activities, “oral rehearsal” has been suggested (Nagasaki, Orimoto, & Armitage, 2018), based on a research project. In the project, university students gave two-minute speeches in class about various topics related to the textbook. The students were given guidance on how to construct their speeches (e.g., main idea, supporting ideas, conclusion). They were encouraged to write down keyword notes, and were told not to write sentences or detailed scripts. At home, students were asked to rehearse the speeches at least five times while recording themselves speaking. Students then had to listen to the recordings, taking notes about possible vocabulary, pronunciation, content, and grammar problems. Using pre-tests and post-tests, it was found that students greatly improved their scores on two different types of speaking tests. They also became much more skillful at “noticing” linguistic forms and gaps in their knowledge of English, a skill which is thought to be essential when trying to improve EFL speaking abilities (Swain & Lapkin, 1995).

With regards to pronunciation, more teachers recently have set “intelligible pronunciation” as the goal, deemphasizing American and British accents, while encouraging exposure to other dialects of English (Uchida & Sugimoto, 2020). This goal is defined as “pronunciation that can be understood by listeners without effort and can serve as a model for students, even with a slight Japanese accent” (p. 4). Unfortunately, some studies have found that some people outside Japan have negative attitudes toward Japanese-accented English pronunciation (Jenkins, 2007). Teachers and students need to know which aspects of pronunciation can sometimes lead to communication problems. The distinctions between /l/ and /r/ and problems with final nasals (e.g., sing/seen, same/sane) are some that have been identified (Mueller, 2019).

Writing

Encouraging students to write needs to be balanced with a focus on improving their accuracy. Concerning the process by which students improve their English writing abilities, Hirose (2018) and Hokumura (2018) both found that Japanese university students progress with great variability concerning fluency (number of words written), accuracy (proportion of error-free clauses among all clauses), and complexity (mean length of clauses). Hirose had a total of 51 students in two semester-long classes write at least one paragraph each week as homework about any topic they desired. The two groups had similar TOEIC abilities, but differed in that one group consisted of freshmen who had received no prior college writing instruction, and the other group consisted of higher-level undergraduates who had already received one year of college writing instruction. It was found that the freshmen increased their abilities significantly with respect to fluency, accuracy, and complexity, whereas the higher-level students showed no significant changes on any of these measures. One implication is that paragraph-level instruction involving students’ daily lives has its limits, and once a certain level is reached, students should focus on a wider range of genres that might motivate them more, covering fiction as well as non-fiction. In the Hokumura study over one academic year, two students with low proficiency levels (TOEIC scores under 470) each wrote 20 short essays in class, and those essays were analyzed in detail. The students improved more with fluency and accuracy than with complexity.

The issue of giving feedback to students is an important one for busy teachers who are often dealing with classes containing over 20 students. The studies summarized below indicate that the issue is a complex one.

In EFL writing classes, Van Beuningen, De Jong, and Kuiken (2012) argue that effective feedback from the teacher is often thought to be essential for students to improve their skills. Bitchener and Knoch (2010) state that direct feedback is the most effective technique, while Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) prefer indirect coded feedback, where students are asked to self-correct. In Jones and Tang's (2020) study, Japanese students seemed to have mixed opinions about which technique was better. A key study in Japan on corrective feedback was conducted by Ellis et al. (2008), who found that university students significantly improved their use of grammatical articles over time, whether the corrective feedback was focused (concentrating only on article errors) or unfocused (receiving article corrections alongside other errors).

A study in Japan finding that feedback was not effective in improving students' writing skills was reported by McGrath (2021), who had 30 paid volunteers write four essays over two months. The titles were designed to elicit similar language (Questions: What are the features of a good parent/student/friend/teacher?) Some students received direct feedback, some received indirect feedback, and a control group self-corrected with no feedback. McGrath found that there was no significant effect on writing improvement for any of the groups. Outside Japan, Truscott (1996) argues corrective written grammar feedback is not so important.

The implication of this is that teachers may not need to correct all students' grammar errors. For example, if teachers have students do Facebook or blog writings, comments on their grammar may not be effective. Instead of spending time on corrections, perhaps students and teachers should focus attention on increasing the amounts of writings involving topics which students enjoy.

Receptive Skills

Reading

In the area of EFL reading instruction, Nunan's (2017) research shows that when university teachers encourage extensive reading, students improve their skills greatly. Miyake et al. (2018) had a large number of lower-level students ($N=155$) do reading activities in and out of the classroom. During one semester, the students read a total of 36 books so that they read about 15,000 words. The students self-reported that they increased their reading speeds, vocabulary abilities, and abilities to infer, and came to like English. The most common complaint of the students was that they were frustrated when they did not know the meanings of words. Thus, the researchers recommend that lower-level students look up words they do not know, which conflicts with the widespread advice of encouraging students to skip over unknown words.

With respect to intensive reading, involving detailed instruction in class, teachers need to help students with both lower-level skills (lexical and grammatical analyses) and higher-level skills (e.g., inferencing). Even though students may understand the words, they often do not understand the whole-text meaning. Ushiro et al. (2018) performed a relevant experiment in which 19 Japanese college students with various majors and English ability levels verbalized in Japanese what they were thinking after reading each sentence in texts. For some of the stories, the students were asked to concentrate on the characters' traits and actions in the stories so that they could later draw four-frame pictures describing the main ideas. It was found that this procedure, along with rereading, helped students connect the characters' traits with their actions. The

researchers recommend, before reading, giving students vocabulary training, and giving them questions so that they can better make inferences. They also say that it is vital for students to understand reading strategies such as contextualizing, visualizing, skimming, and scanning.

Listening

The best listening materials for EFL college classrooms include comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982), but, in an interesting study, Carson (2019) found that inhibitions toward seemingly difficult foreign topics can be significantly lowered when there is effective classroom instruction. He gave two groups of Japanese college students similar listening passages, the main difference being that one passage was centered around Japanese culture, while the other dealt with foreign culture. As expected, the students had great initial apprehension about the foreign passage, but with good instruction the two groups improved their listening skills equally well. A key part of effective instruction, he reminds us, includes pre-listening materials.

Podcasts have been shown to be an effective tool for improving English listening skills in Japan and abroad (Lauer, 2019). Podcasts often include scripts, comprehension exercises, and closed captions, the last of which has been shown to promote vocabulary acquisition and comprehension ability in Japan (Lee, 2017; Hosoguchi, 2016). Some of the most popular podcasts for college students in Japan will be explained later in this paper.

Grammar and Lexis

Grammar

When teaching grammar, to achieve communicative proficiency, Izumi (2021) reminds us that there are three important parts: form, meaning, and function. Form involves how the words are used, meaning involves what topic or message is conveyed, and function involves when and where the words are used.

Grammatical articles (*the/a*) and prepositions are associated with two of the most frequent types of errors made by Japanese learners of English (Bryant, 1984), and recent applied linguistics research has enabled teachers to better help students. For example, Mueller and Tsushima (2021) performed a large-scale study ($N = 178$) on Japanese university students' grammatical article usages. They found that Japanese performed well with *the* in structures when a noun phrase is modified with an explanation (e.g., *The desks in the room are all made of metal.*), and that they were relatively skillful at using *the* when it referred to a noun clearly used for the second time in a text (e.g., *This is a book. The book is heavy.*). However, the Japanese college students were much weaker when referring to nouns which most people around the world or in a particular group know about (e.g., *the sun*; or, *There's a dinner at the church tonight.*), and they were much weaker when the second reference was assumed by context (e.g., *There was a wedding. The bride was gorgeous.*; or, *I like my new cell phone. The screen is big.*). Takahashi (2018, 2016) also described in detail Japanese college students' uses of articles. He similarly recommends that students become more aware of whether or not the referent is context-unique (e.g., *Would you pass me the salt, please?*). Importantly, Akakura (2012) and Ellis et. al. (2008) argue that English articles can be successfully taught to EFL learners. The researchers recommend that teachers give more meaningful models of these difficult functions.

Prepositions, likewise, can be learned when teachers and students have better knowledge of their functions. For example, Nishitani and Nakazaki (2018) point out that native Japanese speakers tend to overuse *by*, because *で* has wider usage:

- a. 電車で : by train (a means of moving)
- b. 教室で : in the classroom (a place)
- c. 縄で : with a rope (using a tool)
- d. 雨で : because of the rain (attributable to)

Thus, students make errors such as **The window broke by the storm*. Better instructional materials can help students avoid these errors.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary teaching and learning has made great advances recently thanks to corpus linguistics. Powerful vocabulary lists include The New General Service List (Browne, Culligan, & Phillips, 2013a), the New Academic Word List (Browne, Culligan, & Phillips, 2013b), the Business Service List (Browne & Culligan, 2016a), the TOEIC Service List (Browne & Culligan, 2016b), and The TOEIC L & R Official Vocabulary Book (Institute for International Business Communication, 2019). For example, Hiroshima University has used these lists to build comprehensive online materials based upon the 6,000 most essential words which undergraduates need in order to be successful in daily, business, and academic environments (Enokida et al., 2021).

Teachers can use software programs to develop specialized word lists in areas ranging from huge fields such as medicine (Lei & Liu, 2016) and nursing (Yang, 2015) to doing small but important tasks such as writing effective job-search cover letters (Hirata, 2019). To make these lists, compilers especially look at the range of texts words appear in, and the frequencies of particular words in particular texts. To show a benefit, for example, when writing cover letters, if students truly understand frequently occurring vocabulary items such as *experience*, *position*, *resume*, *organize*, and *qualifications*, it might increase their chances of finding jobs in internationally-minded companies.

Evaluation

Recently a large number of universities have integrated into their curriculums standardized tests such as TOEIC and Eiken, which have high validity and reliability and are thought to motivate students (Dunlea et. al., 2020). Hiroshima University, for example, developed courses exclusively designed to improve students' TOEIC speaking and writing scores (Amano et al., 2021). It was found that students could improve their scores in a relatively short time, especially with regards to speaking.

Tests produced by teachers in the classroom, as always, need to have reliability and validity, too (e.g., Brown, 1996). Wastila (2019) encourages instructors in Japan to use alternative forms of testing. These include portfolio evaluations, peer assessment, self-assessment, and team-based testing. For example, with team-based evaluation, groups of students compete against each other to perform a task or make something. The goal in alternative testing is to move away from teacher-centered tests toward more dynamic, enjoyable tests which are motivating for students.

English for Specific Purposes

A large number of ESP and content-based instruction (CBI) studies in Japanese universities have involved the field of medical care. For example, Willey et al. (2020) identified the English language needs of medical doctors in Japan, thus creating a better framework for university classes. It was found that the physicians' biggest need with English is gathering information, and they overwhelmingly voiced the opinion that their college educations did not sufficiently improve their general English conversation skills.

Davies et al. (2020) describe in detail how a successful content-based course can be developed. After conducting a needs analysis, comprehensive courses for third-year medical students were developed. The materials include a word list based on corpus analysis, comprehensive online materials, in-class instruction centered on improving speaking skills, and testing.

Podcasting

As mentioned earlier in the paper, podcasting is a language teaching and learning tool that has come into its own in recent years. In addition to helping learners with listening, podcasts can aid the development of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Podcasting has also been shown to enable and encourage learner flexibility and personalized learning. What, then, are the best podcasts for use in language learning, in the context of Japanese tertiary education in particular? To answer this question, the author (Lauer, 2021) conducted a survey to determine the most popular English-learning podcasts among Japanese university students today.

First, the researcher identified about 40 English-learning podcasts available on the internet, and he narrowed the list down to 19 podcasts which he thought would be educationally beneficial and enjoyable for college students studying English in Japan. Then, 154 freshmen (124 males) in eight classes (all science or engineering majors, with TOEIC scores mostly between 450 and 550), as homework over a two-week period, were asked to listen to those 19 podcasts "as much as possible," and to rank their five favorite podcast sites. Half of the students received the names of the podcasts listed in alphabetical order, and the remaining students received the list in reverse alphabetical order. Each student's favorite podcast received 5 points, and those following received incrementally fewer points, with the fifth favorite receiving one point.

Table 1 shows the students' podcast popularity ratings. Hiroshima University's English Podcast finished first, but this finding comes with the caveat that the students' teacher hosts the program. Even though the research took place early in the term, and the teacher did not strongly recommend it, a lot of the students undoubtedly knew that he was the host. Having said that, for about 15 years, the program has been available free on the internet, is a leader in its field, and is listened to by hundreds or thousands of students each week. There are various types of podcasts, including comical dialogs, cross-culture talks, and dramas. They have Japanese support, with accompanying scripts or subtitles. The difficulty levels of the podcasts are also categorized, from low-intermediate to advanced.

BBC World Service: 6-Minute English finished a strong second. This podcast has been produced for many years, and centers around topics ranging from culture to language. There are comprehensive transcripts, but a weak point is that there is no Japanese support for lower-level students. CNN English Express: 毎日ちょこっとリスニング特訓 [Daily Short Listening Practice], TedTalks Daily, and マット竹内の [Matt Takeuchi's] English Square are other high-quality podcasts which wrapped up the top five.

TABLE 1: University Students' Favorite Podcasts

Rank	Popularity Points	Name	Comment
1	393	Hiroshima University's English Podcast	Various types of audio files for students in Japan
2	260	BBC World Service: 6-Minute English	High-quality recordings centered on British culture
3	159	CNN English Express: 毎日ちよこっとリスニング特訓 [Daily Short Listening Practice]	2–3-minute audio files good for lower-level students
4	158	TED Talks Daily	High-level talks, subtitles, audio only or video options
5	135	マツト竹内の [Matt Takeuchi's] English Square	Interesting business topics, Japanese support
6	121	Hapa 英会話 [English Conversation] Podcast	Authentic materials, comical, Japanese support
7	112	English Journal	Excellent, but much of the support costs money
8	100	バイリンガルニュース [Bilingual News]	Interesting bilingual talks with accompanying texts
9	97	ECC英会話 [English Conversation] Podcasting	Low-intermediate level, extensive archive, but ads
10	93	English News Weekly	Excellent materials, made by Hiroshima University

Note: Other podcasts which finished out of the top 10, listed in order of finish: VOA Special English, Breaking News English, Gaba G Style, Let's Read the Nikkei Weekly, Gogo Project Podcast, British Council: Elementary Podcast, 外資系表技英語, 台本なし英会話レッスン [English Conversation Without Scripts Lesson], Grammar Girl.

The Impact of Technology

Videoconferencing

The COVID-19 crisis of the early 2020s helped English teachers in Japan to become keenly aware that more classes should be online, because online classes can be very motivating and effective for improving skills (Morita & Enokida, 2021). In reading, writing, listening, and speaking classes, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and other systems allow teachers to have live video sessions, one-to-one pair practice, instantaneous access to pre-recorded instructional materials, and links to interesting sites on the internet.

To improve speaking skills, for example, Mueller and Walzem (2020) had college students in Japan and Taiwan chatting while using Skype. The video sessions were found to be “immensely popular” (p. 117), with 62% of students saying they initiated extracurricular chats with the foreign students to increase their English skills and further their friendships. Other studies have found that a large number of students really like using Zoom in speaking classes (e.g., Davies et. al., 2021)

SNS

Social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter also have great potential for improving English skills, because students clearly enjoy using them (Bingö, Lauer, & Houghham, 2021). For example, Lauer (2020), utilizing Facebook, had 79 non-English majors in Japan doing cross-cultural

writing activities with students in the United States, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Taiwan. The project was deemed a success especially because a majority of the Japanese students were active in their writings, posting nearly as many long entries and as many short comments as the English-major students in the other countries. Students also seemed to put effort into making their sentences grammatically accurate, and many of them said they enjoyed learning about the other places and cultures.

M-learning

Mobile learning, in which students utilize their smartphones or tablets, is a key part of EFL's movement away from classrooms. Caldwell (2018) used questionnaires and interviews to understand Japanese university students' opinions in detail concerning the use of mobile technologies to learn English. He found that students mostly had positive attitudes toward using their smartphones to study English. But the students also realized that, compared to computers, smartphones have some disadvantages for learning English.

Online Games

Games which improve English skills are also a key part of the online EFL movement, because students clearly love them. To cite one example, Quizlet is one of the leading vocabulary learning tools, incorporating online vocabulary cards and a couple of games. Carman (2020) found that, compared to students who did not use Quizlet, students in Japan who used it responded more positively to the statements "I can make my own sentences using vocabulary I learned," and "I think I'm improving." To cite a final example of a free game app, Kahoot allows students to make their own gamified quizzes (Alizadeh, 2018). Students get points and compete on leaderboards.

Applications for Individualized Learning

The most effective learning, it has long been known, occurs when a student receives individual instruction centered upon that student's current abilities, weaknesses, goals, and interests (e.g., Betrus, 2021). Thus ideally, every student should receive personalized instruction. One teacher for one student is ideal, but tends to be too expensive. Fortunately, today some apps and online programs try to individualize the learning experience for students.

Rosetta Stone, FluentU, Hello English, Duolingo, and HelloTalk are some of the best apps for learning EFL (Gallimore, 2019). Rosetta Stone teaches vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. FluentU has many news and music videos from the internet; in the captions, students can tap on words to learn their meanings. Hello English starts with a test, and then provides comprehensive lessons based on the results. Duolingo has fun language games, and when students have questions they can ask other students for help on message boards built into the app. HelloTalk is a free app that enables students to chat with English speakers from around the world.

Translation Tools

For writing, Google Translate and DeepL are powerful translation tools, while Ginger, Grammarly, and Ludwig are homepages which help students verify the correctness of their English sentences. Ludwig is special in that students type in their best guess of the English sentence, and then the homepage compares the

sentence to those in reliable sources such as the BBC, The New York Times, and scientific journals (Sakaue, 2021). For Japanese with weak English skills, for instance, they could first utilize DeepL, and then use Ludwig to see if the translation is correct.

Smartpens

Smartpens are another exciting tool, which can help students take better lecture notes, and probably improve listening skills (Crawford, 2021; Mancilla, 2013). Students write their notes on paper, digitalize them, then synchronize the notes with a lecture's audio recording. (The microphone is either built into the pen, or another microphone in a cell phone or PC can be used.) Students can then tap certain words in their notes and hear that part of the lecture. Theoretically, smartpens solve the problem that the brain can only process a certain amount of information at one time. Some research has found that native English speakers utilizing smartpens score higher on comprehension tests than students using traditional paper and pencils (Joyce & Boyle, 2019). In the near future, research needs to be done on their effectiveness in EFL classes in Japan.

Virtual Reality (VR)

Imagine a student walking down a street in Sydney, Australia, talking to a shopkeeper, suddenly seeing a crime, or talking to a virtual friend while learning about a historic place; those are just a few of the possibilities which VR will open up to students learning English in Japan in the near future. Google Expeditions is one of the leading devices in creating such a viable experience (Alizadeh, 2019). A teacher can lead students on virtual trips, explaining points of interest in VR space. Tour Creator is the name of the Google platform which allows teachers to customize their own VR tours. Today VR devices tend to be expensive, and their capabilities are still limited, but they are quickly moving in the right direction.

The effectiveness of VR has just started to be explored in the EFL classroom. For example, in Taiwan, Chen, Hung, and Yeh (2021) had engineering majors utilize a VR device while using English and solving problems, and a control group did similar tasks but without the VR device. The VR device basically consisted of a 3D avatar explaining an engineering problem. It was found that the VR group did significantly better than the control group with respect to both vocabulary acquisition and their claimed motivational level to continue studying English. But there was no significant difference between the two groups in their abilities to solve the problems.

CONCLUSION

In this article, the author has used his experience at Hiroshima University's Institute for Foreign Language Research and Education to identify and review some of the literature and online tools that are relevant to the changing situation for Japanese tertiary education. The structuring of the article reflects the activities of the institute, covering the primarily skills-based teaching of general English and important areas related to it such as evaluation, aspects of English for Specific Purposes, particularly in the medical field, and the institute's involvement in podcasting as a resource for language learners.

The final sections of the article have involved a review of the way that technology is impacting language teaching. In comparison to the author's early years of language teaching in Japan, language

teachers and learners now have a wide range of online resources available to them, and this technological change has in many ways been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers and students have learned how to undertake courses effectively online using videoconferencing and learning management systems; students have access to grammar-checkers, translation software, vocabulary-building games and language learning apps. These changes offer interesting challenges and possibilities in the field of language education in general.

In his 35 years of working in Japanese universities, the author has seen English language learning develop to embrace a variety of new ideas and technologies. In an increasingly internationalized world, often involving research and cooperation that crosses borders and time zones, the use of English as an international lingua franca makes it an important language to learn for communication, and the author hopes that the field will continue to develop dynamically as it moves further into the twenty-first century.

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ABSTRACT

Aspects of English Language Teaching in Japanese Universities

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This paper summarizes recent trends in the field in English education in Japanese universities, and also takes a glance at important developments which will affect English education in the near future. In addition, reference is made to a brief study that was conducted, asking 154 university freshmen about their favorite English-learning podcasts. It was found that some of the most popular podcasts today are Hiroshima University's English Podcast, BBC's 6-Minute English, and CNN English Express.

During the 26-year history of *Hiroshima Studies in Language and Language Education*, Joe Lauer has published at least one paper in each issue, and has helped edit every issue. This year he is retiring from Hiroshima University, so this paper is a type of reflection.

要 約

日本の大学における英語教育の諸相

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本稿では、日本の大学における英語教育分野の最近の動向をまとめ、近い将来の英語教育に影響を与えるであろう重要な動向にも目を向けた。加えて、154人の大学一年生を対象に、彼らが好んで使う英語学習用ポッドキャストについて尋ねる簡単な調査も行った。その結果、最も人気のあるポッドキャストは以下の3つであることが判明した：Hiroshima University's English Podcast, BBC's 6-Minute English, および CNN English Express.

ジョー・ラウアーは、『広島外国語教育研究』の26年間の歴史の中で、毎号少なくとも1本の論文を発表し、毎号の編集に携わってきた。本年、広島大学を退職する。そのため、本稿はその「振り返り」の一種でもある。