Content and Language Integrated Course Design: “Tsugaru Literature, Local Literature”

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to propose a series of techniques for designing a literature course relevant to the contemporary Japanese higher-educational environment and in compliance with goals set forth by the Japanese government, while deliberately laying out the pedagogical rationale for textual choices and classroom activities. The specific course dealt with in the following pages is entitled “Tsugaru Literature, Local Literature,” and is tailored to engage students with literature and history particularly relevant to Aomori Prefecture; the methodological framework it employs, however, is adaptable to a wider variety of mixed-language instructional environments. The course introduces both literary works by local authors, and touches on theoretical questions about issues including canonization, language standardization, and the construction of place. The multi-lingual element is designed to foster interdependence and interaction between Japanese and English native speakers in the class when applicable, and otherwise to serve students of mixed linguistic abilities at multiple levels. Emphasis on close-reading short poetic works, provided with parallel textual translations, is intended to build upon several key TEFL concepts: close reading as a way to foster active participation and learning, strategic discussion of poetry and translation in order to cultivate tolerance of ambiguity, and treating literature as a performative medium appropriate for stimulating multimodal learning.

Keywords: poetry, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), tolerance of ambiguity, TEFL

Introduction

How can we teach literature written in Japanese to Japanese students in English? Should we? The simple argument that I present in the following pages is this: there are sound pedagogical reasons for using literary texts in TEFL contexts, and there are significant socio-political reasons for using English as a language of instruction for general content courses in Japanese universities.

This paper is organized around a course syllabus called “Tsugaru Literature, Local Literature,” which is designed to fit with the ideals and general education program at Hirosaki University in Aomori Prefecture; however, the methodological implications should speak to a wider audience. I begin by providing the institutional context for the course and discuss its organizing concept, contrast with an example of a current general-education literature syllabus, explicate the pedagogical concepts underpinning my choices, and conclude with some techniques for cultivating a productive and positive linguistically-integrated classroom environment.

Context

During the 2016-17 academic year, Hirosaki University debuted a new general education, or liberal arts [*kyōyō kyōiku*] program, including 27 “global” [*gurōbaru*] and 23 “local” [*rōkaru*] classes. The former addresses a wide array of subjects from disciplines

spanning the social sciences and humanities. “Global” courses include both international and Japan-centric themes. In contrast, all of the “local” courses are about the local prefecture: Aomori history, Aomori arts, Aomori nature, and so on. Locality in Hirosaki city is usually conceived of alternatively as Aomori (Prefecture) and Tsugaru (region/ *chihō*), which occupies the western half of the modern-day prefecture (from a much broader perspective, “locality” can be expanded to even include all of Northern Tohoku, or the Tohoku region in general). This is a distinction which is clarified in the details of certain class syllabi, as well as in different institutions presenting local literary history. For example, as a research student, in 2008 I participated in a “Tsugaru-*gaku*” [Tsugaru studies] lecture at Hirosaki University focused on literature, arts, and history connected to the idea and locality of Tsugaru, rather than the modern political territory of Aomori Prefecture.

The interest in locality is not unique to Hirosaki University; there are similar programs spread throughout the Tohoku area. Iwate University has “Iwate-*gaku*” courses, Tohoku University and Akita University both have local history courses and institutional history courses, Fukushima University has a number of “regional studies” courses, Yamagata University has an entire liberal arts sub-classification called “Learning from Yamagata,” etc, listed on their websites.

Hirosaki University offers a number of locality courses and literature courses, taught in Japanese, English, and bilingually. Students in the study abroad program and regular enrolled students are generally segregated from each other; bilingual classes are offered with non-native English speakers, usually exchange students from East Asia, in mind. Enrollment in locality-oriented courses in English is currently limited to foreign students, with very few exceptions; locality-oriented courses in Japanese are open only to exchange students with extremely high Japanese levels. English-language content courses for Japanese students most often come in the form of language pedagogy seminars and British literature reading classes. In other words, Japanese students currently have few opportunities to study “Japan” in a direct way in the English language, and, furthermore, to do so alongside exchange students.

The course syllabus utilized in the present paper makes an attempt to bridge that divide, allowing Japanese L1 students to study “Japan,” specifically the topic of “locality,” in a linguistically-integrated environment. One also optimistically looks forward to changes in the curriculum which will provide more opportunities for mixing Japanese L1 and English L1 and L2+ exchange students in a single classroom. Anecdotal evidence from both teachers and students reveals a substantial demand for content and language integrated learning (CLIL) opportunities like this. CLIL pedagogical theory puts emphasis on using “authentic” texts and encouraging the transition from L2-as-goal to L2-as-means-to-a-goal. Stories of demand for this type of class offering bear out in research conducted by the local Self-Access Learning Center (SALC), and appear likely to be incorporated into the university’s education plan in stages over the next several years. A significant percentage of students responded to the researchers’ survey most favorably to the possibility of CLIL courses in cross-cultural communication, psychology, and linguistics, while also expressing interest in other scientific and humanities fields. The report also identifies a lacuna in the current CLIL resources available to university instructors, as commercially-produced materials tend to be oriented toward primary and secondary learners in the fields of history, geography, and science (Birdsell). While the lack of variety in commercial resources may be an impediment to growing the number of

opportunities for this type of education at the moment, projects like the current syllabus may be used as conceptual models for future curricula and teaching materials. Incidentally, the focus on short poetic works and in-class translation practice in the present case is intended to allow for a gradual process of teaching materials development over time.

Thus, the conditions at Hirosaki University regarding English education, CLIL, and local studies appear to be surprisingly amenable to "*rōkaru kamoku*" [local unit] being taught in English to Japanese students. The "vision for the future of Hirosaki University" includes planks of both "regional vitalization" [*chiiki kasseika*] and "globalization," but this is no isolated stance (Hirosaki Daigaku). Hirosaki University is clearly following the Ministry of Education's new "Plan for National University Reform," which emphasizes both the need for Japanese universities to "globalize" through increased presence of foreign students and instructors, and through the expansion of the number of classes offered in English (MEXT). In other words, this university is participating in a top-down trend, and one can optimistically expect more opportunities for CLIL and integrated classrooms across the country in the coming years.

In the present case, the locality-oriented courses are largely centralized in the new liberal arts program, and regular literature courses are found in the faculties of the humanities and education. The liberal arts program is targeted at first and second year students, and does not yet offer seminar courses. The literature syllabi outside of this program, listed on the university website, are populated by the usual suspects—the general trend seems to be toward teaching the "great works." There are naturally multiple institutional and disciplinary demands on professors to offer these types of courses at the undergraduate level; however, the liberal arts program poses an opportunity to expand the purview of literary studies on this campus. Thus, my course aims at putting a question to the concept of locality and minor literature while introducing relevant authors, instead of retreading an already calcified canon which humanities and education students will assuredly encounter again in their classes in the faculties.

Conventional Syllabus Contrast

There are two primary reasons for proposing a locality course which explicitly raises questions about "locality" and for pushing back against the canon. The importance of leveling a question at the nature of "local studies" is in prodding students toward a kind of critical thinking which does not necessarily fit into conventional literature courses for first and second year students. This is partly because these courses tend to be categorized as "reading" classes, which focus more on comprehension than analysis. If the liberal arts spirit of the program is to be taken seriously, then encouraging critical questioning of this sort is exactly what educators should be doing.

The second important reason for talking about the nature of locality and the constructedness of narratives of Japan-as-nation relates directly to the location of the university (in Japan's "*michinoku*" [the end of the road]) and the students themselves, many of whom will have been born and raised in the great "periphery" of northern Tohoku. The political position of the course is to raise the voices of producers of minor literature connected with this too-often "othered" locality, acknowledging their role in weaving the threads of the local cultural landscape while simultaneously providing an opportunity to ask students to question received forms of national imaginaries—state language, national literature, homogeneous national community, etc. This makes it distinct from a

conventional local literature syllabus; for example, the liberal arts course listed below, which is taught completely in Japanese:

Aomori Arts: Modern Literature

1. Orientation
2. Reading Kasai Zenzō: The inner truth of the "God of watakushi shōsetsu"
3. Dazai Osamu (6 classes)
4. Reading Ishizaka Yōjirō: "A Hundred Writers" in the Postwar
5. Reading Miura Tetsurō
6. Terayama Shūji's World of Self Expression (5 classes)
7. Final Test

This represents the weekly layout for the 2016-17 academic year's Modern Aomori Literature course. Of the sixteen weeks, eleven are dedicated to two authors widely taught in both Japanese high schools and overseas universities (Dazai Osamu and Terayama Shūji). The remaining three lectures are occupied by authors less well known abroad, but still widely acknowledged within the literary landscape of Japan (Kasai Zenzō, Ishizaka Yōjirō, and Miura Tetsurō). Non-literature-specialist readers of this paper may be unfamiliar with these latter names, but they became, to varying degrees, established voices in the Tokyo/ national literary community: Kasai was well-regarded as a naturalist writer, and is given a central position in Fowler's work on the central literary establishment (128-145, 248-289); Ishizaka was a writer of popular fiction probably best known for the dozens of films based off of his stories, including multiple adaptations of the novel *The Green Mountain Range* [*Aoi sanmyaku*]; and Miura (the only non-Tsugaru writer in attendance) graduated from Waseda University, and was a recipient of the Akutagawa prize, which is generally regarded as the most prestigious award for "pure literature" in Japan (Mack). Miura's novel *Shinobu gawa* has also been adapted into several television dramas and a film.

Miura's distinction as "non-Tsugaru" is important, because there was and continues to be a strong cultural and political distinction between internal regions of Aomori Prefecture. The historical literary community was based in Hirosaki city, in Tsugaru, and a perusal of any prefectural literary history reveals a near-complete dominance of writers who were either born in the Tsugaru region, educated in Hirosaki's Tōō Gijuku Academy, or active among its literary communities and publishing networks. Thus, from a particular perspective, the inclusion of this Nambu writer in the syllabus opens up the boundaries of Aomori literature to greater inclusivity of authors peripheral to the regional "center."

However, another look reveals a much less innovative, less revolutionary principle undergirding the choice of authors. The course trajectory is primarily invested in teaching students about authors who were living in Tokyo and participating in the infamous Tokyo literary establishment [*chūō bundan*], and who are thus generally recognized as participants in a national literature. A most banal piece of evidence of their stature is the fact that each of these men has his own detailed Wikipedia entry; the majority of writers in the local literature histories do not.

This approach makes perfect sense in a "great works" curriculum, and moreover it is in Hirosaki University's political and economic interest to promote the region: see how many authors from Aomori have made it to the top of the national frame, how well

Aomori's cultural capital is reified in the body of its artistic producers? Unfortunately, this type of syllabus can also serve to reiterate the dominant position and uneven power held by Tokyo, while re-presenting the quotidian, popular imaginaries of rural Japan that any cultural consumer is already familiar with: Aomori as a romanticized land of mother's milk and idealized pastness; or conversely, Aomori as a backward and untimely albatross doggedly clinging to the necks of any writer daring enough to attempt escape from its oppression by emigrating (invariably) to Tokyo.

In contrast, I offer a different approach: one oriented toward the "locality" of local literature. This course is framed by questions concerning place, national literature, canonicity, and the minor. It means asking students to try to think against or outside of a center-versus-periphery model of Japan studies, or at least to try privileging the voices of the margins. Conducting the class bilingually is a small bonus: by reading texts in translation, students will also be forced to interrogate the primacy of language in literature. Can we discuss "modern Japanese literature" not written in the standardized, modern state language? What new ways of reading can be accessed through practices of translation?

This is a particularly relevant issue in the case of Tsugaru literature, as discussions of its history invariably address the pre- to post-war regionalism and vernacular literature movements. Although they did not evolve into a national phenomenon, their works were widely read in their heyday, and they developed a devoted cohort of local authors. The writers who participated in the "local literary establishment" [*chihō bundan*] were able to use written vernacular, among other techniques, to give meaning to their writing and their community at a distance from the concerns of the "central *bundan*." Understanding the Tsugaru literary community does not entail only reading "literary works": you have to look at local newspapers and coterie journals, read internal debates and discussions, and understand the depth of citationality in their writing, and conceptualize all of it as a self-aware network of writers deeply engaged with the "place" of Tsugaru.

Methodological Underpinnings

Especially given the rise of CLIL in recent years, "authentic texts" has become a more and more important keyword for TEFL classrooms. However, the use of literature as "authentic text" has experienced a decline, with poetry suffering to a greater extent than other forms (McMinn). It seems that literature is being sidelined in favor of other disciplinary texts. Yet, literature and poetry easily leverage certain basic pedagogical principles in TEFL and CLIL contexts.

Poetry is a flexible pedagogical tool, which is generally taught in three modes: "language-based," "content-based," and for "personal enrichment," developing a variety of knowledge and skills, including in areas of communication and problem solving (McMinn, 9; McIlroy; Joritz-Nakagawa). As with any practice of extended reading, close reading, or translation, there is always a direct engagement with the language of the text; with vocabulary, grammar, and style. This course utilizes close reading and translation, as well as comparisons between "parallel texts"—original texts paired with prepared translations. This means creating a classroom environment full of linguistic engagement with generous scaffolding, accessible in different ways to language learners of different levels (Tanaka & Morita). The primary focus of classroom lectures, reading, and analysis is "content"-oriented, as students learn to place the poets and their works into historical

context, approaching the literature through a series of different theoretical frames. Furthermore, the relationship between the place of Hirosaki University within the physical landscape of Tsugaru and textual landscape of the regional literary community will also offer students an opportunity to make personal connections between their individual, communal, and scholastic experiences. This is even more true for local students, who comprise the majority of enrollees.

Poetry has other advantages as well. It adapts easily to multimodal learning strategies, providing additional levels of scaffolding and opportunities for student-text engagement. Multimodality refers to the activation of multiple senses, semiotic, or learning modes in the classroom. Emphasizing multimodality is a way to accommodate students with different learning styles and strategies. In more concrete terms, multimodality exists in the "full range of meaning-making resources in human life—spoken, written, visual, gestural, bodily, sonic, and spatial" (Newfield & D'Abdon, 514). This approach has often been used in the form of introducing multimedia technologies (e.g. video editing exercises, website building, voice blogging) to the classroom in order to engage digital-native students who may find it difficult to become enthusiastic about written poetry (Xerri). While it is a truism that all classroom learning necessarily contains some multimodal quality, I argue that poetry is particularly well-suited to adaptation to different learning styles through enunciation, performance, and other varieties of creative interpretation.

In addition to considering development of skills and acquisition of knowledge, instructors of all stripes are reminded to consider "where our students *are*…culturally, historically, and cognitively" (Bibby, 25). When teaching Japanese university students, particularly those in their first and second years of higher education, this means being cognizant of the educational paradigms in which they have been inculcated. So much of college-bound students' lives are structured by preparation for the infamous "Center Test": a two day-long, wide-ranging standardized examination used to determine admission to most Japanese colleges and universities (National Center for University Entrance Exams). Successful matriculation means, by default, that a student has spent countless hours studying toward a test, practicing rote learning and memorization; that a student has learned, implicitly, that questions have right and wrong answers, and that those answers are granted by the authority of a teacher, textbook, or examination.

The architectural design of many Japanese classrooms reinforces this top-down model of knowledge transfer. Rather than being organized around a single large table in board-room fashion, the vast majority of classrooms at Hirosaki University force students to sit in static rows facing the projector/ blackboard and podium and lectern in the front of the room. In the oldest parts of campus, students are seated along long benches, with rows of lunch-counter style desks bolted to the floor. This type of assembly is not conducive to group work, but more importantly, it reinforces stale models of rote learning, wherein the esteemed teacher is literally raised above the students in order to offer knowledge from on high. Working to break down this pedagogical framework and resisting the architectural limitations of the classroom are ways of encouraging active learning, and, more importantly, introducing the concept of ambiguity into the students' experiences of higher learning.[1] Because poetic interpretation is creative (*poesis*), I

[1] Studies on students' tolerance of ambiguity have shown that higher tolerance is related to "successful reading comprehension" and a perception of "higher metacognitive awareness of reading

argue that it can be an effective tool for learning to overcome these limitations.

The local literature course I describe here is specifically designed to confront students with ambiguity, to disrupt their learning paradigms, and encourage flexibility of mind and critical thinking. Literature, poetry specifically, is particularly suited to this task, as close reading requires a careful mixture of personal interpretation and textual evidence. Likewise, bringing the subject of translation, standardized Japanese, and vernacular language to the fore forces students to interrogate assumptions they may hold about the inviolability of linguistic forms and the naturalness of state-sanctioned regimes of knowledge.

Course Progression and Mechanics

The class is divided across three main themes: four weeks introduction/ conceptualization, four weeks regionalism/ vernacular literature, and three weeks putting "major" authors into new light. These themes are separated by smaller units on topics like modern language debates, folk music as literature, and finally expanding the gaze to incorporate appropriations of local literature into different genres. The following chart indicates some of the themes, major authors, and primary texts taken up in the course:

1. **Orientation/Local Literature/Minor Literature**
    - *a.* Ono Masafumi, Intro to *Tsugaru no shi*; *Kita no Bunmyaku*
    - *b.* Fujita Tatsuo, *Aomori ken bungaku-shi*
    - c. Local Archives
2. Roots of Modern Language and Poetry
    - a. Akita Ujaku, "The Skeleton's Dance"
    - *b.* Narumi Yōkichi, *Tsuchi ni kahere*
3. **Regionalism/Vernacular Literature**
    - *a.* Fukushi Kōjirō, *Chihōshugi-hen*; Intro to *Marumero*
    - *b.* Takagi Kyōzō, *Marumero*; *Yugionago*
    - *c.* Ichinohe Kenzō (et al), *Tsugaru no shi*
4. Poetry in Song
5. **"Major" "Regional" Authors**
    - *a.* Terayama Shūji, *Tareka kokyō wo omohazaru*
    - b. Dazai Osamu, "Jūgo nenkankan"
    - c. Osabe Hideo, "Baba yado"
6. Expanding Circuits of Citation

Students will begin the course by reading a very brief introduction to T.S. Eliot's concept of literary tradition. Eliot may have been interested in delineating a single cohesive entity called "English literature," but I read his definition more as a conversation between informed literary parties. According to his argument, works written in the present address those from the past and inform readers' interpretations of both. Tradition in this sense is a subsection of the literary archive, a community of readers and writers who

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strategies" (Basoz, 56). The sense of ambiguity which I seek to introduce encompasses this conventional, linguistic-pedagogical conception, while also expanding beyond the level of simple reading comprehension. The efficacy of this technique, and its effects on student learning, require further practice and analysis before any positive conclusions may be drawn from them.

interact across time and space—basically, a *bundan* which self-references through the past. Approaching "Japanese national literature" and "local literature" through this framework recasts them as related traditions with overlapping linguistic and geographical themes. Similarly, the majority of lauded modern "Japanese" literary works should be evaluated as participating in a conversation with the European literary traditions they so generously appropriated from. However, in the present case, by choosing to focus on a regional literature instead of using the frame of the national or global, we can help dispel the illusion of a spontaneous national literary tradition.

This conceptual frame is continually built upon throughout the course, as students consider questions of the minor and of locality, hopefully destabilizing assumptions about canonicity, nation, and place. Teaching about local literature offers the unique opportunity to take a field trip to one of the local literature museums, or even to see how literary artifacts are embedded in the physical landscape, in the form of monuments [*bungakuhi*] and as mobilized by the local tourism industry. By helping students become aware of the institutions which structure our understanding of place, and then physically bringing them to encounter those institutions in person, I hope to see them apply critical thinking skills from the classroom in the context of their everyday lives. Again, it is the choice of teaching the local as a discursive object to question, which provides the opportunity to actualize students' learning in more immediately tangible ways.

The middle of the course will move into a broader literary survey. Four weeks cover the regionalism movement and vernacular literature, followed by a class on the construction of place through song. The final three main classes take up nationally-recognized authors, and the final class looks at the outer edges of "literature," focusing on how some "entertainment figures" have appropriated local literature in their art.

This course is designed to be taught in English, but with plenty of scaffolding to lower the stakes of engagement and keep Japanese students participating. To compensate for the linguistic difficulty inside the classroom, I employ a lot of group work, having students collaborate on homework in structured ways. Literary translations (parallel texts) are offered with the intent of providing a unified vocabulary to discuss the works in both languages. Secondary readings are to be tackled as collaborative exercises: most reading is dealt with as group homework projects, wherein small groups of students will break up a single reading passage into digestible sections and share their notes with each other before class.

In some instances, groups will be assigned just 2-3 pages, so that students will read and present different sections of a longer reading. This would work, for example, when reading texts that present a series of definitions or historical chronology. Group members will have to read in advance, share their notes, and then compile them into a single, short presentation. The goal is to make students responsible for each other within their groups, and to the class as a whole. At the same time, however, they will be able to rely on their classmates for support in reading, writing, and presentation.

Sometimes students will be reading in English, processing an argument or definition; sometimes this means reading in Japanese, and processing the information into English. Because class discussion and lectures will take place in English, students must recall information in both languages, and translate their thoughts in easy-to-understand fashion. To lower the bar for participation again, students may be

assigned explicit reading strategies focused on defining key terms, identifying stages of historical development, or summarizing important figures in a narrative. In other words, students are provided with, or required to produce, very targeted goals in their readings. In-class presentations will serve to summarize these important points, citing or translating the original text. For example, a group presentation on Katō Takeo's essay "Chihō bungaku to tokai bungaku" [Country literature and urban literature] should clearly define the two types of literature he discusses, identify the type of words he uses to describe city and the country writers, and hopefully help lead the class to a critical interpretation of how his writing interacts with other discourses approached in the class (Katō).

The latter half of each meeting will then turn to the literary texts themselves, and focus on close readings. Students will be tasked with producing what I call "theme writings" (similar to *kōsatsu* in Japanese) focused on a single keyword the students derive from close reading. For longer prose works, students will work together to produce character-relationship charts and come up with key themes for the texts, with key words attached to each character's name, and descriptions of their relationships. Thus, even if they only read in Japanese, they will be forced to collaborate on an English-language interpretation, generating a base vocabulary for class discussion, as well as a visual reference and memory aid. Discussion will then be built up through contributions by different groups (e.g. start by collecting theme/keywords, then moving to discussion).

In the case of poetry, students will be tasked during class with comparing translations and original texts in their groups, identifying themes or keywords, and then reporting them to the class as a group. This is not a class in literary translation, but we will use the juxtaposition of English and Japanese texts to help students develop and debate the vocabulary to discuss the works, and help them raise questions about interpretation and meaning. Seeing what is lost or gained in translation is one method that can help students think critically about the language and imagery of the works. This will be particularly useful and interesting during the vernacular literature segment, as even local students will be unfamiliar with the idiosyncratic, and now severely dated, "dialect" represented on the page.

Review

The above paper introduces a local-literature course in order to demonstrate a number of techniques for creating a linguistically-integrated classroom methodologically and politically relevant to the current environment of Japanese higher education. By using localized texts outside of the national canon, we can encourage students to think critically about their surroundings. By focusing on translation, poetry, and active-learning activities, we can challenge received learning models and encourage the development of tolerance of ambiguity. And, finally, by stressing multimodality and providing scaffolding in the form of parallel texts and group support, we can lower the stakes of participation and encourage a greater breadth of learning.

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