

Original Paper

# Report on Classroom Activities: Improving English Production by Having Learners Contrast Japanese and English Expressions from a *Manga*

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## Abstract

Awareness of the differences and similarities between two languages will facilitate the communicative competence of language learners. After reporting on the differences between Japanese and English expressions found in a *manga* (Japanese comic book), the researcher will describe classroom activities aimed at making learners aware of different communication strategies. These strategies are designed to raise learner awareness as to how the same expressions are employed in contrasting manners in different languages. The author employed *manga* as the main source of material for her classroom activities because from the point of view of Japanese learners of English, *manga* have a number of advantageous points. These include the popularity of *manga* among young people, their visual attractiveness to young people, and the rich variety of genres they contain.

To conclude the paper, the researcher will report on how the students changed their attitudes about writing essays in English after taking the course. She evaluated these attitudes by analyzing questionnaire data gathered from the participants. In addition, she found that the total of 13 classroom sessions covered by the study was insufficient for fostering changes in learner attitudes vis-à-vis English essay-writing tasks. In spite of this drawback, however, the activities introduced by the researcher were a catalyst in making the participating learners aware of the differences between the two languages and in expanding their ability to write essays in English from a variety of perspectives.

## Introduction

A language learner's awareness of the differences and similarities between two languages will facilitate their communicative competence of language learners. In this paper, the researcher will first describe classroom activities aimed at making students aware of the different communication strategies in various cultures by comparing Japanese and English expressions found in a *manga* (Japanese comic book) that she chose to adapt as classroom material. Furthermore, she will report on how the students changed their attitudes about writing essays in English after they completed a course in remedial English and evaluated

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the activities explained in this paper.

The reason the aforementioned *manga* was chosen as classroom material is that *manga* written in Japanese are very popular among young people and are widely read by them. These *manga* are designed primarily to stimulate the interests of readers by attracting them visually. In addition, these books are rich in a variety of genres such as science, history, mathematics and fiction. Not only are *manga* published in various genres, but they are published in English and are becoming more popular year by year. They can now be seen in book stores everywhere.

There seem to be two reasons for their publication in English: one is to export Japanese *manga* culture overseas, where Japanese *manga*, especially the work of Hayao Miyazaki, is flourishing; the other is to target Japanese students of English who want to learn lively prose that originates from natural settings. For Japanese learners of English, “Peanuts” used to be a *manga* that was well-known as a tool for absorbing information about Western culture and the English language itself. However, Japanese students of English sometimes found it difficult to understand the true meanings of some of the stories in the “Peanuts” series or to see the point of some jokes. Their background knowledge of Western culture was scanty and the humor of certain jokes was not evident when students read them in English, even though these same jokes may have seemed amusing when translated into Japanese. English translations of Japanese-language *manga* have, to some extent, addressed these problems. That is to say, Japanese students of English can enjoy the jokes and enter into the fictitious experiences of *manga* because of their familiarity with their own culture. At the same time, of course, they can learn English.

#### Teaching Materials and Preparation

Sixteen categories were devised, classified by features commonly seen in transferring Japanese into English, based on 500 sentences in the *manga* “Kindaichi Files”, and these categories were used as a basis for designing teaching materials (Miyake, 2002). The categories are as follows (names of the categories are indicated in brackets):

1. Changing the meaning step by step (Step): The expressions in Japanese are changed or paraphrased step by step, so as to readily convey their meanings in English.
2. Adding subjects in English (Add): Subjects which are implied in certain Japanese expressions are identified clearly in the English translations of these expressions.
3. Omission of subjects in English (Omit): Subjects are sometimes omitted in English, especially in colloquial expressions.
4. Simplification of the meaning in English (Simplify): Superfluous expressions are avoided and sentences tend to be concise in English.
5. Idiomatic expression (Idiomatic): Ordinary expressions in Japanese are transferred into idiomatic expressions in English.
6. Different usage of names (Names): The usage of names differs between the Japanese and English versions of certain expressions.
7. Pronouns are often used in English where names would be used in Japanese (Pronouns): Personal names are used repeatedly in the Japanese version of a given expression but they are transferred into pronouns in the English version.
8. Presumption of the meaning in Japanese (Presumption): The Japanese lines of some expressions sometimes end with an incomplete sentence, which is transferred into an overt expression in English.
9. Change of subjects (Subjects): The subjects of some sentences sometimes change when the sentences

are translated.

10. Slang words or expressions (Slang): Some expressions in Japanese are transferred into slang words in English.
11. Changes in the words themselves (Word): Some words in Japanese are changed into other words in English, in consideration of their true contextual meanings.
12. Different usage of demonstrative pronouns (Demonstratives): The usage of demonstratives differs between the Japanese and English languages.
13. Affirmative expressions in English from negative expressions in Japanese (Affirmative): Negative expressions in Japanese are changed into affirmative expressions in English.
14. Division into two sentences in English from one sentence in Japanese (Division): Some Japanese sentences are divided into two sentences in English.
15. More specific expressions in English (Specific): More specific expressions are used in English than in Japanese.
16. Using inanimate subjects instead of animate subjects (Inanimate): Animate or personal subjects are used in Japanese whereas inanimate or impersonal subjects are employed in English.

(For a more detailed explanation of the defining features of the categories above, please refer to Miyake, 2002.)

On the basis of these 16 categories, seven kinds of handouts for the first half of the semester were prepared. Each of these handouts included an explanation of two to three of their cultural and linguistic aspects; in addition some exercises referring to the features were included in each handout (see Appendix 1). This comprised the core of the classroom activities. Next, I prepared seven additional handouts for the second half of the semester. These handouts consisted of two pages of a Japanese-language *manga*, along with the English translation on the same page. These were employed in choral reading exercises. In addition, PowerPoint screens for seven classes for the first half of the semester were prepared. On these screens, two to three features were written first in Japanese, followed by English translations. The screens were used at the beginning of each class to get the students' attention. They were later printed out for the students to use in order to confirm their understanding of the material at the end of the class. Finally, six kinds of handouts were prepared for the latter half of the semester. These included sentences with various features (based on the 16 categories above) that were selected at random from the *Manga Kindaichi Files* (see Appendix 2).

## Participants

Fifty university freshmen participated in this study. They were all technical engineering majors. Their English abilities were rather low because they were not English majors and some of them had gained admission to the university without taking entrance examinations containing an English component. Moreover, judging from my extensive experience teaching and talking with them, I felt that their motivation to learn English was quite low.

There were 13 classes in a semester and 30 to 40 minutes were used in each class for this activity. The course was divided into two sections: the first consisted of seven classes, and the second was made up of the latter six classes in the semester. During each of the first seven classes, two to three of the 16 features mentioned above were introduced to the students. During the last six classes, the students tried to find these features for themselves by contrasting the English and the Japanese discourse in a bilingual handout

of a *manga* that I distributed to them.

#### Procedures

- (1) I used PowerPoint to display, one by one, sentences containing two to three features chosen as the lesson focus for a particular day. When a Japanese text was shown on the screen, the students had to think for themselves how the text should be transferred into English. Then, when the English translation of the text was displayed on the screen, students needed to rethink their translations to see if there was a difference between what they had originally thought and the actual English expressions on the screen. I confirmed that the students understood at this time that a given expression on the screen was not the sole correct English translation of a particular word or phrase. What was most important, I felt, was to get the students to ask themselves how the expressions they had thought of differed from the expressions on the PowerPoint screen. After that, I explained to the learners the salient cultural and linguistic points related to the features chosen for the day's lesson. In the same way, in order to confirm that the students had understood the features shown on the PowerPoint screens, I introduced the topical features of the day from other pages in the *manga*, *Kindaichi Files*.
- (2) I distributed three kinds of handouts: (a) a handout with two original *manga* pages (including the features chosen for the day's lesson); (b) a handout that included the features of the day, along with supplementary explanations and exercises; and (c) the previously described PowerPoint handout.
- (3) I read the Japanese and English *manga* handout described in (2)(a) above with the students. I read the Japanese portions aloud and the students read the English portions aloud. This was done so as to stimulate conversations among the learners and to help them envisage the situations portrayed in the *manga*. The primary aims of this exercise, then, were to help students gain a deeper understanding of these situations, as well as to aid them in following the flow of the natural expressions in the conversation.
- (4) Then, I made sure that the students understood the topical features of the day's lesson by using the handout described in (2)(b) above. This part of the lesson was the core activity of the day's class. For example, the two features described in Appendix 1 were illustrated by sample sentences: one of these was to show that the demonstrative pronoun "here" in Japanese had changed into "this" in the English version and the other was to illustrate how the subject was omitted in Japanese but added in English. As to question [A], the students were required to demonstrate in writing that they had understood these features. Regarding the part of the handout labeled "解説" (explanation), I explained the features in detail in terms of their cultural and linguistic aspects. For example, "here" in the English version of a given sentence was an adverb of the sentence, so it did not become a subject of that sentence. Moreover, "here" in Japanese should be transferred into "this room," but "room" was omitted in order to avoid the repetition of the word. As to question [B], I let the students try to express the meaning by themselves in English so that they could process the above-mentioned difference in a deeper manner.
- (5) Finally on the handout described in (2)(c) above, I let the students write the content for question (A). These contents were printed out on the PowerPoint screen.

The above procedures were repeated in each of the first 7 classes and were sufficient to introduce all 16 features that appeared in the *manga* textbook. During the last six classes, while making use of the handouts (Appendix 2) on which some of the 16 features were randomly introduced, the students were

encouraged to try to explain orally as many of the differences between the English and Japanese version of the discourse of the days chosen *manga* portion as they could.

### Survey of students' attitudes

The attitudes of English learners influence the quality of the English they produce. In my view, it was especially important to try to discern how the students changed their attitudes regarding their oral production of English. Hence, I measured these attitudes before and after they took the course. I felt that such data should be collected in order to help learners explore new strategies for acquiring English expressions, as well as for using these expressions in a natural way.

In the first and last classes of the semester, I asked the students to write short essays. They were also asked, just after they had written these essays, what they had focused on or cared about, what they had thought most difficult, and so on. (Appendix 3 refers to the first class, while Appendix 4 refers to the last class.) In the questionnaire that was distributed in the last class of the semester, they were also asked about their degree of satisfaction with the course, how useful they thought the classes had been, and how the things they paid attention to in the production of English had changed since the period before they took the classes. They were instructed to express in writing everything that occurred to them, while at the same time not to be afraid of making mistakes, since the primary purpose of the short essays was not to evaluate their writing skills.

### Results and Discussion

Table 1 displays descriptive data from the questionnaires. For the first survey question "What did you pay attention to most when you wrote the essay?" the data indicated that about half of the students (49%) paid attention to grammar before participating in the classes. However, this number was reduced to 27% after the course. That is, by the end of the course the students had shifted their focus of study from grammar to the process of how subjects of sentences were selected (27%) or to other factors. Thus, in contrast to the beginning of the course, the learners' attention was focused not principally on grammar, but on the variety of linguistic features to be found in the essays.

In addition, by the end of the course, the students paid less attention to spelling than they had done at the outset of the course. Under the item "other," some students noted that they had paid attention to the beauty of the letters and punctuation of English sentences before taking the class, but that after taking the class, they became more concerned with how they could change the syntax of Japanese expressions in order to be able to transfer them easily into English (please see Table 1).

Figure 1 helps us see this pattern of change more clearly. The "after" line reveals a gentler curve than that of the line labeled "before." This suggests that after taking the class the students were able to pay attention to a greater number of features salient to English production than they had at earlier stages in the course. In particular, they had become freer to choose whatever subjects they wished.

The data gleaned from the second item on the survey (a multiple choice question to which the students could indicate more than one response), "What did you find most difficult when you wrote the essays?" indicated that before they took the course, "words," "expressions" and "grammar" each occupied approximately one third of the total (38%, 37%, and 37%, respectively) number of responses. However, after the course the overall percentage for each of these responses rose (50%, 52%, and 46%, respectively - please see Figure 2). "Words" and "expressions" occupied half or more than half of the responses and "grammar" accounted for almost half of the responses. One possible reason for this could be that by the end of the

Table 1 Changes in student attitudes

Items in the questionnaires	Before (N=55)		After (N=49)	
What did you pay attention to most when you wrote the essays ?	① grammar	27(49%)	① grammar	13(27%)
	② content	11(20%)	② selection of subjects	13(27%)
	③ spelling	6(11%)	③ content	9(18%)
	④ selection of words	2(4%)	④ selection of words	7(14%)
	④ selection of subjects	2(4%)	⑤ spelling	4(8%)
	⑥ other (1)	7(12%)	⑥ other (2)	3(6%)
What did you think most difficult when you wrote the essays ?	① words	38%	① expressions	52%
	② expressions	37%	② words	50%
	② grammar	37%	③ grammar	46%
	④ other	0%	④ other	0%

other (1) . . . calligraphy, punctuation

other (2) . . . thinking about how the Japanese expressions could be changed so as to be transferred easily to English

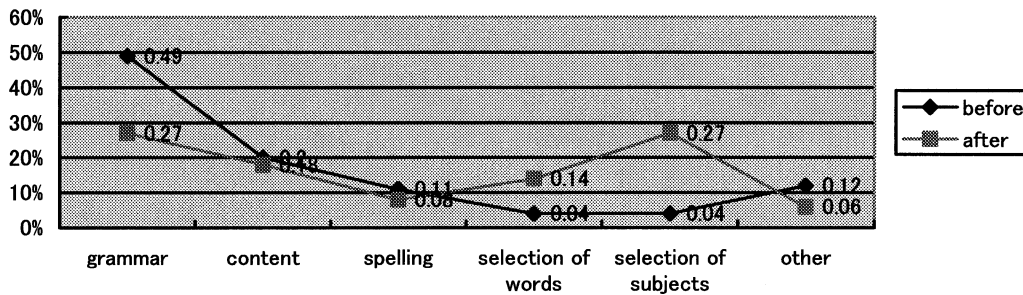


Fig. 1 What did you pay attention to most when you wrote the essays?

course, the students were able to pay attention consciously to the differences between the two languages as well as to monitor their oral production for themselves.

With regard to their evaluation of each class after taking the course, in responding to the question, “Did you enjoy each class?” a majority of the students responded in the affirmative. This included those who answered that they had “enjoyed very much ” the course (10%), as well as those who responded that they had “enjoyed the course” (51% see Table 2 and Figure 3). As for the question “Did you think this course

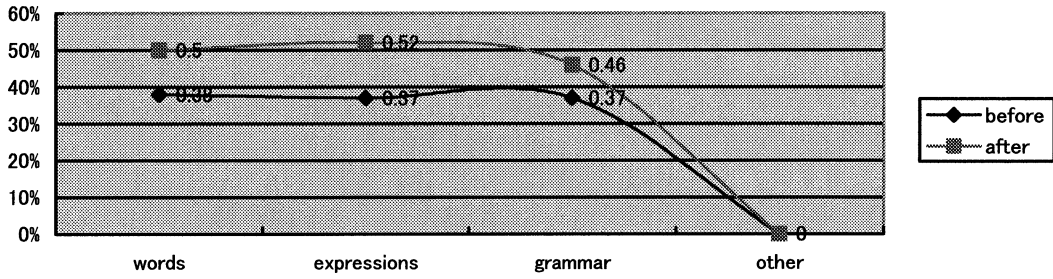


Fig. 2 What did you think most difficult when you wrote the essays?

Classroom evaluation(N=49)

Table 2 Classroom evaluation (1)

Enjoyed very much	5 (10%)
Enjoyed	25 (51%)
So-so	16 (33%)
Did not enjoy very much	2 (4%)
Did not enjoy at all	1 (2%)

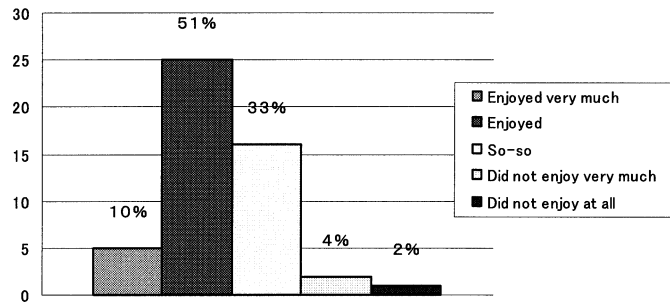


Fig. 3 Classroom evaluation (1)

Table 3 Classroom evaluation (2)

Very useful	1 (2%)
Useful	39 (80%)
Not so useful	8 (16%)
Not useful at all	1 (2%)

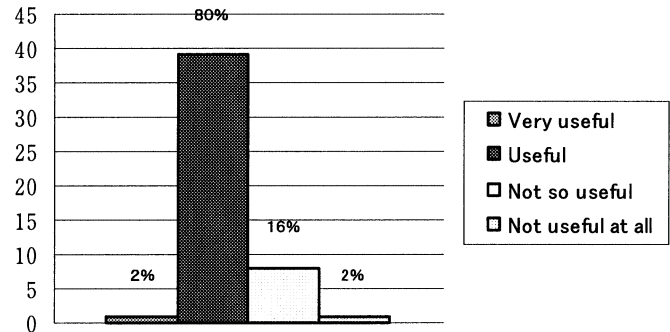


Fig. 4 Classroom evaluation (2)

Table 4 Classroom evaluation (3)

Very much changed	3 (6%)
Changed a little	24 (49%)
Not changed so much	18 (37%)
Not changed at all	4 (8%)

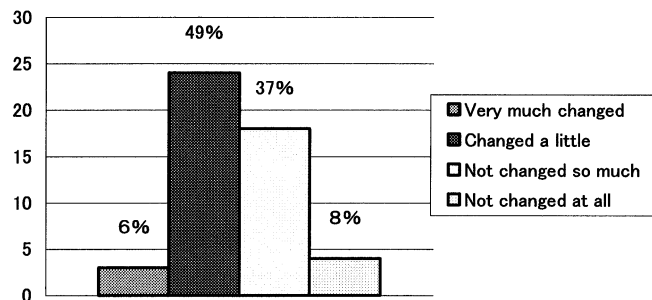


Fig. 5 Changes in thought (Re:perceived difficulty of writing English essays)

was useful?” eighty-two percent of the students said “Yes” (Table 3 and Figure 4). When asked, “Did you change your perception of the difficulty of writing essays in English?” 55% of the students answered positively, while 45% answered negatively (Table 4 and Figure 5). Various answers to the open-response question, “How did you change your thinking when you produced English?” (asked only of the students who answered “Yes” to the question previous to this one), included, among others, “I found that I could produce English in a simpler way than I had thought possible.” “I tried not to use the same words in the same sentences.” “I tried to change or paraphrase Japanese so as to be able to transfer certain words into English easily.” “I found that the English language was structured more simply than I had previously thought.”

## Conclusion

By participating in 13 weeks of activities focused on a comparison of Japanese and English expressions chosen from the pages of various *manga*, a group of 50 students demonstrated considerable improvement in their ability to express themselves in English, to the extent that they viewed the study of English no longer as merely a struggle with grammar, but as a means of exercising autonomy in selecting various subjects and words on which to focus. Thus, they were able to widen their horizons. They recognized that one Japanese word was not equivalent to merely one word in English, and they acquired the ability to reorder the syntax of Japanese sentences in order to facilitate the translation of these into English.

Actually, as the students became aware of the differences between the two languages, the percentage of those who felt that writing in English was difficult increased after they took the course. This could be perceived as a positive development because students learned to avoid translating Japanese expressions word for word into English.

As for their evaluation of the activities, most students felt these to be useful and effective. However, forty-five percent of the students went through no change in their attitudes toward writing English. This would suggest that only a semester (i.e.:13 classes) is not enough to change their posture toward the writing of English. The very act of writing, including writing in their mother tongue itself, might present difficulties for many of the students. This is the next challenge to be faced.

Overall, the activities described in this paper were successful in helping students recognize expressions which are used in natural settings and natural ways in English. It is hoped that students will take the next step to acquiring fluency in English by learning to produce such natural English expressions spontaneously without first translating them word for word from Japanese.

## Challenges for the future

As the results of the questionnaire indicate, the percentage of students who experienced difficulties with oral English production increased after they took the classes. To address such difficulties, we need to give students more opportunities to express themselves in English while furnishing them with a greater number of examples of natural English expressions, to the point that they will come to recognize these expressions automatically. As the students progress in this direction, our instruction should shift from an emphasis on long deliberations over how to express thoughts in English to an emphasis on fostering more speedy and spontaneous written and oral expression.

Recently many elementary schools in Japan have, in addition to instruction in basic English conversation, introduced a course entitled “International Exchange.” Junior and senior high schools have also tried to



cooperate to coordinate their curricula with those of their elementary school counterparts mentioned above. Given this situation, English education in universities should also change to the extent that it will challenge students to acquire more sophisticated expressions. I hope that by having students compare discourse in both languages, which I have attempted to do using the activities described in this report as a vehicle, this will help teachers to improve their own English classes aimed at promoting communicative competence.

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## Appendix (1)

## Lesson 4

日本語 (Japanese)

英語 (English)

<p>1. ここが音響室！</p> <p>Koko-ga ongaku-shitsu!</p> <p>2. でも本当にこんな所タダで貸してくれるんですか？</p> <p>Demo, honto-ni kon-na tokoro tada-de kashite kureru-n-desu-ka?</p>	<p>This is the sound engineering room.</p> <p>Are you sure you want to let us use it for free?</p>
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[A] 上記の日本語と英語を比較し、変化している特徴を述べなさい。(Compare the above Japanese and English sentences and describe the differences between them and their special features.)

1. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## [解説](Explanation)

1. 英語の **here** は副詞なので主語にはならない。「ここ」は「この部屋は」と考え、さらに同じ言葉の繰り返しを避け、**this room** が **this** になったと考える。同様に「それは何ですか」の「それ」を単純に **it** に置き換えないように注意しよう。なぜなら、日本語の指示詞であるこれ(近称)、それ(中称)、あれ(遠称)に対して、英語は **this** と **that** しか存在しないからである。(You should not directly change English words into Japanese. For example, “here” in English cannot be the subject of the sentence because it is an adverb. However, in Japanese “here” can be the subject. You should catch the meaning of the word “Koko (here)” in Japanese “Kono heya (this room)”. Furthermore “this room” can be changed into “this” to avoid the use of the word “room” repeatedly. Another example is that the subject “sore-wa (it)” of the sentence “sore-wa nan-desu-ka.(What is it?)” should not be changed into “it” directly. “It” in English and “sore” in Japanese are not equivalent in meaning because Japanese has three demonstrative pronouns such as “kore”(a demonstrative pronoun used for close distances), “sore”(used for middle-distances), and “are”(for long distances), whereas English has two, “this” and “that”. (例) それは何ですか? (Sore-wa nan-desu-ka. → What is that?)

2. 日本語は論理性よりも、全体の雰囲気、気分といったものを重視するため、文の主要成分、主語、目的語といったものを省略、あるいは含み表現として表現されないことがしばしば起こる。よって、英語に置き換えるとき、それらを補わなければならない。日本語の述語動詞には、その主語や目的語を補う働きがある。(In Japanese, main parts of a sentence like subjects and objects are occasionally omitted in order to preserve the unity and harmony of the sentence as a whole; at the expense of logic. Therefore, when Japanese is transferred into English, you need to supplement the words in English which are omitted in Japanese. Verbs in Japanese have the function to infer the subjects or objects of the sentences, even though they are not clearly expressed.

(例) ほしければ、くれるか。→ くれる (きみが、ぼくに) ほしい (ぼくが、それを)

(Hoshi-kereba, kure-ru-ka. → kure-ru (kimi-ga, boku-ni) hoshi-i (boku-ga, sore-wo)

want-hypothetical, give-can-question → give-can (you-nominative, me-objective)

want-suffix (I-nominative, it-accusative)

[B] つぎの日本語では何に注意し英語に置き換えたらいいでしょうか。(Let's translate this Japanese into English, considering the specific features we learned above)

1. そこは俺の席だ。

Soko-wa ore-no seki-da

There-nom, I-possessive, seat-conclusive

2. 顔が真っ青よ。

Kao-ga ma-sao-yo.

Face-nom, really-blue-suffix

## Appendix (2)

## Lesson 10

[A] 下記のセリフが日本語から英語になると、どのように変化しているか考えて見ましょう。

(Let's look at how English expressions change the feeling of the comic when Japanese is translated into English.)

1. なかなか面白い子じゃないですか彼・・・ Kindaichi is an interesting kid, don't you think?
2. 緒方先生！ Ms. Ogata!
3. そういえば顧問なさってる演劇部の合宿あのアホも連れてくんですって？  
I heard you're taking that joker along to the drama club camp.
4. ええ七瀬さんの推薦ですわ Yes, Miyuki's idea.
5. 気をつけて下さいよ！奴は典型的オチコボレですからね。何をしでかすか・・・  
Please keep an eye on him. He's your typical delinquent. No knowing what he'll get up to.
6. 一なるほど確かに彼はオチコボレですわね・・・ Ah. Yes, he is indeed a delinquent.
7. 遅刻 早退は当たり前授業なんて半分はサボってるし  
Notorious truant, doesn't show up for half his classes.
8. テストはほとんど赤点でその上スポーツもまるでダメ Fails most of his exams and is weak at sports.
9. でも私それは彼の本当の姿じゃないと思いますの  
But I don't think he's shown us what he's really made of.
10. 彼は他の生徒いない(何か)を持っている・・・そんな気がするんです。  
Something tells me he has something special.
11. またまたあ You must be joking.
12. 考えすぎですよ！緒方先生 An overactive imagination.
13. 皆さんご存じないのかしら？ Maybe you don't know.
14. 金田一君がさる”天才”と言われた人物の血を引いていることをー！！  
The blood of a certain genius runs through Hajime's veins.

## Appendix (3)

アンケート用紙 (The questionnaire)

クラス(Class) ( )

1. 英語の資格、あるいはレベルを書いてください。(Write your English competence or level)  
 英検(STEP) ( ) 級(Level) TOEIC ( ) 点(Score)  
 TOEFL ( ) 点(Score) 商業英語検定(Business English Test) ( ) 級(Level)  
 工業英語検定(Technical English Test) ( ) 級(Level) その他(Others) ( )
2. 英文を書くとき何に一番気をつけて書きましたか?(What did you pay attention to most when you wrote the essay?)  
 1. 文法(Grammar) 2. 内容(Content) 3. スペル(Spelling)  
 4. 単語の選択(Selection of words) 5. 主語の選択(Selection of subjects)  
 6. その他(Other) ( )
3. 英文を書くとき、何に困難さを感じましたか。一番難しいと思った順に番号を入れて下さい。  
 (What did you find most difficult when you wrote the essay? Number in order of difficulty.)  
 文法(Grammar) ( ) 単語(Words) ( )  
 言い回し(表現)(Expressions) ( ) その他(Other) ( )

## Appendix (4)

アンケート用紙 (The questionnaire)

クラス(Class) ( )

1. 今回の金田一シリーズの授業は(Did you enjoy the class?)
  1. 大変楽しかった(Enjoyed very much)
  2. 楽しかった(Enjoyed)
  3. 普通(So-so)
  4. 楽しなかった(Did not enjoy very much)
  5. ぜんぜん楽しなかった(Did not enjoy at all)
  
2. 今回の金田一シリーズの授業は(Did you think this course was useful?)
  1. 大変役に立った(Very useful)
  2. 役に立った(Useful)
  3. 役に立ってない(Not so useful)
  4. ぜんぜん役に立ってない(Not useful at all)
  
3. 英文を書くとき何に一番気をつけて書くようになったか(What did you pay attention to most when you wrote the essay?)
  1. 文法(Grammar)
  2. 内容(Content)
  3. スペル(Spelling)
  4. 単語の選択(Selection of words)
  5. 主語の選択(Selection of subjects)
  6. その他(Other) ( )
  
4. 英文を書くとき何に困難さを感じましたか? 一番難しいと思った順に番号を入れてください。  
(What did you find most difficult when you wrote the essay? Number in order of difficulty.)
 

文法(Grammar)( )                      単語(Words) ( )

言い回し(表現)(Expressions) ( )                      その他(Other)( )
  
5. 英文を書くことに対する気持ちは変わりましたか? (Did you change your perception of the difficulty of writing essay in English?)
  1. 大変変わった(Very much changed)
  2. 少し変わった(Changed a little)
  3. あまり変わらない(Not changed so much)
  4. ぜんぜん変わらない(Not changed at all)
  
6. 変わったと答えた人: どのように変わりましたか? (How did you change your thinking when you produced English?)