

論文

# Approaches to Writing and the Japanese University Context

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## 要 旨

英語教授法やライティングスキル習得方法については、多くの研究が現在までに報告されている。また、どのように英語力を向上するかを記した多数の手引きが存在する。それらの教授法には、教育面や文化面から長所と改善すべき点があり、ライティング指導方法もその例外ではない。ライティング指導方法の提案者達は、自分の指導法を別の方法と比較し、持論の重要性と長所を容易に主張しているのではないかと考えられる。教師は授業内容と生徒の特性を考慮し、クラスに適切な指導方法を選出しなければならない。

日本の大学の英語教員の立場から、この論文ではまず始めに日本の大学での英語指導方法、日本人学生の特徴について述べ、次に主なライティング指導方法 [product, process, and genre] について説明し、どのライティング指導法が日本の大学で最適かを最終的に評価することが大切であると考えられる。

Keywords: writing approaches (ライティング指導方法), process (プロセス), genre (ジャンル), product (プロダクト), Japan (日本), university (大学), pedagogy (教育学)

Much has been written on the subject of teaching and learning the skill of writing in English and different approaches to this key skill have developed overtime. However, different pedagogical approaches will have differing strengths and weaknesses when applied to certain educational and cultural contexts, and approaches to writing are no different. While proponents of the different approaches to writing may be quick to assert the value of their approach and the strengths it has when compared to other approaches, a teacher must consider ones own teaching context and students in an attempt to ascertain the most suitable approach for their classroom.

As a teacher of English at a Japanese university, this paper attempts to explore the major approaches to writing and their relevance and value to the Japanese university context. To do this, I will examine some contextual features of English language teaching in Japanese Universities and some characteristics of Japanese learners before exploring the major approaches to writing: product, process, and genre. This paper is written to assess the appropriateness of the major approaches to writing within the Japanese university context and, therefore, identify which approach, if any, is most suitable.

### **The Japanese Context.**

One of the key influences on English language teaching in Universities is the students' experience before they enter university. Prior to entering university, most Japanese students will have studied English for at least six years. Writing activities during this time will, for most students, have been tightly controlled with free writing being almost unheard of. Given that Japan regularly features towards the bottom of English proficiency ranking tables among Asian countries, it would appear that a move away from the traditional approach employed prior to university is required. However, more than a simple examination of the Product, Process and Genre approach to writing is required.

The Japanese educational system is famous for its university entrance examinations. The often heard 'examination hell' or preparations for the university entrance examination begin in earnest many months before the first wave of tests are taken.

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The English requirement for the first entrance examination is the same for all students with the individual universities then demanding that further tests be taken as their course or prestige demands. Given that the first entrance exam is taken by all and is often all that is required, schools across Japan feverishly prepare their students for the test to such a degree that this extends far beyond the classroom and has become a national obsession (Shimahara, 1991). As Hyland points out, “Written examinations alone determine grades and future success” (Hyland 1993 pp 73).

With English being a compulsory element of the entrance examination it is unsurprising that it exerts an enormous impact on English teaching at high schools, an impact that is considered by many to be overly negative (Terauchi 1995, Shimahara 1991, Fujimoto 1999). The English component of the entrance examination overwhelmingly focuses on the students understanding of grammar and vocabulary. As such, the teaching methods, curriculum and energy of teachers and students at high schools are devoted to meeting the requirements of university entrance examination. Such is this devotion of high school English teaching to the entrance examination that Japanese statesman Wataru Hiraizumi as far back as 1975 called for the removal of English as a compulsory part of the entrance examination (Terauchi 1995). Hiraizumi highlighted that excessive focus on the entrance examination, a lack of student motivation and ineffective teaching methods were the main causes of poor English ability among Japanese. However, the entrance examination remained and offers university teachers a level up to which they know all their students have attained, particularly in vocabulary and grammar.

Japanese teachers traditionally hold a belief that ‘teachers are to teach’ (Azuma 1998). Personal experience working within the Japanese high school system leads me to concur with this statement and with Hyland when he states that traditional methods and materials are dominant in the Japanese classroom, which centres on the teacher and where students are expected to be passive (Hyland 1993). To try to achieve targets dictated by university examination requirements, many schools take on text based teaching at an accelerated pace with subject matter being repeatedly drilled and students tested in mock situations (Shimahara, 1991). A grammar translation approach to writing is dominant and reflects the knowledge demanded by the

entrance examination.

This is illustrated by the example of a writing class taken from a school textbook (Element English Writing) used by a Japanese colleague at an academic high school (appendix one). The writing class has the target of using connectors in writing and the writing exercises themselves are mostly gap-fill or guided writing at the sentence or short paragraph level. This class would appear to be the rule rather than the exception as most writing classes feature English only at the sentence level or paragraph level at best (Asaoka & Usui, 2003). The exercises employed would also support Hyland's belief that "The Japanese education system does not seem to value independence nor assign creative or imaginative tasks" (Hyland, 1993: 73).

The limited exposure of students to writing does not seem to be limited to English. Asaoka and Usui found that this was the case in L1 writing as "...the writing training in Japanese at school is usually limited to personal writing such as diaries or book reports mostly on novels..." (Asaoka & Usui, 2003: 145). It is therefore unsurprising to find that a study conducted among university students of an EAP course discovered students had greater difficulty with macro-level issues such as planning, topic choice, focus, conclusion etc than grammatical accuracy, which was not viewed as a problem (Asaoka & Usui 2003). University teachers of other subjects also found organisation to be the most problematic area of L1 student writing indicating the problem was deeper than just English instruction (Asaoka & Usui, 2003).

Just as students' writing ability is partly a consequence of the teaching style and methods employed by teachers, so too are their classroom demeanour and preferences for learning. Personal experience has shown that students rely heavily on dictionaries and textbooks thereby indicating a preoccupation with accuracy. Indeed, research conducted among foreign English teachers found that Japanese students do not like to take risks in the classroom (Dorji, 1997). Japanese students have also been characterised as being unable to express their opinions, debate or even discuss issues (Allen, 1996). While cultural issues may play a part in this, it seems certain that teacher centred classes that do not require or encourage student participation are an influencing factor. The teacher-centred nature of classes no doubt also contributes to

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the feeling among foreign English teachers that students have difficulty in accepting and taking part in learner-centred group activities (Dorji, 1997).

Despite this characterisation of Japanese students, a number of studies suggest that students wish to move in another direction. When asked why they studied English 60% of university students answered that communication was most important, culture was the second most frequent answer with 29.1% (Terauchi, 1995). Japanese university students also expressed a desire for more semi-free to free task types (Davies, 2006). These studies indicate that Japanese university students, having studied English for many years through methods considered by many to be restrictive, look towards freer and more expressive approaches of English learning.

This wish of students seems to have been partly realised. Although many teachers at university continue to teach in the grammar translation style in which they were taught (O'Sullivan, 1992), it appears that some teachers are increasingly using a process writing approach in their writing classes (Wachs, 1993).

In the following sections I will review the strengths and weaknesses of the major approaches to writing and assess their applicability to the Japanese context as described above.

### **Product.**

The product approach, popular until the 1970s, viewed writing as an extension of grammar (Hyland 2003). Focus is on syntactic and grammatical forms with accuracy being paramount. Students were taught incrementally, error was prevented and accuracy was expected to arise from a student's practices with structures (Reid, 2007). End-product construction was the desired outcome of the product approach with learning being achieved as a result of teacher and textual input. These ends were sought by working through a process characterised by the four stages of *familiarization* with grammar and vocabulary through a text, *controlled writing* exercises featuring manipulation of fixed structures, simple teacher *guided writing* exercises imitating model texts, and *free writing* in which students use the patterns

they have been taught to create a target text (Hyland 2003). However, Raimes (1983) adds that students were only allowed to attempt free compositions after reaching a high-intermediate/advanced level of proficiency. Therefore, the work of students below this proficiency threshold was strictly controlled with it being very easy for students to work without making mistakes. Mistakes were even rare when it came to free writing as writing became merely an imitation of the previously studied text and structures.

As an approach that focuses on form, product writing removes the creativity and individuality of writing to a large degree which, it can be argued, can lead to disinterested students. With little acknowledgement of writing macro-functions, it approaches writing in a way that does not accurately reflect how tests are created. Little focus on the reader also results in the social functions of writing being largely ignored. In addition, the highly controlled nature of the product approach minimises mistakes which can aid student learning and provide meaningful feedback.

### **Process.**

Some academics (e.g Tribble, 1996 and Raimes, 1993) view the process approach to be a reaction against the product approach to writing. Whether or not this is the case, it is clear that a process approach is in stark contrast to the product approach as it places importance on meaning rather than attention to form. The focus of the process approach is on the student as a writer who brings in his/her own individuality and writing resources. However, this assumption of writing skills might not reflect reality.

Writing is seen as unpredictable and highly individualistic (White and Arndt, 1995). All writing, even the most routine, is viewed as being creative and demanding of “conscious intellectual effort, which usually has to be sustained over a considerable amount of time” (White & Arndt, 1995: 3). Process writing involves the generating and processing of ideas as well as the planning of writing. The development of students’ meta-cognitive awareness is key to process writing and teachers aim to nurture students’ ability to reflect on strategies they use to write (Hyland, 2003).

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The teacher in the writing classroom adopts a role of facilitator, guiding students through the process of writing towards these ends and a written outcome that is neither preconceived nor determined by the teacher or materials. The desirable atmosphere of the process writing classroom is close to that of a collaborative workshop with teacher and students adopting complementing roles and holding similar status (White and Arndt, 1995). However, it is suggested that this may disempower teachers and make them bystanders in their own classrooms (Hyland, 2003a).

The process of writing itself contains several stages: generating ideas (usually through brainstorming), focusing, structuring, re-viewing, drafting and evaluating (White and Arndt, 1995). These stages do not follow a linear path but rather can be seen as a cycle, with it being possible for students to revisit any stage in the process as their writing demands or as new ideas are formed. Allocating sufficient time for the generation of ideas and for providing feedback on the content is crucial to the process approach (Raimes, 1983). Feedback is central to a student's improvement in process writing and is viewed as an interactive exercise between teacher and student or between the students themselves, and so it is seen as most effective when face to face (White and Arndt, 1995). Feedback is provided on the content of the student's work, requesting expansion or clarity when needed, pointing out which points were agreed with or were particularly interesting and indicating which points were difficult to understand. The student then acts on this feedback to produce a new draft which again will receive feedback and so on. White and Arndt (1995) indicate that surprising improvements may result from at least two drafts and sensitive feedback. However, Raimes (1983) suggests that a three draft process with teacher feedback at each stage, an evaluation of progress throughout the stages and the assigning of follow-up tasks in areas found to be weaker than others will be highly effective and turn writing from being just a language exercise into an "ongoing process of discovery" (Raimes, 1983: 142).

Although process writing would raise awareness of planning and the complexities of writing, genre proponents would suggest that it presents writing as a decontextualized skill isolating the writer (Hyland, 2003a). An understanding of how language operates

in writing as a form of human interaction is lacking in the process approach. Process writing pays only lip service to the reader, instructing students that they should consider the audience if required (White & Arndt, 1993: 9). Genre proponents would argue that this is always required and is the most important aspect when considering writing. Effective written English requires an understanding of the social purpose and context which is not offered by the process approach.

## Genre.

Several observers have commented that genre and product share several characteristics, for example both are predominantly linguistic (Badger and White, 2000) and value the end-product as the main object of focus (Harmer, 2007). However, genre differs from product as it looks beyond textual features. Genre is an approach to writing which highlights the reader and suggests that students "...also need knowledge of the culture, circumstances, purpose and motives that prevail in particular settings" (Paltridge, 2001: 7). These settings are separated into different genres of writing based on the language used and the context for which they are produced. Genre emphasizes the constraints of form and content that must be reorganised to for a text to fit a social purpose (Tribble, 1996).

The idea of social purpose is central to the genre approach as a letter of complaint, a postcard to a friend or an academic article will all employ distinct forms of language, have an intended purpose, and will be read by different readers who will interpret the text in ways dictated by social practice. Genre seeks to offer explanations on the way language functions in the many social contexts so that students recognise we write something for some purpose and what we write differs depending on the purpose and who will be reading it.

In the classroom, the provision of multiple example texts from a specific genre allows students to compare and deconstruct the language used and thereby discover the underlying assumptions and ideologies (Hyland, 2003a). The genre teacher supports or 'scaffolds' learners as they progress with the amount of support reducing as they advance and begin to produce their own drafts and texts of the target genre.



However, the overdependence on the teacher and examples could potentially result in the 'slavish imitation' that Tribble (1996: 58) warns should be avoided at all costs in a genre approach. Indeed, a criticism of genre is that it promotes imitation and does not raise students' awareness of how complex the process of writing is. Tribble argues the counter, however, when he suggests that "Genre is not a rigid set of rules for text information. It is social practice, not simply the text, which makes the genre possible, and social practices are open to challenge and change" (Tribble, 1996: 51).

### **Discussion.**

As we can see, the product approach most closely corresponds to the writing classes undertaken by Japanese high school students and is evident in the example provided. From the textbook example provided, we see that the emphasis is on accuracy and form with the activities being highly controlled before moving on to a guided writing exercise. However, the free writing component of product is conspicuous by its absence; something that might cause surprise considering the textbook was used at a private and academically well regarded high school, though as we have seen, this is consistent with the general Japanese context.

From the devotion to grammatical form and syntax in Japanese high school teaching, it is not surprising that many university students are satisfied with their ability in this area. Wachs (1993), discussing writing in Japanese universities, suggests that the broad knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary gained in high school be put to good use. With this in mind, it would seem logical to conclude, as Wachs did, that a process approach to writing is most suitable as students have had little experience at free writing or exposure to the process of composing written English. However, as we have seen, Japanese students seemingly have not had any great exposure to free writing in Japanese either. This being the case, the writing skills that the process approach assumes students will bring to L2 writing from their L1, would appear not to exist, making any attempt to implement process writing problematic.

Additionally, the teacher adopting the role of facilitator on the student's level within the process approach may feel uncomfortable and unnatural for Japanese students

and so may hinder progress. So too might there be issues with the levels of feedback. Teacher feedback at the frequency suggested by process proponents, such as Raimes (1983), is not feasible in the Japanese university contexts in which a class of 50-70 students is quite normal (Anderson, 1993) and classes meet only once every week (Wachs, 1993). Yet, as research found macro-level issues to be the most problematic for Japanese students (Asaoka & Usui, 2003) and free task types to be the most desirable among Japanese students (Davies, 2006), implementation of process writing to some degree would seem appropriate.

Knowledge of genre and the social realities of writing are also necessary for effective writing. After all, students taking a university English writing course will do so for many reasons; employment, study overseas, travel, to communicate with friends/family and so on. Although many will likely never call upon their English, one must assume that university students, being the future leaders of society, will use it and need to use it effectively.

A genre approach seems much more compatible with this environment. The providing of multiple examples and the scaffolding of students towards an end product would seem familiar to Japanese students looking to the teacher for the input they see as being required for learning. Tribble (1996) suggests that to write effectively, students need content knowledge, context knowledge, language system knowledge and writing process knowledge. Indeed, if we solely adopt one approach at the exclusion of another, we do a disservice to our students. Many writing commentators (Badger & White (2000), Tribble (1996), Hyland (2003), Raimes (1983) suggest, even though they may favour one over another, that a mix of different approaches represents best practice. Indeed, the “21st century classroom has teachers designing curriculums’ based on a balance of institutional programme and student needs rather than around dogmatic theories or approaches” (Reid, 2007: 29).

## **Conclusion.**

It would seem clear that an English writing class at a Japanese university should contain elements of process and genre. Exploring how writers actually write through

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a process approach will develop the meta-cognitive skills that may be lacking and develop self reliance. The use of feedback is also a valuable tool though, given the realities of the Japanese university, peer feedback might be frequently required as teacher feedback is not always possible. Overdependence on process would exclude any exposure to genre and the social dimension to writing. It would potentially also place great strain on the students used to a tightly controlled teacher-centred environment. Such an extreme change may prove counter productive and so adopting the scaffolding method of genre may help students ease in to aspects of the writing process.

There is no reason why both genre and process approaches cannot co-exist in the writing classroom. Process techniques such as brainstorming can be adopted to discuss different genres, examples can be studied to improve language knowledge and students can then write their own versions towards their own ends. Drafts can be used and feedback offered by the teacher or peer. The teacher can adopt a role moving towards that of a facilitator as the scaffolding is removed and students advance. Such a mixed approach would be relevant to the teaching experiences and learning expectations and of Japanese students. The blend of genre and process would build on the existing foundation of sound vocabulary and grammatical knowledge and an attention to form to offer an outcome much greater than if one approach was adopted exclusively.

Appendix 1.

Part  
**3**

# Lesson 2

趣味は人さまざま

教 pp. 112-113

例をあげて書く

**STEP 1**

1 次のパラグラフを読んで、下の問いに答えなさい。

(a) People love movies all over the world. There are many kinds of movies, \_\_\_\_\_ love stories, comedies, action movies and science fiction movies. My friend Ted likes action movies, \_\_\_\_\_, *Matrix*. Animated movies are also popular. His little brother loves *Pokémon*. My favorite movie is *Titanic*. Kate Winslet is so beautiful!


(b) Japanese people eat various kinds of food. \_\_\_\_\_, we eat Chinese, Italian, and French food. I usually have bread and eggs for breakfast, but I sometimes have rice and *miso* soup. I sometimes have a hamburger before I go home. I guess hamburgers are American food. My brother really likes hot dishes, \_\_\_\_\_ Thai and Korean food.

1) 下から適切な語句を選んで、それぞれの下線部に入れなさい。ただし、同じ語句を2度使用してもかまいません。


for example      such as      and so on

2) それぞれのパラグラフの中の主題文に下線をひきなさい。

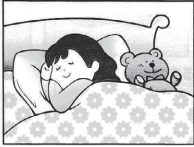
2 絵を参考にして、次の書き出し文に続けて書きなさい。



毎日ジョギングする



暴飲暴食をしない



十分に睡眠をとる

**Hints** ⇨ eat or drink too much

Different people try different ways to keep healthy. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

80

STEP 2

1 文章の□に入れる3つの文が、順不同で以下のA～Cに示されています。論理的な文章にするのに最も適当な配列のものを、次の①～⑥のうちから1つ選びなさい。(センター試験\*)

Economic growth refers broadly to an increase in wealth over a certain period of time.

□ Even though gross national product, GNP, is a widely used measure, there are those who argue that it is not the most appropriate.

- A. However, there are some differences of opinion among these specialists.
- B. Economists generally agree on what influences economic growth.
- C. They disagree, for example, about how they should measure economic growth.

(注) broadly 「大ざっぱに」/ gross 「総計の」/ GNP 「国民総生産」/ widely 「広く」/ appropriate 「適切な」

- |         |         |         |
|---------|---------|---------|
| ① C-A-B | ② A-C-B | ③ B-C-A |
| ④ C-B-A | ⑤ A-B-C | ⑥ B-A-C |

( )

2 次の問いに答えなさい。

(1) あなたは友人や家族など、人にプレゼントをするとなれば何を買いますか。だれに何をかうのか例を3つあげて、次の書き出しに続けて英語で書きなさい。

- I will buy .....
- I will buy .....
- I will buy .....

(2) (1)で簡条書きにした文をもとに1つのまとまった文章を書きます。つなぎの語句を使って修正を加えながら、次の書き出しに続けて書きなさい。

Whenever I buy a present for someone, I consider his or her interests. ....

.....

.....

.....

.....

The above example of a writing class was taken from the latest (at the time of writing) version of *Element English Writing* published by Keirikan. Details of this and other books in the range can be found on their website: <http://www.shinko-keirin.co.jp>

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