

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

*Compiled and edited by Adrian PATERSON*

In recent years, *Akita English Studies* has included abstracts of graduation theses written in English by students of Akita University's Faculty of Education and Human Studies. The theses cover a wide range of topics within the fields of English education, English linguistics, and English literature. The purpose of the graduation thesis research project is to question some aspect of the student's studies, and then to investigate it more deeply. It is interesting to see the different ways students go about this process, and to see which aspects of the program pique their interest. One of the great aspects of teaching at university just to see how students develop during their time here, both as people and as English speakers.

The following 12 abstracts reflect a lot of hard work on the part of the students. Through their research, students investigated English education, special needs education, English linguistics, and English literature related topics such as online study abroad, CLIL, listening materials and activities, phonics, teaching polysemous words, perceptions of English classes, TBLT, comparison of Japanese and Korean textbooks, phonological awareness, autistic aloneness, meaning and the co-operative principle, and the portrayal of gender related issues.

In order to produce this work, students had to overcome many obstacles, including, but not limited to, remaining COVID-19 restrictions, teachers license examinations, job hunting, not to mention the sheer effort required to conduct the research and then write about it in depth. What you see here are short summaries of their research.

Please enjoy reading the abstracts and join us in congratulating all of these recent graduates. Congratulations! It has been a privilege to see you all mature into young adults. We wish you all the best for the future, and hope that you will include your work in future AAES Journal issues and participate in future conferences.

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

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### **Benefits of Using Core Meanings in Teaching Polysemous Words**

HATAKEYAMA Narumi

The number of words which junior high school students are expected to learn increased (MEXT, 2017), so junior high school students' learning burden likely is becoming heavier, especially if the words are polysemous—have multiple meanings. As an effective way of learning vocabulary for junior high school students, Mitsugi and Nagashima (2015) maintained the effectiveness of core meaning-based instruction

in the acquisition of prepositions. Therefore, I decided to research the benefits of using core meaning in learning polysemous words at junior high school.

The aim of study is to investigate whether core meaning promotes junior high school students' understanding of the meanings of polysemous words and what kind of information needs to be presented together to promote their understanding. To achieve this purpose, I divided junior high school students into 3 groups and provided them with different information, concerning the meaning of ten target verbs and conducted a questionnaire and a test for second-year students at junior high school.

As a result, I have found that using core-meaning and its illustrations together can help junior school students understand the meaning of polysemous words. I also found that in the case of polysemous words, students showed different answers depending on the number of meanings of the ten target verbs. This suggests that core meanings are useful when words have 2 or 3 meanings. As the number of meanings increased, students found lists of dictionary meanings more helpful.

### **On the Phonological Awareness of Japanese Junior High School Students: How They Perceive the Pronunciation of English Monosyllabic Words When They Are Read Backward**

HORI Ryota

There are several differences between English phonological awareness (i.e., syllables) and Japanese phonological awareness called "mora". After seeing the results of previous studies showing that mora influence consonant manipulation by Japanese learners of English, I wondered if there might be other influences related to mora. I set the following research question: "What influence do mora have on English phonological awareness other than the manipulation of consonants?" To answer my research question, I conducted a questionnaire and a recognition test concerning the pronunciation of monosyllabic English words with junior high school students. The questionnaire includes questions about the participant's pronunciation leaning, their knowledge of phonics, and their perception of the pronunciation of English. The recognition test consists of a total of 22 items which required the participants choose one option which they think is the closest to the pronunciation of the word when it is read "backward". The research on the questionnaire revealed that Japanese students in junior high school know of Japanese "haku", and some of them noticed the difference between "haku" and syllables. The test results showed that Japanese mora had great impact on diphthongs in general and on some long vowels. There was a strong tendency for letter vowels which represent one sound to be recognized when swapping their letters backwards. Students can develop English phonological skills and generally noticed the complicated regularity between English sounds and letters with explicit learning from English teachers.

**Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions About English Classes Based on Their Student Teaching Practice: For a Better Connection Between Elementary and Junior High School English Education**

HORII Asuka

In order to clarify the differences in attitudes toward English education between elementary and junior high school teachers, this study investigated the issues and potential areas for improvement in English education expressed by prospective elementary and junior high school teachers who had experienced teaching practice.

In terms of the relationship between pronunciation and spelling, it was found that both elementary and junior high school pre-service teachers believed that there was not enough instruction on the relationship between pronunciation and spelling. They also believed that there should be more opportunities to teach pronunciation and spelling.

Opinions were divided on reading and writing. In reading, elementary school pre-service teachers believed that reading comprehension is difficult for elementary school students and that it would be better to teach reading step by step, using picture books and manga. However, the junior high school pre-service teachers thought that instruction should be strengthened by increasing input. In writing, the elementary school pre-service teachers emphasized the importance of providing opportunities to write letters and teaching the alphabet to get students used to writing. On the other hand, junior high school pre-service teachers were found to place more emphasis on learning and teaching methods, such as increasing knowledge and using ICT to provide feedback.

**Illness and Gender in *Northanger Abbey***

ODA Nozomi

In this paper, I would like to examine a perspective that has not been previously discussed regarding Jane Austin's *Northanger Abbey*. I believe that the themes of illness and gender are important in the story. The heroine's confrontation with another character's illness should be analyzed in terms of the gender roles and expectations placed on women, especially when it comes to having children. These themes were important in 18th-century England and are still seen today, as some societies are still male-dominated.

In order to investigate this novel, I have organized this thesis into two parts. In the first chapter, this paper pays attention to the heroine in *Northanger Abbey* learning about the illness of another character. For the heroine, who doesn't know the world well, illness has a significant role. It has been pointed out that the heroine discovers a whole new world by the end of the novel, but the illness she confronts also suggests the possibility of her becoming ill after her marriage in the near future. In the second chapter, this paper focuses on the gender problem in the novel, looking back at women's social positions in 18th-century

England, and the features of the novel's style. Austen doesn't specifically describe the future lives of the female characters including the heroine in *Northanger Abbey*, but what is suggested is not only their happy marriages, but also their risk of being suddenly excluded from a male-dominated society.

### **Research of Online Study Abroad on Language Acquisition and Cross-Cultural Understanding: The Comparison Between Online Study Abroad, Study Abroad, and Study in Japan**

OKUYAMA Masako

In 2020, COVID-19 spread all over the world, heavily affecting those who wish to study abroad. In a situation where it is relatively difficult to go overseas, online study abroad should be expected to be widely recognized and used as a new form of studying abroad. My research aims were to identify the effects of online study abroad on language acquisition and cross-cultural understanding. More specifically, this research compares two groups: online study abroad and traditional study abroad, to examine whether there are any differences in the effect on language acquisition and cross-cultural understanding. A questionnaire was used to investigate the effects of online study abroad on language acquisition and cross-cultural understanding, and to compare the three groups: online study abroad, traditional study abroad, and no study abroad. The research employed SPSS for quantitative data analysis as well as content analysis for qualitative data analysis. The results of the quantitative data analysis showed that the participants perceived that through online study abroad they felt an improvement in listening, and fewer participants felt that reading and writing skills improved in comparison to other language skills. The results of the data analysis using the Quade's test showed no significant differences in language acquisition between online study abroad and traditional study abroad, as well as cross-cultural understanding between the three groups. The qualitative data analysis showed the participants' comments on their perceptions and thoughts on their improvements in language acquisition and cross-cultural understanding through online study abroad programs.

### **A Design of Content and Language Integrated Learning for Elementary School Students: Focusing on Intercultural Exchange**

OTOMO Serena

In order to enhance elementary school students' motivation to learn English, this research focuses on how intercultural exchange in a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) lesson affects elementary school students' attitudes toward learning English. CLIL can help to promote learner's motivation to learn languages. One of the characteristics of CLIL, culture, has the role of boosting cultural awareness through cooperative work with various kinds of classmates. In Japan, however, community replaces culture because there is less culturally diverse educational environment than US or European

schools which have students from various cultural backgrounds in a classroom. Therefore, this study focuses on intercultural exchange in CLIL. The researcher carried out the CLIL lessons with 5th grade elementary school students. The pupils learned about intercultural understandings through the CLIL classes including an intercultural exchange. The results of this study show that the children enhanced their positive attitudes toward learning English. All 29 students seemed to enjoy the three CLIL classes. The top three reasons given for why the class was fun were related to intercultural understanding: learning about Australia, being able to interact with Australian primary school students, and understanding the differences between Australia and Japan. Similarly, The CLIL lessons made 90% of the participants like English more than before. It is found that the students were quite interested in culture, and they could notice the fun of learning English experientially. In conclusion, an intercultural exchange in CLIL lessons can be a valuable learning activity for elementary school students.

### **A Comparative Analysis of Cultural Materials in English Textbooks in Japanese and Korean Primary Education**

SATO Naoya

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology announced the new Course of Study in 2017, promoting not only English education, but enhancement of cross-cultural understanding in elementary school. However, some previous research has pointed out the defects of Japan's English textbooks in terms of cross-cultural understanding materials such as a bias toward English-speaking cultures and overt culture that are shown more often than other cultures and covert culture. In addition, the reviewed research indicated that studying the curriculum for English education in Korea can bring about some ideas for the improvement of the curriculum in Japan. Based on the literature review, this research aims to provide suggestions for the improvement of Japan's primary English education, especially cross-cultural understanding by comparing the cultural materials in elementary school textbooks in Japan and Korea. Japan's English textbooks for analysis are Let's Try! for middle graders and New Horizon Elementary for upper graders, while Korean textbooks include Elementary School English for middle and upper graders. The Fisher's exact test and the Bonferroni's multiple comparison test were used for the statistical procedures. The results showed that the textbooks for middle graders rely on the cultural materials which are easy to understand visually, and that for upper graders this includes the theme of international cooperation, while the Korean textbook for sixth graders includes many cultural materials which are effective in attracting learners' interest. Based on these outcomes, this research proposed three points that English teachers should be aware of in elementary school.

## **Grice's Theory of Meaning and Co-operative Principle: A Study of Human Communication**

SUGAWARA Rio

Through 英語学演習, I became interested in human communication. I had never thought about our communication so deeply. Thus, there are a lot of surprising and amazing ideas or suggestions for me. At the beginning of my research, I thought that the big problem of human communication is guessing and understanding a communicator's words. However, Grice and Sperber and Wilson say that it is not the case. They think that the real problem is choosing the correct intention from too many possibilities about the communicator's intention. I did not believe this idea at first, but I have come to agree with it. Then, I had a question: how do listeners choose a communicator's actual intention in human communication?

Grice suggests the co-operative principle which is one of the answers to my research question. He thinks that our communication is characteristically a cooperative effort. Grice proposes that there are four categories: Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner, and nine maxims. He thinks that the principle and maxims help guide a listener's understanding of a speaker's intention. The maxims seem to be natural, but I feel they are very important.

Grice's co-operative principle is of course a great suggestion, but I attempted to discuss the problem. Sperber and Wilson also try to analyze Grice's principle, and moreover develop their own concept, Relevance. I did not deepen my understanding of relevance in this research, but I would like to continue to study in future research. Communication is essential for human beings, so I am sure that this research will be helpful for my future life.

## **Analysis of materials use and activities on listening in high school**

TANAKA Ryo

The purpose of this research is to investigate the actual situation of teaching and learning of listening in high school. To achieve my research goal, I made two research questions: (1) How did university students learn listening during high school? (2) What is the relationship between the subjects' perception of listening proficiency and factors related to teaching and learning of listening? To answer these questions, I conducted an online questionnaire with 119 subjects about their high school's English classes and their self-study. The questionnaires revealed that opportunities for input tended to be limited in many aspects, and that the more focus teachers placed on listening in class, the more students felt the improvement of their listening skills. I also found that while some individuals did not study listening in self-study, most experienced listening teaching methods such as dictation, shadowing and so on. As for the second research question, there was no clear relationship between the subjects' perception of their listening proficiency and most of the factors related to listening learning skills. Other findings included that the more negative students' perception of their listening proficiency was, the more students tended to choose "none". In addition, while most subjects answered that listening activities were useful in class, for

those who are bad at listening, the ratio of the answer “not useful” increased. They also answered that there was no method they felt to be effective. To understand the influence of varieties of English on subjects’ listening comprehension, I want to investigate the relationship between listening and phonetics.

### **Relationship between learning phonics and motivation for reading**

TERUI Kosei

The situation in English education has changed in recent years with the revision of the Courses of Study and the inclusion of foreign languages as a subject in elementary school. In the current situation, it is important to keep student motivation for reading English high, and phonics instruction, which deals with the relationship between English spelling and pronunciation, is attracting attention. This study focuses on the relationship between learning phonics and reading motivation and examines whether learning phonics can lead to raising motivation for reading.

In this investigation, the author conducted a questionnaire and a test on phonics to investigate the relationship between participants’ reading practices, attitudes toward reading, experiences of learning phonics and the score of the test.

As a result, it was found that few students were in the habit of reading English on a regular basis, and those who were in the habit of reading were extrinsically motivated to read English. It was also found that many students have a sense of reading aloud in their minds when they read silently. This suggests that there is a relationship between silent reading and pronunciation, and also learning phonics might help their silent reading. However, no significant relationship between learning phonics and motivation for reading was found in this investigation. Further investigation is needed on this issue.

### **Autistic Aloneness**

WATANABE Minami

I am interested in autistic communication, so I decided to study it for my research project. To support my research, I read Frith (2003). In this book, I found a very interesting case study: Peter's story. Peter is introduced as an autistic child, and there are some stories about him. Through reading this study, I wondered what communication problems autistic people experience, and why autistic aloneness occurs. In Frith (2003), I also found an interesting experiment: the Sally-Anne experiment. In this experiment, there are two positions: the researcher and subjects. Autistic people were the subjects in this experiment. This experiment shows us features of autistic communication, so I thought that this experiment may help to answer my questions. Through studying this experiment, I consider the result of this experiment to be connected to theory of mind. This idea of theory of mind is also introduced in Frith (2003). In this idea, the way of our understanding and communication are explained. By understanding this idea and connecting it to the Sally-Anne experiment, I could answer my research question about the one of the causes of autistic aloneness.

### **Task-Based Language Teaching Classes for Elementary School Students: Based on the Status Quo and Needs Analysis**

YONEYA Chiharu

Since 2020, 3rd- and 4th-grade students at elementary school take Foreign Language Activities classes, and 5th- and 6th-grade students study English as one of their subjects. According to researchers like Ellis, Shintani, and Matsumura, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is one of the best ways of teaching English.

There are students who are either good or not good at English in the class. What are the similarities and differences between elementary school students who are good at English and those who are not good at English? How should I make TBLT classes for elementary school students to help them enjoy communication in English? To answer these questions, I did a questionnaire survey with 85 students at an elementary school.

As a result, all the students were good at listening to English and liked playing games, and the students were not good at speaking English in front of the whole class. The students who were good at English answered that they were good at reading English, whereas the students who were not good at English answered that they were good at talking with partner. In addition, it was found that improving the activities and classes based on the students' status quo is necessary for them to build their confidence of using English. The use of tablets and suitable task topics were found to be important for students to feel the joy of communication in English based on individual students' needs.