Faculty of Education and Human Studies Graduation Theses in English Language, Linguistics, Literature, and Education

Compiled and Edited by Ben GRAFSTRÖM

For the past few years, *Akita English Studies* has been including graduation thesis abstracts of the Akita University's Faculty of Education and Human Studies students who major in English language, linguistics, literature, and education. Not only is it interesting to read about the student' wide variety of research interests, but it is also amazing to see how much they have developed during their time at Akita University, both as students and as English speakers.

The following 19 abstracts show a sincere effort on the part of the students to be engaged with the world around them. Through their research, the students tackle social issues like how gender is portrayed in Japanese comics; and, how the practice of judo can reinforce social norms and traditions. The thesis topics also show the students' critical approach to current education policies and teacher practices, for example by questioning education norms like which "English" young Japanese students should be learning, and whether or not the "one-size-fits-all" approach to teaching language is suitable to students with varying personalities.

While again this year the COVID pandemic restricted the extent to which students could do fieldwork and observations in local schools, these abstracts do show a wide variety of data collection and analysis methods employed by the students. Thanks to the digital age, perhaps questionnaire surveys that could be sent by email or via a link were the easiest data collection methods, but students also relied on pre- and post- testing to collect quantitative data for their research, which may or may not have been more challenging to conduct.

Congratulations to all the recent graduates! AAES hopes you will include you work in future issues and participate in future conferences.

(Note: Theses are listed alphabetically by author's family name.)

Grice's Contribution to Human Communication

ABE Norihiko

There is still no absolute answer to the question, "How do human beings communicate with one another?" In their own work, Sperber & Wilson focused their research on a communication model called the inferential model, rather than the code model, which was the most popular explanation of human communication at the time. In the inferential model, inferences are made based on the intentions of the speaker, which is effective in interpreting the meaning of speech that cannot be

explained by the code model. Grice used the perspective of speaker's intention, which is also used as the starting point of this inference model, as an explanation of communication. Grice studied "meaning" in sentences that use the expressions "means," "means something," and "means that," in natural and nonnatural meanings. When "mean" is used in the nonnatural sense, it tends to be used in person-to-person interaction. And after discussion, Grice found that the speaker's intention is important.

I noticed that Grice's analysis is cited and plays a very important role in Sperber & Wilson's communication theory. In my paper, I will discuss in detail why and how Grice's analysis contributed to Sperber & Wilson's discussion. In addition, through a close reading of Grice (1957), I try to clarify again how Grice's ideas, which made such an important contribution, were derived from his arguments. At the end of this paper, I will try to clarify Grice's analysis, which is generalized in abstract texts, based on the process of Grice's argument.

Prejudice Against and Stereotypes of Foreigners Among Japanese:

Nationality, News Media Impact, and Personal Experience

AIMONO Mayu

As more and more overseas visitors come to Japan in the era of increasingly globalized world, it is more likely that Japanese people will have some problems with visitors from different cultures. As a study on prejudice and stereotypes, the research examined the influences on Japanese people's prejudice against and stereotypes of foreigners, different nationalities of foreigners, the degrees of prejudice and stereotypes, and the relationship between prejudice and stereotypes. A questionnaire as a research tool was used to investigate these aspects of prejudice and stereotypes, providing the data on the participants' experience of prejudice and the descriptions of their feeling uncomfortable toward foreigners, as well as descriptive statistics of the degrees of prejudice and stereotypes among the participants. In addition, SPSS was used to perform the Spearman rank-order correlation to compute a correlation between prejudice and stereotypes. The results showed that the media has an impact on prejudice, and that Korea, China, and North Korea are the most likely targets of prejudice and stereotypes, especially, North Korea. Moreover, the research found a strong positive correlation between prejudice and stereotypes. As an educational implication based on the research, opportunities to have cross-cultural contacts since childhood was recommended for a possible prevention measure for a formation of prejudice.

The Borrowers: The story of a girl's independence

FUJITA Minami

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the features and significance of a girl's independence through *The Borrowers* series by Mary Norton, a famous English novel for children, and clarify the

reason why the story is continued to be loved and still read nowadays. In order to investigate Arrietty's development (the heroine of the story), I have organized this paper into three parts.

In the first chapter, an analysis is given on the barriers of parents: obstacles of motherhood, and boundaries of gender. The necessities of overcoming the barriers will be pointed out, and two types of difficulties that Arrietty faces in the story will be explained with some examples. In the second chapter, discussions of settlement and migration will be taken. After examining the possibility that the story reflects the author's own personal history of repeated migration, the impressive scenes regarding settlement and migration are analyzed. In the third chapter, the comparison of Arrietty and Mary, the heroine of another famous children's literature, *The Secret Garden,* will be reviewed. And the differences of the processes of the growth of two girls are indicated, focusing on two aspects: an orphaned girl and the point of settlement. In the end, I came to the conclusion that the appeal of *The Borrowers* to children and adults alike is that it talks about universal issues that all girls must face in order to become independent.

The effects of learning strategies and learning experiences on learners' pronunciation of English sounds: How katakana rubies can prevent learners acquiring native-like pronunciation

HIRATA Asumi

The underlying factors that cause most Japanese learners of English to pronounce English words with Japanese pronunciation were katakana are largely due to differences in phonemic features and writing methods between the English and Japanese languages. Therefore, in order to distinguish these differences and acquire English pronunciation, it is essential to devise methods of pronunciation instruction in Japan's English education system and the accompanying pronunciation learning strategies for learners themselves. In this study, a questionnaire and a recording survey were conducted and collated to analyze how learners' experiences and their own pronunciation learning-strategies affect their actual pronunciation and awareness of pronunciation. By analyzing the data, this study tried to figure out what kind of pronunciation instruction and pronunciation learning-strategies increase pronunciation acquisition and awareness of the pronunciation of English without using katakana, which are commonly referred to as "rubies". In collating the questionnaire and the recordings, one of the main focuses was the hypothesis that learning pronunciation with katakana rubies (katakana pronunciation guides) above English words would affect learners' pronunciation and awareness of pronunciation, because pronouncing English through katakana (a Japanese phonetic alphabet) can deprive learners of the opportunity to be aware of the difference between English and Japanese, and is one of the major factors that promote katakana pronunciation.

Changes in Phonemic Awareness and Differences in Learning Experience:

Through Activities About Sounds and Letters

KOMATSU Chinatsu

This study was based on two research questions about changes in phonemic awareness and the differences between different ages. The critical period hypothesis has been studied a lot and found to have some influence, especially on phonetic aspects and pronunciation. For phonemic awareness, based on the results of previous research showing significant differences in CVC (consonant + vowel + consonant) words, two surveys about fourth-grade elementary school students and third-year junior high school students were conducted, using the nonsense word fluency (NWF) pronunciation test and questionnaire. Phonics, alphabet chants, and alphabet jingles were used as activities for teaching sounds and letters, and classes were actually given to junior high school students. The results of pre- and post-tests were compared and analyzed using Wilcoxon's signed rank sum test and other methods. A significant difference was found especially for the short vowel "o." In order to examine the differences in age, the results of the elementary and junior high school students were analyzed using Mann-Whitney's U test. The results showed that there were not significant differences between the elementary and junior high school students in either pre- or post-test. Furthermore, by determining the differences in pronunciation patterns and the percentage of correct answers for each word, certain possibilities were found for the "influence of romaji."

Cultural Learning Through Judo Among University Students:

Etiquette, Respect, Gratitude, and Human Development

KUDO Ryuto

Judo began in 1882 and is now widespread in more than 200 countries and territories. In addition, martial arts have become compulsory in Japanese junior high schools, and more than 70% of junior high schools offer judo classes. One of the reasons why judo has spread so widely is that people can learn culture through judo. Although people can deepen their understanding of culture through judo, it is still unclear as to what kinds of cultural learning they experience in what ways and situations. The researcher formulated the following research questions: "What kind of culture do university judoka learn though judo?" and "In what ways and situations do they learn culture through judo?" In order to answer these research questions, the research selected quantitative and qualitative research methods, namely the questionnaire survey and interviews. The results showed the participants' cultural learning, such as etiquette, respect, gratitude, and human development in various ways and situations, including practice, rules, matches, and judo equipment. The researcher discussed and contextualized the results, and suggested a future study to deepen the research area of martial arts and cultural learning.

Learners' Perception of Speaking Difficulty at Levelt's Blueprint Processing Components

and Its Influence on Speech Complexity, Fluency, and Accuracy

MARUI Shuto

This study was conducted to extend the research area of acquiring and teaching speaking-skills. The primary purpose of this study is to survey learners' speaking difficulty and the linguistic characteristics caused by the perceived difficulty they felt. Nine students from the Engineering Course at Akita University took a speaking test and a questionnaire. Their speeches were analyzed by means of a certain measure for complexity, accuracy, and fluency. The questionnaire was used to determine their speaking difficulty which is based on the blueprint for the speaker (Levelt, 1989), and also revealed psychological factors connected to speaking. The results showed that the students seemed to have different linguistic characteristics such as more use of disfluency words or low accuracy rate depending on their speaking difficulty. Furthermore, by closely looking at the data of each of the students, it also turned out that the students' potential competence and their perception were connected, and thus students' perception of speaking difficulty does not result in the same linguistic performance. This analysis suggests the potential effect for teachers to use the Levelt's (1989) model to improve students' speaking skill. Further studies are hoped to be continued in seeking the more confirmed tendency between the perception of speaking difficulty and the actual language use.

A comparison of the pronunciation of English loanwords in Japanese

and the original American and British pronunciations

MIURA Rikuto

More than 70 countries around the world use English as their official language. There are many different types of English, but because English education in Japan is mainly modeled on American English, there are few opportunities for learners to become familiar with other types of English or to become aware of the wide variety of Englishes. Therefore, the aim of this research is to suggest an introduction for Japanese English learners, especially beginners, to become aware of and interested in the diversity of English. In order to achieve this goal, I compared the pronunciation of two well-known types of English in Japan (American English and British English) with loanwords that learners may be familiar. As a result, I found several patterns other than the difference in similarity to loanwords due to rhoticity, which is a well-known difference between American and British English. This achievement allows us to show concretely that there are various types of English using familiar vocabulary assist learners.

To what extent do junior high school English textbooks cover words used in daily life?

NISHIMAKI Shutaro

I conducted a survey to see how much of the vocabulary used in junior high school English textbooks is covered in daily life, in order to find out whether mastering 1,600 to 1,800 words is really enough for daily life,

Hu and Nation (2000) claimed that 98% vocabulary coverage is necessary for reading a text fluently, and 90% vocabulary coverage is necessary for reading without difficulty.

To trace the evolution of vocabulary coverage, I referred to the study by Hasegawa and Chujo (2004), which showed that vocabulary coverage increased from the 1980s to the 2000s, reaching 80% even in the lowest areas.

In Research Question 1 (To what extent do English textbooks of junior high school cover English in a globalized society?), I selected the subject matter based on the goals set forth in the Courses of Study. In Research Question 2 (How does the vocabulary coverage change?), I selected the same subjects as Hasegawa and Chujo (2004) in order to trace the changes in vocabulary coverage. For both Spoken Language and Written Language, there were several subjects that exceeded 80% coverage. However, they did not reach the standard using the previous studies.

From my study, it is clear that mastering the vocabulary in the textbook alone is not enough for the students. Teachers need to understand the vocabulary used in daily life and teach it to students in class.

Comparisons Between Extroverts and Introverts

Regarding English Learning Styles Preferred by Extroverts

OGUMA Momo

The relationship between personality (such as extraversion and introversion), and second language acquisition has been a research topic that many researchers have investigated. To examine the relationship, my research compared the scores of the questions regarding English learning styles preferred by extroverts between introverts and extroverts, as well as extroverts who perceived themselves as introverted and extroverts who perceived themselves as extroverts. To determine whether the research participants were extroverted or introverted, the Awaji-Okabe personality test was used. The research employed a questionnaire survey to figure the participants' perceptions of their own personality, and their English learning styles, focusing on listening and speaking.; No difference was found between introvert and extrovert rows in extroverted behavior. There was also no difference in the behavior of those who thought they were extroverts and those who were introverts. The researcher discusses the need to conduct observational studies to improve the research area of the relationship between personality and second language acquisition based on these results. However,

if a person who perceives himself or herself as an introvert prefers the same English learning styles that extroverts prefer, it is worth considering what approaches to English learning an extrovert who perceives himself or herself as an introvert might take.

Elementary School Students' Interest in ALTs:
Its Relation to Motivation, Speaking, and Developmental Stages

ONODERA Kana

In order to develop global human capital who can play an active role on the world stage where English is the most influential language in the world, learning English has been a requirement in many educational settings. In this context, the role of overseas employees such as foreign teachers and Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) has become essential in all schools from elementary to high school in Japan. The purpose of this research is to clarify the relationship between students' interest in ALTs and motivation to learn English. Data for the research was collected from a questionnaire survey. The participants were 113 elementary school students aged 8 to 12 years from the third to sixth grade in a school in Akita City. From the results of the questionnaire survey, the following three findings were obtained: (a) a significantly strong positive relationship between students' interest in ALTs and their motivation to learn English, (b) a significantly moderate positive relationship between students' interest in ALTs and their desire to be able to talk to people in English, and (c) a significant difference in students' interest in ALTs between the ages of 8 and 10. The research results indicate possible benefits of the presence of ALTs in elementary school for students' English learning. In addition, the researcher discussed that the probability that since students' interest in ALTs differs depending on their developmental stage, the effects they receive may also differ.

The Effects of Pre-Task on the Factors That Make Speaking Difficult

SASAKI Kotone

In English education, speaking is emphasized as an important skill. I would like to find out the factors that make speaking difficult. I also think Task-Based Language Teaching is great to improve students' speaking skill and pre-task is important to reduce the factors. Especially in form-focused pre-task, students can deepen their understanding of the expression to be used. Thus, I set up a hypothesis that the factors that make speaking difficult such as anxiety may be reduced by a form-focused pre-task. Here I show that participants' negatively perceived competence led to the feeling that they are not good at speaking English and that the form-focused pre-task could reduce such factors silently than meaning-focused pre-task. When their own abilities were actually low and when their perceived competence was negative, they had emotional and language use problems and found it difficult to speak. The feeling of anxiety also led to the feeling of not being able to make mistakes and the feeling of being ashamed to make mistakes. The belief that one's speaking ability is low is

connected to a diverse range of other speaking difficulty. In addition, guiding learners through the form-focused pre-task eased their anxiety and fear of making mistakes, and helped them to understand the context of the conversation. However, suggesting the target expression that should be used in a task did not necessarily reduce the factors. I need to examine the effective pre-task to reduce the factors and improve students' speaking skills.

What Type of Inferential Questions Do Prospective English Teachers Make and How Do They Perceive the Use of Them in English Classes?

SATO Kanna

As communication in English is required in various situations, English education has an important role. Focusing on reading, effective use of reading questions is essential. With this in mind, this paper explores the type of inferential questions that encourage deep reading made by English teachers who will take responsibility for the future English education, and the perception of the use of them in English classes.

As a result, prospective English teachers tend to make inferential questions that help readers understand specific information in detail rather than inferential questions that fill gaps between sentences. Focusing on text type, while there are almost no differences the number of questions of bridging and evaluative inferences in dialogues, questions of elaborative inferences are made rather than questions of bridging inferences in monologues. Regarding the perception of using inferential questions, while most participants have a positive attitude toward using inferential questions in English classes as a teacher, they feel it is difficult to make them practically.

Based on these results, I suggest providing prospective English teachers with the opportunity to practice making inferential questions; adding inferential questions to textbooks; and incorporating texts into textbooks from which various types of inferential questions can be made.

Languaging in Reconstruction Task and Perceived Effects of Dictogloss on the Development of the Four Language Skills

SATO Shion

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has recently revised the Courses of Study. According to MEXT, one of the guiding principles is to achieve independent, interactive, and deep learning. Deep learning refers to the perspectives from which students think and consider things. In this study, I focused on this point. In this study, the analysis of learners' focus on dictogloss through languaging was based on Language Related Episodes (LREs). Also, focusing on the four language skills, the effect of dictogloss on learners was examined by the Kruskal-Wallis test. The participants worked on a dictogloss activity consisting of four steps, which

was basically conducted all in English. About languaging, this study focused on the reconstruction task and recorded pair work. For the statistical analysis, the learners answered a questionnaire after the activity. As a result, five types of LREs were found from the analysis of the dialogue. In particular, the learners produced utterances to gain better words or expressions. The statistical analysis of the four language skills showed no significant differences among the language skills, but the results of the questionnaire revealed that the learners perceived the improvement of the four language skills.

Effect of Anonymizing Peer Feedback in Writing Activities

TOMARU Momoka

This thesis investigates the effects of anonymizing the names of evaluators in peer feedback for writing activities. Many researchers show the benefits of peer feedback in writing activities, while it is pointed out that learners feel anxiety or stress when they give and receive feedback in pairs. I focus on anonymizing peer feedback to solve this problem. In this study, I investigated the effect of anonymizing peer feedback by comparing the results obtained from peer feedback with evaluators' name and that without the name from perspectives of the quality of rewritten essay and evaluation sheet, and feelings when giving and receiving feedback. As a result, there are four findings: the rewriting process and filling out the evaluation sheet are not affected whether presence of evaluators' name or not; recipients prefer peer feedback with evaluators' name; and senders prefer peer feedback without the name. The fourth, biggest effect of anonymizing peer feedback is that learners can decrease the anxiety of giving feedback. In this study, recipients preferred feedback with an evaluator's name because of the reliability of evaluation, but the possibility is indicated that anonymizing peer feedback could be further improved by providing more support by teachers, such as teacher feedback and peer feedback training.

What can we do for LGBT people?

TOMIOKA Maho

We often see news and events about "LGBT" in recent years. However, what we see through the news is mainly about the many problems such as discrimination against LGBT people. Why are they being treated so? What exactly is the problem? Unfortunately, we don't have enough knowledge about them. Even at university, we didn't learn about in class. But I think that it would be necessary to understand them in the future in order to become a member of society. Moreover, if we become an educator, I feel that it is even more necessary. And my research considers what we can do to make a comfortable world to live in for LGBT people.

So, I investigate their history and recent events, with a particular focus on educational settings. In addition, I take a questionnaire to see how well LGBT is known around us and investigate the

efforts of the university. As a result, it turned out that although their understanding of LGBT is gradually increasing, their existence is still not well known.

From these results, I propose that it is important to learn the importance of LGBT from the scene of school education and to make LGBT commonplace for people.

A Transition of Gender Roles and Portrayals in Boys' and Girls' Comics in Japan:
From 1960s Through 2010s

UMETSU Mayumi

"Gender" refers to the socially and culturally formed differences between men and women, expressed in terms of masculinity and femininity. This study examines the gender roles portrayed by hero and heroine characters in Japanese boys' and girls' comics, focusing on their gendered characteristics and behaviors. The researcher selected one representative comic of each decade from the 1960s to the 2010s, from both boys' and girls' comics, as the subject of analysis for this study. The behaviors of the heroes and heroines in the 12 Japanese comics were analyzed in four categories: expression of affection, rescue behavior, crying, and aggressive behavior. The chi-square test was used for all comparisons between items to determine if there was a difference among them. The results showed that the image of the heroine in boys' comics is changing from passive to active, and is increasingly portrayed as acting out masculine traits. Moreover, the hero not only helps the heroine but also has her help him or show tears more often. On the other hand, the heroine in girls' comics is basically depicted as a passive and emotional figure, while the hero is always depicted as more active and rational than the heroine. The results suggested that boys' comics are breaking away from stereotypical gender portrayals over time, while girls' comics are still conservative and stereotypical in their portrayals of gender.

Making the pronunciation of English consonants easier
for 6th year elementary school students to understand

WATANABE Hikaru

In this study, I considered whether there is a method of pronunciation instruction that is easy to understand for 6th grade elementary school students. I focused on consonants, which I think is one of the things that should be understood in pronunciation instruction. The reason for focusing on pronunciation instruction is that with globalization and the shift to early English education, there is a sense of weakness among teachers and children regarding English pronunciation. For this reason, I thought it would be easier for both students and teachers to understand the importance of consonants when teaching and learning English pronunciation. Then, I wondered if I could discover anything about this from the vocabulary in textbooks that are frequently used in class. Based on previous

research, I decided on eight consonants that I think should have a high priority for learning and examined the frequency of the number of consonants learned in elementary and junior high schools. As a result, I found the consonants with high frequency, and it is necessary to learn these sounds while understanding the differences between them and Japanese. In addition, two similar consonants should be understood in the order of their frequency.

What challenges do young teachers face in foreign language classes?:

With a focus on team-teaching with an ALT

YOSHIDA Haruna

The purpose of this study was to find out what challenges young teachers face in elementary school foreign languages classes and foreign language activity classes, with a focus on teaching with ALTs.

In order to achieve this goal, I came up with three research questions, which are as follows: (1) How do young teachers feel about classes of foreign language/foreign language activities? (2) What challenges do young teachers face in classes of foreign language/ foreign language activities? (3) How do young teachers feel about communication with the ALT in relation to team-teaching? I conducted a questionnaire survey and an interview survey.

The results showed that, generally speaking, young teachers feel enjoyment and satisfaction more strongly during the class than when they prepare for the class. One of the challenges that the younger teachers face is that they felt anxious about communicating with ALTs and evaluating the performance of the children.

In this study, the young teachers were more positive about foreign language activities than in previous studies. In the future, more teachers may take a more proactive approach to English while understanding the actual situation of children.