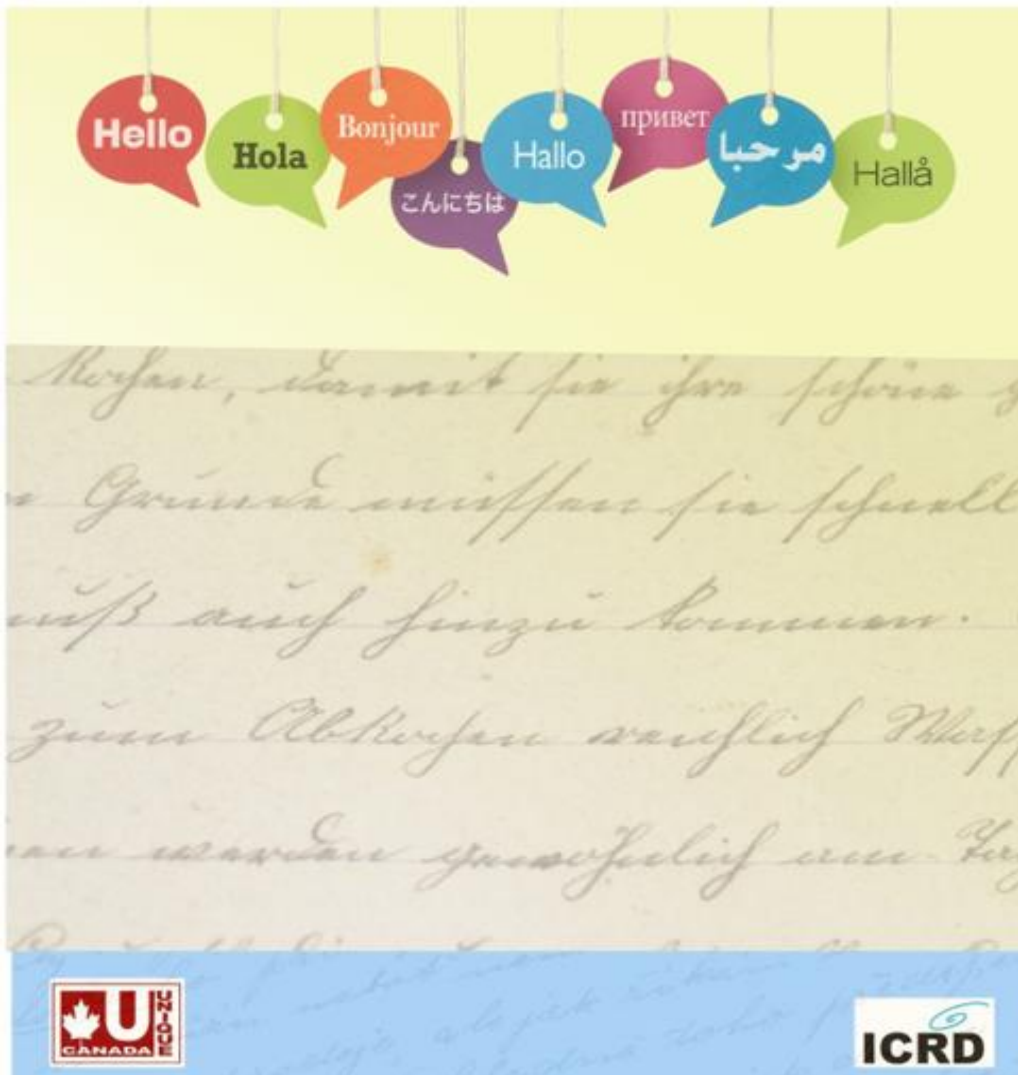


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A Socio-Semiotic Approach to Learning about Language –

A case study of teaching EFL in Japan

Sonya CHIK

Department of English, Kanagawa University, Japan

Abstract

This study explores the potential of applying Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to teaching EFL in Japan. SFL is a theoretical framework that describes language as a meaning-making resource presented in a system network of choices. Under SFL, texts are classified into socio-semiotic activities based on the contextual parameters of ‘Field’ or the nature of activity, ‘Tenor’ or the roles and relationships between discourse participants, and ‘Mode’ or the role of language plays in the activity. The SFL approach has been applied to language teaching in different educational settings and is supported by a growing body of research that demonstrates its potential for helping language learners improve writing skills and literacy development. This study documents the learning process and outcome of an elective English course that employs a text-typology model in classifying texts into eight broad types of socio-semiotic activities namely expounding, reporting, recreating, sharing, doing, enabling, recommending and exploring. The study drew on qualitative data stemming from students’ text analysis activities and reflective writing tasks to explore the effect of learning about language from a functional perspective. The findings suggest that the socio-semiotic approach to learning English is successful in contributing to students’ increased awareness of the different types of English text and the choices of language resource that are available to make meaning in various social contexts. The findings also suggest that learning how to analyze and describe text using functional metalanguage helps students improve their reading proficiency.

Keywords: *language learning, language in context, Systemic Functional Linguistics, EFL*

Introduction

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a holistic theory of language learning. Under SFL, learning is a semiotic process in which learning is “learning to mean” and “to expand one’s meaning potential” (Halliday, 1993, p.113). In his Language Development Project, Halliday proposed a threefold perspective of “learning language, learning through language, learning about language”, suggesting language learning as a lifelong process with a focus on language and its social context. This study explores the potential of using SFL, a socio-semiotic approach, to help students ‘learn about language’ in the context of teaching EFL in Japan. In particular, it investigates the impact of teaching language as a meaning-making resource in different social contexts from a functional perspective. The SFL approach is supported by a growing body of research that demonstrates its potential for helping language learners improve writing skills (Abuhasan, 2021; Brisk & Zisselsberger, 2001) and literacy development (Achugar et al., 2001; Hyland, 2007; Lo & Jeong, 2018). SFL-informed pedagogies are also proven to be helpful in developing critical language awareness among other benefits (Schwarz & Hamman-Ortiz, 2020). However, most studies focus on a particular genre such as academic writing or reading narratives. This study documents the learning process and outcome of an English elective class in a private university in Japan that employs a text-typology approach to teaching EFL. Under the text typology framework, texts are classified into eight broad types of socio-semiotic activities – the ‘social’ activities of ‘doing’ and ‘semiotic’ activities of ‘expounding’, ‘reporting’, ‘recreating’, ‘sharing’, ‘doing’, ‘enabling’, ‘recommending’ and ‘exploring’. With a focus on the ideational and textual meaning under SFL, the class was conducted in a workshop style to help students develop awareness and critical analytical skills through examining and comparing texts from different social contexts.

The text typology approach aims at empowering students with analytical tools to classify texts based on the context of situation. Students were encouraged to proactively learn about the language resources available to describe the characteristics of the selected texts in relation to the specific communicative purposes. This research aims to explore the extent to which students can make use of the text typology framework and functional grammar to (1) become aware of the linguistic characteristics of English text in different social contexts and (2) improve their reading comprehension proficiency through analyzing and describing text in context.

Methodology

This case study is based on a research that was conducted over a 14-week period through observation and documentation of students' text analysis activities and reflective writing tasks. The class was open to third year university students who were pursuing EFL as their major in a private university in Japan. The sample data consists of observation notes and reflective journaling that document the learning process of 12 consenting students who took the class during the spring semester in 2022. Students were aware that their in-class activities, assignments and learning journal were analyzed for research purpose and that the anonymity of the individuals would be preserved.

First, students learned about the model of language depicted by SFL as a register or variation of language use in social contexts. Under SFL, texts are considered as socio-semiotic activities and are classified according to the contextual parameters of 'Field' or the nature of activity, 'Tenor' or the roles and relationships between discourse participants, and 'Mode' or the role of language plays in the activity (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, pp.32-34). Next, they learned how to break a sentence into clauses and conduct simple text analysis using functional grammar. Under SFL, grammar is taught as a choice within the language system. The aim in applying this concept to teaching EFL is to raise students' awareness of the choices available in the system that are being used in the specific social context (Byrnes, 2022, p.7) Once students acquired the basic skills to deconstruct a text by breaking it into clauses, they practiced putting it back together into functional groups. Finally, they created a text archive that contained a collection of authentic texts in which they classified into different text types according to the contextual parameters for further analysis.

The text typology framework (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, pp.34-41) was introduced to the students at the beginning of the course. Under the framework, texts are classified into eight broad types according to the field of socio-semiotic activities. They are:

1. **expounding** knowledge (e.g. textbook / lecture)
2. **reporting** events or phenomenon (e.g. news report / biography)
3. **recreating** aspects of human life in fictional world (e.g. novels and dramas)
4. **sharing** personal experience and values (e.g. casual conversation / blog)
5. **recommending** through promotion (e.g. advertisement / financial advice)
6. **enabling** by instructing or regulating (e.g. recipe / legal document)
7. **exploring** social values (e.g. public speech / customer review)
8. **doing** by using language to facilitate some course of action (e.g. customer service)

In addition to the text typology framework, students also learned how to tease out functional units based on the experiential and textual meaning. Experientially, a clause is defined as a configuration of three components namely Process, Participant and Circumstance. Process can be further categorized according to functional types such as 'doing', 'being', 'saying' and 'sensing' in the broad sense (cf. Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, Chapter 5). To examine the development of the text, the notion of Theme under textual meaning was presented. Theme, according to Halliday, "is the element that serves as the point of departure of the message; it is that which locates and orients the clause within its context" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p.89).

At the end of the course, students selected one text from their text archive and presented the finding of their analysis using functional grammar. The results and findings were shared and discussed with the

class. Throughout the course, students also engaged in a reflective journaling task in which they recorded their learning progress and reflected on the learning method and the effect on their English proficiency.

Results and Discussion

In this section, I will discuss the results of applying SFL in an English class in which students were guided through the process of learning about the English language from a socio-semiotic perspective.

Text in Context – learning about language from above

The notion of “text in context” was introduced to the students at the beginning of the course. Working in pairs, students were presented with some model texts taken from different social contexts such as casual conversation, buying a coach ticket, recipe, university student handbook, etc. Without knowing where the text was from, they were asked to identify the contextual parameters of Field (the subject matter), Tenor (people taking part in the discourse) and Mode (whether it is written or spoken, formal or informal and monologue or dialogue) of each text. Students shared their answers with the class through an open discussion led by the teacher who pointed out some explicit language features such as the use of question, politeness and content words. Although the discussion of text in context at this stage stayed at the level of vocabulary and grammar, students reported to have gained awareness of how the characteristics of texts varied based on different context of situations.

Metafunction and lexicogrammar – learning about language from below

During the first half of the course, students engaged in activities that helped them re-engineer their understanding of the notion of ‘text’ and ‘sentence’ through the lens of SFL. Under SFL, a ‘sentence’ in the traditional sense is referred to as a ‘clause’ or a ‘clause complex’ that links different clauses together through logico-semantic relations. There are three components in a clause – a process unfolding through time, the participants involved in the process and circumstances associated with the process (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p.220). These components are organized to construe our experience of the world around us and inside us. In an English clause, ‘Process’ is typically realized by verbal group, ‘Participant’ by nominal group and ‘Circumstance’ by adverbial group or prepositional phrase. For example, in clause (1) ‘The troops attacked the capital on a cold winter night.’ will be analyzed as follows under experiential grammar.

(1)

<i>The troops</i>	<i>attacked</i>	<i>the capital</i>	<i>on a cold winter night</i>
Participant (Actor)	Process (doing)	Participant (Goal)	Circumstance (Time)
nominal group	verbal group	nominal group	prepositional phrase

To draw a boundary between clauses, students would first identify the nuclear Process, which is typically realized in a verbal group that is associated with the Participant(s). Students first practiced “clause-chunking” at the sentence level and gradually moved on to dividing the whole text into clauses. By the fifth week, most students could grasp the technique and were able to chunk a text into clauses with minimal guidance.

One important revelation from the clause-chunking exercise was the discovery of some common difficulties students faced when comprehending English texts. When presented with more than one processes (verbal groups) in a clause, students sometimes could not determine the clause boundary. For example, in clause (2) ‘The man we saw is my friend’, there are two processes (realized in verbs) - ‘saw’ and ‘is’. From SFL perspective, the nuclear configuration is “The man is my friend” and the clause “we saw” functions as the modifier of ‘The man’. The clause is annotated as: The man [[we saw]] (Participant) is (Process of ‘being’) my friend (Participant).

(2)

<i>The man [[we saw]]</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>my friend</i>
Participant (Identifier)	Process (being/identifying)	Participant (Identified)
nominal group	verbal group	nominal group

After a few practice exercises on identifying the nuclear process and chunking texts into clauses using model texts provided by the instructor, students started to gain the momentum in searching for embedded clauses that are used to modify the preceding nominal group (Participant). They also found this pattern in authentic texts that they collected for their text archive. As reported in the learning journal of one student:

Finding the main process is interesting, but I am sometimes confused. There are some words that are a little bit challenging for me to categorize. They look like verbs, but they are used as if they are adjectives, or are not verbs.

There are other times where the clause itself functions as the Participant. Consider clause (3) ‘Wearing those shoes is wrecking my feet’ below.

(3)

<i>[[Wearing those shoes]]</i>	<i>is wrecking</i>	<i>my feet</i>
Participant (Actor)	Process (doing)	Participant (Goal)
nominal group (rank shift from an embedded clause)	verbal group	nominal group

In (3), ‘Wearing those shoes’ is an embedded clause nominalized to function as the Actor (Participant). The act of ‘wearing those shoes’ is construed as the Actor that is responsible for ‘is wrecking’, a Process of ‘doing’ that brings about a negative change to ‘my feet’ the Goal (Participant). Although students still found it difficult to identify complex sentence structure by the end of the course, many reported that having the awareness and intention to identify the nuclear process of the clause helped them clarify the meaning of the text.

Another common challenge facing most students was the ability to distinguish between ‘form’ and ‘meaning’. As they started to come across instances where the verbal groups were realized in the most common ‘verb-to-be’, they were surprised to learn that those verbal groups were not necessarily processes of ‘being’. Students were constantly reminded and encouraged to think deeply beyond the form or surface meaning when considering the true function of the process type in relation to the participants. Under experiential meaning, Process is further divided into ‘doing’, ‘being’, ‘sensing’ and ‘saying’. The fact that many students tended to analyze verbs that take the form of ‘verb-to-be’ such as ‘is’, ‘are’, ‘was’, ‘have’, ‘were’, etc. as a process of ‘being’ shows that they were still only focusing on the form and not the meaning. Through repeated practice, they came to realize that they needed to examine the verbal group carefully from the perspective of meaning. Although these verbs may be in the ‘form’ that is commonly used to represent process of ‘being’, if examined closely, some of these verbs are only part of the passive construction of the clause as in (4.2) below.

(4.1) Because there **were** no clear government guidelines, || (4.2) these **were** rarely explicitly **mentioned** in CSR reports.

Since both clauses contain the verb ‘were’, students were tempted to analyze the process type of both clauses as ‘being’. However, the verbal group ‘were mentioned’ of clause (4.2) is a passive construction

with the verbal group that is split between two modal adjuncts ‘rarely’ and ‘explicitly’. This clause can be rewritten in the active form as ‘CSR reports rarely explicitly **mentioned** these, in which case the process is of the ‘saying’ type. The meaning of the message in the clause is the same, only from a different perspective.

In addition to analyzing text using the experiential grammar, students were also taught to divide the clauses into Theme and Rheme under the textual meaning. Theme is the starting point in which the writer has chosen to guide the reader in interpreting the development of the message. It is further divided into textual (e.g. conjunctions), interpersonal (e.g. mood and vocative), circumstantial (e.g. time, place and manner) and topical (e.g. nominal group that functions as the Subject). The part that is after the topical theme is Rheme. Depending on how the writer or speaker intends to direct the reader or listener interpret the flow of information in the text, a clause may contain only one unmarked topical theme (clause 5), a marked circumstantial theme (clause 6), or multiple themes (clause 7).

(5) I went to town on Friday.

I	went to town on Friday.
topical	
Theme	Rheme

(6) On Friday I went to town.

On Friday	I went to town.
circumstantial	
Theme	Rheme

(7) However, when ice crystals form, they will have definite positions.

However,	when ice crystals form,	they	will have definite positions.
textual	circumstantial	topical	
Theme			Rheme

Theme is useful when analyzing a full text as it shows the method of development that the writer has chosen to guide the readers through the flow of information. It also helps characterize the text type in the specific context of the situation. For example, a biography (reporting text) is typically organized by circumstance of time as Theme to guide the reader through the life event of the person under description. By dividing the clause into thematic units, students became aware of the different components of the clause that are at work simultaneously to organize the content as the text unfolds.

Systemic choices and text typology – learning about language through text analysis

Once students gained a basic understanding of the analytical framework using Theme and Process type, they engaged in individual and group tasks to analyze English texts using the metalanguage they had learned. In addition to analyzing model texts prepared by the instructor, students also collected text samples in their daily life and stored them in their text archive. They classified the texts based on the field of activities such as ‘reporting’, ‘expounding’ and ‘recreating’ under the text typology model. As suggested by previous studies, it is important to let students identify their own texts for study and analysis, and discuss with them how the texts relate to the social contexts that they engage with (cf. Martínez Lirola 2005: 76). By selecting their own texts for analysis, students were able to clarify their understanding of the model as well as their interpretation of the language features. One of the benefits of conducting text analysis activities in class is that students can discuss and share their views through collaboration. One student reported in the learning journal that seeing other students’ work had stimulated her own thinking on how to analyze her text:

It is interesting to see my classmates' analysis of the texts. They read and analyze various articles though they collect texts from same category such as reporting, expounding, and recreating. While I saw my classmates' text analysis, I was thinking that if I narrow down the categories more, I might find uniqueness of each type of text.

Patterns found in issues relating to the comprehension of the text (e.g. passive construction) or the application of the framework could also be dealt with immediately. After a few rounds of text analysis, students were able to identify passive construction easily or at least catch themselves on the spot when they made the same mistake again. Being self-aware of the issue was seen as one important improvement in language learning (Accurso and Gebhard, 2021). The significance in the learning impact was also documented in another student's learning journal:

I also found it difficult to distinguish the Doing process type apart from Being process type when the verbs were formulated with passive voice. For example, in my text archive I analyzed, there is the sentence "beans are washed". I learned that it is important to focus not only the 'be-verbs', but also need to care about verbs in the rest.

At first, students were not able to articulate the relationship between the analysis and the text type or social context in which the text is used. However, through an iterative process of collaborative text analysis, sharing of individual work and comparing language features of texts from different text types, they were able to acquire the ability to describe the language features of the text in relation to the subject matter and communicative purpose. By the end of the semester, they were able to analyze a full text of around 500 – 800 words in their final project and describe their findings in relation to the text typology using metalanguage such as process type and theme. Some students reported increased awareness of language features in relation to the context of situation and others on the improvement in English comprehension skills as shown in an extract of the learning journal below:

Although the way of dividing verb into process types is not easy, I would adopt this method if I encountered difficult sentences. The reason is that this method enables me to think the meaning carefully and it will lead to improving my intelligibility in reading texts.

Moreover, acquiring the skills to observe the use of language from a functional perspective enables students to reassess their approach to communication in English as commented by a student in his journal entry: "I acquired the ability to analyze sentences in functional terms in this class... I would like to change the way I look at and think about communication in English."

Conclusion

The findings suggest that the socio-semiotic approach to learning English is successful in contributing to students' increased awareness of the different types of English text as they become exposed to authentic texts of different social contexts. By the end of the course, students were able to identify the choices of language resources available to make meaning to achieve communicative functions such as news reporting, personal biography, product manual and science textbook for children. Furthermore, students reported that their reading and comprehension proficiency was improved as they became confident and capable in reading more complex sentences with embedded clauses. The critical analysis of text using functional metalanguage was also perceived to be a valuable learning outcome by most students, which could help them in their academic writing and graduation thesis. Although this study is based on a small sample of students engaging in a socio-semiotic approach to learning about the English language in an elective English course, it demonstrates the potential of SFL to be applied in the teaching of EFL in Japan. While the dataset of this study is not large enough to generalize the findings, the insights gained from the observation and documentation of students' activities and reflections suggest that cultivating awareness between 'form' and 'meaning' of language use in context may bring about positive results in English learning in tertiary settings. Further studies may extend the scope to include interpersonal meaning and other text types in English.

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**Survival And Human Values in Nvm Gonzalez's
'A Season of Grace'**

Charina G. Alejo

St. Ferdinand College, City of Ilagan, Isabela, Philippines

Abstract

*This study analyzed the struggles and the human values in the novel 'A Season of Grace' and related these to the 21st Century **Filipinos**' struggles and values. It employed the formalist approach in analyzing and evaluating the novel. The study found out that the novel is an illustration of a person's continuous struggle in a hostile environment. Thus, the novel contributes to a deeper understanding of what it means to be human and what it means to be alive, whether such a life is lived in **pain and suffering**.*

Keywords: *struggles for survival, human values, literary analysis*

Introduction

When one reads literature, he unveils the varied dimensions of life, initiating him to look at the world around him, at the people surrounding him and into his inner life (Dela Rosa, 1976). The experiences of the characters that the reader meets on the printed page influence his understanding of human nature and life. Through these he realizes the consequences of his own actions and tries to modify them into ways acceptable and admirable in the world of men and women. Thus, a person who has been through the reading of a number of works in literature is likely to have a better sense of what is valuable and what is not.

Among all literary types, the novel is often considered the best vehicle to represent both the external and the internal reality. In the novel, *A Season of Grace*, Nestor Vicente Madali (NVM) Gonzalez, a notable Filipino writer in English was able to depict a story about surviving and overcoming the worst choices of life, enabling readers to come into the characters' deepest hearts (Serran, 2008).

This study explored the struggles for survival and the reaffirmation of human values in NVM Gonzalez', *A Season of Grace*. It also sought answers to the following: 1. What struggles for survival are presented in the novel and how are these similar to the struggles of the 21st Century Filipinos? 2. What human values are reaffirmed in the story and how are these compared to the values of the 21st Century Filipinos?

Methodology

This study involved critical analysis and evaluation. To deduce the main idea of the novel and make textual criticism, the formalist approach was employed. In this approach, the characters, setting, tone, point-of-view and other elements of the text were analyzed and the texts were used in drawing forth proofs for the thesis of the study. Further, sources related to literature and to the thesis of the study were used to allow a more comprehensive evaluation of the novel.

Results and Discussions

Struggles for Survival:

The novel, *A Season of Grace*, is an illustration of the struggles the poor *kaingineros* of Mindoro experienced. It depicts their daily battle against the forces of nature, which was clearly depicted in the attack of the black mice to Sabel and Doro's *kaingin*; their battle against the abusive government officials, which was shown in the *kaingineros*' encounter with the Treasurer of Palaon and his Deputy Assistant as; well as their relationship with the scheming business adventurers, Epe Ruda and Tiaga; and the struggle against oneself, which was portrayed in Doro's unhappiness while working at the Alag firewood concession managed by Epe Ruda.

Struggle Against Forces of Nature

In comparison with the struggles of the *kaingineros* against the forces of nature in the 50's, today's Filipino farmers are battling against more destructive natural forces such as typhoons, flashfloods and volcanic eruptions. It is a fact that due to the country's geographical location, where tropical cyclones are formed and where the Pacific Ring of Fire and several earthquake fault lines are found, Philippines is beset by a host of severe natural disasters, including volcanic eruptions, tropical cyclones, earthquakes, floods, mudflows, fire and drought and according to PAGASA, the average cyclone occurrence in the Philippines is 19 to 21 per year, of which two (2) are super typhoons. But it is also noted that these natural calamities are becoming destructive because of the irresponsible stewardship of the environment.

Like Doro, Sabel and the rest of *kaingineros* of Mindoro in the novel, Filipinos need to appease mother earth. They need to consider that her resources are meant for all people. Thus, instead of cutting all the trees that can cut, there is a need to plant trees; instead of throwing dynamite to the seas and rivers to harvest tons of fishes, there is a need to take care of its fish and corrals.

Struggle Against Corrupt Systems

The worsening struggle of the Filipinos against the abusive government officials and inconsiderate landowners and businessmen is manifested in the widening economic gap of the two-class systems in the country, the small elite and the very large lower-class Filipinos. The unequal distribution of wealth power and economic security, with the elite controlling the lion's share, makes the security of the lower-class people lay on their patron's wealth and power. Like the poor *kaingineros*, who turned to Epe Ruda and Tiaga for their farm and daily needs, the poor Filipinos also turn to the rich to finance their fiesta or to provide medication and hospitalization for their family (Andres, 1989). This very situation provides the rich more power over the poor Filipinos making them plunge into deeper poverty and *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude).

Furthermore, Filipinos' struggle against graft and corruption is also moving to higher level as revealed by the alarming statement of the chief of the Philippine Armed Forces about the military "I admit there is graft and corruption in all levels" (Decker, 2003) and the result of the Transparency International (TI) corruption index administered by the Germans identifying the Philippines and the political parties and legislature as the second most corrupt country (PDI, 2003). These reports just confirm the idea that a significant share of the country's budget is lost to graft and somehow explain why majority of the Filipinos have remained poor or have become poorer.

These realities in the life of the Filipinos are not only indications of the gravity of the Filipino struggle against the evil people in the society; they also serve as challenges to the Filipinos to be one with others in the battle against the abusive members of the Philippine society.

Struggle Against Oneself

At a certain point in the novel, *A Season of Grace*, the main character, Doro, experienced being torn between what he really wants out of his life and what he does for a living. Doro wanted to live his life cultivating land. This had been his dream, but because a group of mice devoured his rice field, he was pushed to servitude. To numb his difficulties, sufferings and depression, he resorted to heavy drinking of Tuba.

Like Doro and Sabel in the story, the powerless Filipinos of this century are pushed against their will just to survive the heavy burden of their deteriorating economic conditions partly brought about by corrupt officials and the demands of everyday living.

As of 2000, the NSO survey showed that 34% of the Filipinos are living below poverty line (INQ, 2003). This means that 26.6 million Filipinos out of 85 million are suffering from poverty in the sense of having no means to satisfy even their basic needs.

Compounding the problem of poverty is the government's inability to contain budget deficit. With the war in Mindanao being resolved, and with the large infusion of money going to military operations, the 99.4 billion budget deficit (according to the Praymer, 2004) is expected to further swell beyond the prescribed ceiling.

Another indicator that the economy is far from being healthy is the high unemployment and underemployment rates. In the year 2000, the unemployment rate stood at 13.9 %, the highest in nine years, while the underemployment rate reached 25.1 % (Maglia, 2000). The implication of this is reduced consumer spending, which can lead to further deceleration of the economy. Such situations leave the Filipino powerless pushing him to do things against his will just to survive.

Human Values.

A Season of Grace does not only present the struggles of the simple minded *kaingineros*, but, it also teaches the importance of the values of love, interdependence, faith in God and courage in difficult and challenging situations.

Love

Like all married couples, Doro and Sabel's marriage also arrived at a stage where the strength of their marriage vows is seriously tested. But, because their love is supported by mutual service, loyalty and obedience, it was able to bear all things, believe all things, hope all things and endure all things (Cor 13:17). It is this unconditional love that helped them go through their struggles against the different forces of nature, the abusive and inconsiderate people in their society, and the daily tensions of life's difficulties and challenges.

"Marital love," Pope Pius XI teaches, "consists in the deep attachment of the heart (will) which is expressed in action, since love is proven by deeds". Paulette Bonifacio (2005) explains the teaching of the Pope as a union that is defined in loyalty, service and obedience, not in terms of interpersonal affection. It requires mutual empathy with and compassion for the needs, feelings and desires of one's spouse and a mutual giving way to those needs, feelings and desires when the occasion so demands for the sake of and in response to love. Self-centeredness, therefore, has no place in marriage. Thus,

spouses who seek their own way always, who value the domination of their spouses, who will never give way to their partners will never become one person with anyone, perhaps not even with themselves.

In the Philippine culture, infidelity or extra marital relationship, which ranges from casual relationship to the keeping of *querida* or paramour, is considered by PCP II as a major concern in Filipino marriages. (PCP II) Proofs of its being a major concern in Filipino marriages are presented in the note of Carandang (1987) that wives rank infidelity as the number one family stressor; by the report of Lacar (1993) showing that male infidelity is the most frequent reason for marital separation and by the study of Vancio (1980) citing male infidelity as a major issue for marital break-ups in Manila. With these studies, it can be said that marital unions nowadays are greatly affected by infidelity for the breaking of marital vows among Filipino couples.

Interdependence and Camaraderie

Another human value that the poor *kaingineros* in the novel, hold dear is interdependence and camaraderie. These values are vividly illustrated in their sharing of whatever they have, whether it is roasted banana, pickled bamboo shoots, or old fishing net; their joining the *saknungan* system during planting or harvesting seasons; their togetherness during their nine-day novena and burial of Nong Tomas.

Relative to the universal human value of interdependence and camaraderie are the Filipino values of *pakikisama*, *bayanihan* and *pagdadamayan*. Though these values are bipolar or ambivalent, their positive side corresponds to the human values of interdependence and camaraderie (Quinto, 2003).

Pakikisama as defined by Fr. Frank Lynch (1976) is “the ability to ability to get along with others in such a way as to avoid signs of conflict.” Thus, according to Andres (1989), it encompasses the tendency to cooperate without hesitation, tendency to be obsequiously accommodating, hospitable and respectful to others, and the tendency to level with someone who is out of lie or the curbing of anti-social attitudes by disallowing privacy.

Unfortunately, the positive dimension of *pakikisama* is not the predominant and dominant side of the Philippine society today. It is now marked with *lagayan*, *palakasan*, and *lokohan*. A typical example of this situation is the modus operandi of some political leaders who throw big parties and give gifts/money/bribe/*suhol* to their followers to reinvigorate their loyalty and to build a big reservoir of *utang na loob* and *palakasan*. *Bayanihan* on the other hand is “*pagkakaisa*salayunin (unity of objectives), *pagkakaisa* kilos (brotherhood), *pagpapaunlad*ngbawat isa (developing of everyone), *masigassignapaggawa* (devoted and wholehearted work), *kinikilala*angmalakas at *pinapalaka*sangmahina (recognizing the strong and strengthening the weak), *pag-ibig* at *katapatan* (love and loyalty). This value of *Bayanihan* still remains in every Filipino but “the initiative of intensifying and expressing it has become so dormant that Filipinos seem to care only in time of crisis and calamities.

Furthermore, the Filipinos before as portrayed by the simple-minded *kaingineros*, had a high sense of neighborhood or *pagdadamayan*. When somebody is in distress, the Filipinos in the past were always helpful. And because they received help in times of distress, they too incurred *utang-na-loob* and would be helpful. But materialism and individualism of the West have influenced the Filipino, somehow the *bayanihan* value waned (Andres, 1989).

It is true that many Filipinos still observe the giving of *abuloy* (contribution of a sum of money to the bereaved family), the praying for the dead and the attending of funerals but, seldom do we now see

Filipinos joining the *saknungan* system during planting and harvesting seasons or politicians helping the poor and the needy without expecting votes come election time (Hollnsteiner, 1964).

What Filipinos need at present is to revive the *bayanihan* spirit and to put it into full force (Andres, 1989). Thus, every Filipino is called to share what he or she has and to generously work for the common good of the Filipinos – for God’s kingdom (Bp. Utleg, 2004).

Faith and Courage

The simple-minded *kaingineros*’ faith and courage permeates the novel. It is this faith in the providence of the creator that sustained them though the difficult times in their journey through life. Through this faith, they keep the hope and courage to face whatever life has for them.

Values of faith (spirituality) and courage pervade the hearts of the Filipinos who are hopeful of divine intervention in their daily struggles. It is their faith that serves as their coping resource of life’s adverse events. This is given evidence in the 1991 ISSP survey stating that eight to nine out of ten Filipinos agree that there is a God who personally cares for human beings (Mangahas, Guerrero, 1991).

Faith and courage are seen in the urban poor Filipino floating in the sea of high-price commodities, the farmer eking out a living in the face of typhoons, floods and high prices of insecticides and pesticides and the domestic helper wanting to be with her children but needs to go abroad for her family’s future.

Conclusion

With the employment of suitable narrative devices – repetition, irony, contrast, reminisces, interior dialogues and dream vision – the writer is able to mirror the continues struggle (natural, sociological and personal) of the *kaingineros* in an environment marked with hostility and contradictions.

The novel is a presentation of the general pattern of struggle by all peoples against the threatening cycles of natural calamities, social disorder, economic imbalance and political turmoil. It reaffirms human values such as love, interdependence and camaraderie and faith and courage.

Moreover, the novel’s title underscores the celebration of faith and hope against the battle of life. It exemplifies the dynamic reality that every season, even during the most challenging moment, is a season of grace... a season of divine assistance... a season of favor.

As such the novel contributes to a deeper understanding of what it means to be human and what it means to be alive, whether such a life is live in pain and suffering.

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Medical and Nursing Choices in Japanese Ending Notes: A Discourse Analysis.

Diego OLIVEIRA

College of International Relations, Nihon University, Japan

Abstract

This study focuses on the genre of ending notes in Japan. Ending notes serve as platforms for writers to express end-of-life wishes, end-of-life care decisions, and guidance for family and caregivers. This research conducts discourse analysis on the medical and nursing section of ending notes, aiming to understand the underlying societal concerns about aging and death in the country. The literature review highlights the historical emergence and increasing popularity of ending notes, discussing their role in the broader context of "shūkatsu." The methodology employs move analysis, a discourse analysis tool from Genre Theory, to analyze the medical and nursing section of 15 ending notes. The findings reveal three main purposes: to assist writers in communicating their thoughts, feelings, and choices related to the end of life; to guide writers in communicating their preferences and requests regarding aging and elderly care; and to advise writers on planning for the end of life as well as on the writing of the ending note. These purposes encompass topics such as end-of-life and life-prolonging treatment decisions, nursing care preferences, and caregivers, among others. The study concludes that ending notes, particularly their medical and nursing section, provide a means for individuals to exercise control over their end-of-life choices. The analysis highlights how the genre offers a tool for achieving a sense of agency in planning one's last years and eventual passing, reflecting broader societal shifts towards valuing individual autonomy in the face of longevity.

Keywords: *Aging, Death, Genre Theory, Japan.*

Introduction

The phenomenon of longevity has significantly impacted and changed various aspects of Japanese society, including cultural norms, social dynamics, economic structures, and attitudes toward aging and dying. Considering these transformations, this research adds to the body of knowledge on aging and end-of-life matters by examining the ending note, a Japanese writing tool designed to help individuals reflect on and plan for aging, dying, and death.

Demographically, Japan's super-aged society status is notable. The country boasts one of the highest life expectancies globally, with men living to around 81.5 years and women to 86.9 years (WHO, 2020). As of 2020, approximately 13.8% of its population falls within the age range of 65 to 74 years, and 14.7% are over the age of 75 (Cabinet Office, 2020). This combination forms more than 28% of Japan's population, making it a super-aged society with new economic, social, and private challenges to face. In economics, a longer life means more years in retirement and, consequently, more money to live those years (NHK, 2018). In family dynamics, longevity means finding new ways to care for older people with less burden on family members, especially women (Jenike, 2003). In the realm of mental health, the increase in the number of nuclear families, in conjunction with the decrease in co-residence (Iwai, 2020), can lead to an increase in loneliness in the country. According to official government data, the number of single-person households among those over 65 has risen from 10% in 1986 to 17% in 2011 (ILC Japan, 2013), with projections indicating a potential increase to 24.5% by 2040 (Cabinet Office, 2021)

Regarding death and dying, longevity and modernization, characterized by advancements in medicine, secularization, rationalization, and individualism, have also reshaped perspectives on death in Japan (Suzuki, 2012). For instance, dying a painless death without unnecessary medical interventions and at home is seen as natural and desirable (Long, 2005; 2013). New burial forms such as ash scattering (Kawano, 2004), *eitai kuyōbo* (a grave that is permanently cared for by non-family members) (Hoshino, 2014), and tree burial (Boret, 2013) have also gained popularity in the country due to the high cost of graves, gender issues (women who do not want to be buried in their spouses' graves), and grave inheritance traditions among others.

In response to the abovementioned changes, planning for the end-of-life has gained popularity in Japan, and ending notes have been its most known tool for achieving one's desired ending. Thus, this paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the genre and its role in Japanese society through a discourse analysis of one of its sections, namely the medical and nursing section.

Literature Review

Ending Notes in Japan: Their Nature, Origins, and Popularity

Ending notes are notebook-like writing pads distributed by businesses, NPOs, and government agencies in Japan. They serve as platforms for individuals to record their thoughts and plans regarding various aspects of aging, dying, and post-death. The notebooks contain sections dedicated to topics such as end-of-life care, nursing in old age, funeral arrangements, inheritance, self-history, and messages to loved ones. Additionally, the ending notes include short explanatory texts about life-prolonging treatment, new burial practices, finance, inheritance, and other topics concerning aging and death.

Historically, the exact origin of the first ending note is uncertain, but it is likely to have emerged in the late 1990s or early 2000s. By 2004, some of the oldest ending notes were already being published and sold in the country, indicating an early popularity of the genre. Recent surveys indicate that the genre has become well-known in the country, particularly among older citizens. A 2021 (Rashisa NPO, 2021) survey conducted with more than 3,000 adults in the country revealed that more than 80% of the participants knew or had heard about ending notes. The numbers were even higher among participants older than 60 years old (90.6%). The popularity of ending notes can be attributed to their significance in the context of *shūkatsu*.

The Role of Ending Notes in Shūkatsu

Shūkatsu is movement that advocates for comprehensive end-of-life preparation, commencing with retirement and extending throughout the processes of aging, dying, and death. The movement includes NPOs, businesses, local governments, and scholars. Much like the Death Awareness Movement in the US (Bregman, 2017), *Shūkatsu* encompasses a variety of multi-disciplinary professionals who collectively promote the ideal of end-of-life planning. These professionals include writers, doctors, *shūkatsu* advisors, financial planners, and ending note creators,. Though they do not function as a single unit, they share the common objective of advocating for the benefits of end-of-life planning for both individuals and society. Despite lacking a central figure or organization, this shared goal creates the idea of *shūkatsu* as a cohesive "movement."

In *shūkatsu* seminars and introductory books, ending notes are promoted as essential tools for end-of-life planning. According to *shūkatsu* experts, ending notes are helpful because they encompass everything needed to plan for one's last years of life and death. They allow individuals to organize personal information, reflect on their past, and share their life stories while communicating their wishes regarding aging and death to family members (The Association of *Shūkatsu* Counselors, 2013).

Previous Research on Ending Notes

Despite the increasing popularity of ending notes and their recognized importance for *shūkatsu*, research on the topic remains limited. In the field of psychology, Shimojima (2014; 2015) has studied the content and general structure of ending notes. The author suggests that the inherent structure of ending notes, starting with an autobiography section, covering elderly and end-of-life care, and finishing with funeral wishes, can facilitate the contemplation of challenging topics and reduce the writers' anxiety and negative feelings regarding death.

In gerontology, Kimura and Ando (2015) have also contributed to research on ending notes. The authors' study comprised two phases: a textual analysis and interviews with writers. From their textual analysis, Kimura and Ando found that the most common topics in ending notes were medical and nursing care decisions, funeral and grave decisions, messages to loved ones, estate planning, organizing belongings, career history, contact information, inheritance details, and personal history. From the interviews, the authors suggest that individuals write ending notes driven by two core motivations. First, the desire to spare their loved ones from distress in case of their deaths. Secondly, the difficulty of engaging in conversations about death with family members and close friends. Kobayashi et al. (2016), in another study in the field of gerontology, suggest the use of ending notes to support community-

based comprehensive care systems. According to the authors, the ending note can be an instrument that provides essential information about the writers to doctors, nurses, and social workers.

This paper extends the previous works on ending notes through a move analysis of the nursing and medical section. The medical and nursing section of ending notes refers mainly to topics regarding the last years of life, including nursing care in old age and medical care at the end of life. A move analysis of this section can shed light on the concerns of Japanese society regarding aging and death.

Method

The Method of Move Analysis

Move analysis is a tool for discourse analysis and writing instruction (Swales, 1990). Moves are important in genre analysis for two reasons. First, genres are distinguished by their moves. As Connor et al. (2007) point out, "while related genres will certainly share common move types, each will have their own unique structural characteristics that reflect the specific communicative functions that the genres have" (p. 29). Second, genres achieve their communicative purposes through the combination of their moves.

Moves possess certain characteristics. A move is not a grammatical unit but "a rhetorical unit that performs a coherent communicative function in a written or spoken discourse" (Swales, 2004, p. 228). Therefore, they have variable lengths. A move can be as short as a word or as long as several paragraphs. Moves also vary in frequency. According to their frequency, moves can be categorized as obligatory, found in all samples of the genre (100%), typical (60 to 99%), or optional (59% or less) (Connor et al., 2007). Some scholars also classify moves into two primary types: rhetorical moves and structural moves. Rhetorical moves serve rhetorical purposes within a text, whereas structural moves function as indicators, such as the titles and headings of a text (Yunxia, 2000). Moreover, although a move is not a grammatical unit, grammatical and lexical features can indicate a move's type or nature (Swales, 2004). The final constituent of a move is the step. Steps are considered the "sub-components of moves" (Hyon, 2017, p. 33). A move may have several steps, one or none. The combination of these steps enables a move to perform its action in the text (Connor et al., 2007). In other words, moves are often performed through the execution of singular or multiple steps. Therefore, move analysis investigates the moves and steps in a genre and their functions.

Data Collection

This study performed move analysis on the medical and nursing section of 15 ending notes. Ending notes were selected based on one criterion. They had to be recognized as ending notes by members of the *shūkatsu* community or publishers. Following the criteria described above, the goal of the data collection was to create a corpus that represented the variety of ending notes produced in the country. Thus, in the corpus are ending notes published by associations, funeral businesses, *shūkatsu* companies, city prefectures, NPOs, one-hundred-yen shops, and regular publishing companies. The ending notes were purchased in *shūkatsu*/ending note seminars, bookstores, Amazon, and one-hundred-yen shops or given to the researcher by the makers. The ending notes bought in bookstores were selected by popularity and selling rank. Only the most popular and sold ending notes were selected for the corpus.

Data Analysis

The move analysis for this study was conducted in five stages. Stage 1 identified the primary purposes of the section through careful reading. Stage 2 described the moves and steps of the medical and nursing section by analyzing four sample texts. Stage 3 applied the framework built in Stage 2 to the other ending notes in the corpus. Stage 4 revised all the moves, steps, and their description after analyzing all 15 ending notes. Stage 5 made changes to the description of the moves and steps according to new findings in Stage 4.

Findings

The move analysis conducted in this study revealed three primary purposes of the medical and nursing section of ending notes. These purposes assist writers not only in planning for the end of life but also educate them on actions and procedures necessary to achieve the desired end. The purposes and their obligatory and typical moves are presented according to their frequency in the 15 ending notes analyzed in Appendix 1.

Purpose One. To Guide Writers in Communicating their Thoughts and Wishes Concerning End of Life

Purpose, one helps writers communicate their thoughts, feelings, and choices concerning the end of life. The moves and steps in the purpose show the complexity of topics such as life-prolonging treatment, diagnosis disclosure, the idea of a good death, and organ donation in Japan. Move 4. Communicating decisions about end-of-life care is an example of how the topic of life-prolonging treatment is approached in ending notes. In this move, the writer is led to consider, make choices, and record their wishes about end-of-life care. This includes topics such as where the writer would like to spend their last days, hospice treatment, palliative care, gastrostomy, and medical treatment. The example below shows Step 2. Expressing one's decisions about life-prolonging treatment and Step 3. Expressing one's wishes about the place to spend one's last days of Move 4. Communicating decisions about end-of-life care.

Move 4. Communicating decisions about end-of-life care

About Life-Prolonging Treatment ※ Please check the box	Step 1. Indicating the topic to be considered
<input type="checkbox"/> If at all possible, I would like to receive life-prolonging treatment. <input type="checkbox"/> I do not wish to receive life-prolonging treatment if there is no chance of recovery. <input type="checkbox"/> Reducing pain is important for me. <input type="checkbox"/> Other	Step 2. Expressing one's decisions about life-prolonging treatment
About End-of-Life Care ※ Please check the box	Step 1. Indicating the topic to be considered
<input type="checkbox"/> I want to stay at home in a hospital. <input type="checkbox"/> I want to live in a hospice	<input type="checkbox"/> I want to receive nursing care <input type="checkbox"/> Other Step 3. Expressing one's wishes about the place to spend one's last days

Note. Adapted from page 11 of *Korekara maemuki ni egao de Komae-shi endingu nōto* [From now on, with a positive smile, Komae city ending note] (2017), Komae City Health and Welfare Department Elderly Disability Division translated by the author.

In summary, purpose one suggests control over one's dying as an "ideal" death. The moves and steps in the purpose lead writers to consider and communicate choices meant to provide them with a good death. This includes reducing pain, being with one's family at the end, and what should be done with their bodies after death.

Purpose Two. To Guide Writers in Communicating Their Thoughts and Wishes Regarding Aging and Care

Purpose two points to three interesting topics: caregivers, care location, and the conflict between being cared for as one wishes and trying not to be a burden. Regarding the topic of caregivers, Move 3. Communicating wishes about nursing care location and Move 4. Communicating wishes about caregivers show that ending notes see family, particularly spouses, as a strong option for caregivers. Also, the moves suggest a slight change from the traditional family-centered care for older people to the inclusion of professional help and outside services such as nursing homes and care managers.

Step 2. Expressing wishes about nursing care location in Move 3. Communicating wishes about nursing care location is an example of the connection between nursing services and family care in ending notes. In this step, writers choose where they would like to receive nursing care if/when it becomes necessary. Two formats are used in this step. Eleven out of the twelve ending notes that had this step used a multiple-choice format in which the writers choose the option that best suits them. Only

one ending note used a more open format where writers needed to write down the place where they wanted to receive nursing care. To the question about where the writer would like to receive nursing care, ending notes offered the following possible answers:

- (I would like to) enter a nursing home at my own will (11/12)
- I leave it to the family to decide (8/12)
- (I would like to) be cared for at home (8/12)
- Others (5/8)
- (I would like to) be cared for at home but receiving nursing services (3/12)
- (I would like to) be cared for at my children's home (3/12)
- (I would like to) be cared for at home but nursed by professional caregivers (2/12)
- (I would like to) be cared for at a family member's home (1/12)
- (I would like to) be cared for at home, nursed by family members (1/12)
- I haven't considered it yet (1/12)

Overall, purpose two points to the influence of family traditions in older people's care without forgetting to include new forms of care such as professional services and nursing homes. This trend is likely a consequence of longevity and a more gender-balanced society. First, when people live longer, they also need more years of care; secondly, research has shown that younger women in Japan are less willing to care for their husbands' parents (Jenike, 2003).

Purpose Three. To Guide Writers in the Writing Process and Uses of the Ending Note

Purpose three of the medical and nursing section focuses on giving instructions on completing the ending note and advising writers on other actions related to end-of-life planning. Move 1. Giving advice and recommending actions to be taken, for instance, advises writers on things they should do besides writing the ending note. This may include consulting with family members about end-of-life decisions, looking for a nursing home, or taking steps necessary for organ donation. The excerpt below is an example of Step 3. Advising on how to choose an elderly home and Step 1. Advising consulting with family members in Move 1. Giving advice and recommending actions to be taken.

There are two types of long-term care insurance services: home-based services and facility-based services. If you decide to use a service, contact the Regional Comprehensive Support Center, etc., and consult with family members and specialists to ensure that you use the service that best suits your needs.

Note. Adapted from page 13 of *Anshin nōto* [Peace of mind notebook] (2011), Mejirodai Anshin Net Committee, translated by the author.

As the quotation above shows, purpose three indicates the more educational purpose of ending notes. Although the goal is still to guide writers to a good end of life, the narrower objective is to educate writers about actions and things they may need to complete to achieve a good death.

Conclusion

The three purposes in the medical and nursing section of ending notes indicate the idea of control over the end of life as equating to a good ending. In Japan, a "good death" is defined as dying of old age (*rōsui*), without burdening others (*meiwaku*), free from pain (*yasuraka*), and at home (Long, 2005; 2013). This kind of death implies a certain degree of control from the dying person over the dying process. Such a death implies a degree of control by the individual over the dying process, aligning with Walter's (1994) concept of the Neomodern Death, where the dying person holds authority over the end-of-life process. This study's results reveal that ending notes' medical and nursing section facilitates such control by guiding individuals to make choices and document them in the ending note. These preferences are then carried out by family members and healthcare professionals to ensure the writer's

good death. In other words, ending notes allow Japanese seniors to exercise autonomy over the last years of life.

Contribution and Further Research

The study's findings offer insights into the tools and topics related to end-of-life planning in Japan, making original contributions to the fields of death studies and gerontology. Furthermore, analyzing the rhetorical purposes of ending notes provides an outlook on how Japan is facing the challenges of a super-aged society, which can potentially inspire approaches for other nations grappling with aging, mortality, and individual autonomy.

Lastly, a limitation of the present study is its scope. Ending Notes can have up to 27 different sections. However, the study only analyzed the ending notes' medical and nursing section. Therefore, further research should investigate other sections, such as graves, burials, or inheritance, to enhance our understanding of how this genre facilitates end-of-life planning.

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Appendix 1.

Moves and Steps in the Nursing and Medical Section of Ending Notes and their frequencies (n =15)

Purpose One. To Guide Writers in Communicating their Thoughts and Wishes Concerning End-of-Life	
Move 3. Communicating decisions about diagnosis disclosure	14
Step 1. Indicating the topic to be considered	13
Step 2. Expressing one's wishes about diagnosis disclosure to oneself	14
Step 3. Expressing one's decisions about diagnosis disclosure to others	2
Move 4. Communicating decisions about end-of-life care	14
Step 1. Indicating the topic to be considered	13
Step 2. Expressing one's decisions about life-prolonging treatment	14
Step 3. Expressing one's wishes about the place to spend one's last days	5
Step 4. Expressing one's wishes about hospice treatment	4
Step 5. Recording one's wishes concerning palliative care	3
Step 6. Expressing one's decisions about gastrostomy	1
Move 5. Communicating decisions about organ and body donation	11
Step 1. Indicating the topic to be considered	9
Step 2. Expressing one's decisions about organ and body donation	9
Step 3. Expressing one's decisions about organ donations according to the type of death	3
Move 6. Writing about other requests concerning death and dying.	9
Move 7. Writing about a surrogate decision maker	4
Step 1. Indicating the topic to be considered	4
Step 2. Recording the details	4
Purpose Two. To Guide Writers in Communicating Their Thoughts and Wishes Regarding Aging	
Move 3. Communicating wishes about nursing care location	12
Step 1. Indicating the topic to be considered	11
Step 2. Expressing wishes about nursing care location	12
Move 4. Communicating wishes about caregivers	11
Step 1. Indicating the topic to be considered	9
Step 2. Expressing wishes about caregivers	9
Step 3. Writing about care managers	2
Move 5. Communicating how costs for care should be managed	10
Step 1. Indicating the topic to be considered	9
Step 2. Expressing one's wishes regarding the cost of care	9
Purpose Three. To Guide Writers in the Writing Process and Uses of the Ending Note	
Move 1. Giving advice and recommending actions to be taken	9
Step 1. Advising consulting with family members	7
Step 2. Advising on guardianship and decision-makers	2
Step 3. Advising on how to choose an elderly home	2
Step 4. Recommending actions to guarantee organ donation	1
Step 5. Advising on how to choose a care manager	1
Move 2. Convincing writers to write the medical and nursing section	8
Step 1. Explaining why it is important to write certain information	6
Step 2. Encouraging writers to write the section	4
Step 3. Explaining the topic of the section or page	2
Move 3. Suggesting the writing process and other uses for the ending note	8
Step 1. Advising on how to write the section	6
Step 2. Directing writers to other pages in the ending note	3
Step 3. Pointing out limitations on the choices about organ and body donation	2

The Challenges of Bilingual Education Practice through the Digital Bilingual Education Platform

Ching-Ying Lin Ed.D.

Department of Applied English, National Pingtung University, Taiwan

Abstract

This study undertakes a thorough investigation into the effects of the Ministry of Education's "digital bilingual education platform" on language learning achievement and preferences among elementary school students in Taiwan. The ten-week study involved eighty-seven participants from four cities, with a specific focus on Indigenous languages, Hakka, and English. The primary objectives were to assess the impact of the digital bilingual education platform on language learning outcomes and to explore students' preferences and perceptions regarding its implementation. The study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of language learning achievements with qualitative exploration of participant experiences and perceptions. The findings revealed statistically significant improvements in language learning achievements across the majority of participants following their engagement with the digital bilingual education platform. Participants expressed overwhelmingly positive perceptions regarding the platform's effectiveness in facilitating language acquisition. The implications of the study extend beyond the immediate findings, emphasizing the crucial role of self-reflection for language instructors in adapting and optimizing digital bilingual education tools. The positive outcomes underscore the potential benefits of incorporating technology into language education, especially in the context of Indigenous languages, Hakka, and English. This study aims to contribute to the formulation of informed government policies, specifically in the realm of bilingual education programs, advocating for the integration of digital platforms to enhance learning outcomes and foster positive attitudes towards language acquisition. Pedagogical implications derived from this research highlight the need for educators to adapt their instructional methods to capitalize on the advantages offered by digital bilingual education platforms. Acknowledging its limitations, the study paves the way for future research to address these gaps and build upon the current findings. By exploring the impact of the digital bilingual education platform, this doctoral dissertation significantly contributes to our understanding of effective language learning strategies. The insights gained have the potential to inform educational policies supporting bilingual education initiatives, ultimately enhancing language learning outcomes for elementary school students in Taiwan. The study concludes with a call for continued investigation into the integration of technology in language education and its broader implications for the field.

Keywords: *bilingual education, language learning, the digital platform, online learning*

Introduction

The Taiwanese government has introduced the "Bilingual 2030 policy," aiming to enhance the English proficiency of Taiwan's youth to bolster their competitiveness for a brighter future (NDC, 2021). Simultaneously, the global COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted various industries worldwide. Amid the pandemic, online language learning emerged as a viable solution to adapt to the imposed restrictions. In response to these initiatives and challenges, the researcher actively participated in the digital bilingual learning project starting in 2022. The project's team collaboratively established "the digital bilingual education platform," as illustrated in Figure 1.

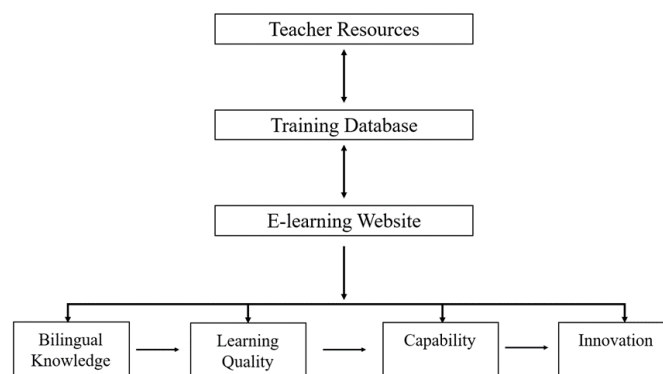


Fig. 1. The digital bilingual education platform

The digital bilingual education platform offered numerous advantages, benefiting both instructors and learners. Leveraging teacher resources, a training database, and an E-learning website, both educators and learners could enhance their bilingual knowledge, learning quality, capabilities, and innovation. The primary objective of the study was to investigate the impact of language learning achievement and preferences through the utilization of the "digital bilingual education platform" established by the Ministry of Education (MOE). The study sought answers to the following research questions:

- (1) What is the effect of language learning achievement through the bilingual education practice by the digital bilingual education platform?
- (2) What is the elementary school students' language learning preferences through the bilingual education practice by the digital bilingual education platform?

Literature review

The contemporary method of language learning and teaching, known as e-learning, has garnered increased attention, as underscored by Alqahtani and Rajkhan (2020). The growing interest and acknowledgment of e-learning as a modern pedagogical approach signify its effectiveness in the field. Furthermore, Alakrash and Razak (2021) highlight that the successful integration of digital technologies into language learning hinges on two pivotal factors: fostering positive attitudes towards technology and cultivating proficient digital literacy skills. These factors are crucial for the optimal utilization of digital tools, ultimately contributing to enhanced language learning outcomes. Oke and Fernandes (2020) underscore the pivotal role of fostering a positive and collaborative classroom environment to facilitate the successful integration of technology. They emphasize the significance of establishing mutual understanding among participants to embrace technology and reshape the learning atmosphere. The effectiveness of technology integration in the classroom is also significantly influenced by students' skills, attitudes, willingness, and motivation. Rababah (2020) points out that educational institutions worldwide are actively taking measures to reshape English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in response to evolving educational trends. The current emphasis is on nurturing student autonomy and independence to facilitate knowledge acquisition, moving away from conventional approaches like the grammar translation method.

Moreover, Alakrash and Razak (2021) emphasize the significance of students possessing sufficient data and digital literacy skills in today's educational landscape. Progressions in technologies such as big data, mobile computing, social networks, and cloud technology present opportunities for creating adaptable learning environments that facilitate self-directed learning at any time and location. Teachers can integrate digital platforms into their classes by employing Instagram photos and videos as writing prompts, as validated by the study conducted by Alfaki and Alharthy (2014). The incorporation of social websites in English classes demonstrated greater efficacy in enhancing language proficiency, as learners found it comfortable to engage with these resources.

Carmean and Haefner (2002) conducted research highlighting the impact of technology integration, particularly through online social networks, on second language learning. These platforms contribute to creating a social and enjoyable atmosphere, enhancing student confidence and engagement. Multi-

sensory experiences, online discussions, and information searches further support implicit skill acquisition. Jena (2022) emphasizes the role of digital platforms as networks that provide students with an efficient and interactive learning environment. These platforms encompass a diverse set of tools, including videos, discussion forums, chat forums, assignments, and quizzes, facilitating and supporting students in their learning processes. According to Chen and Wang (2020), digital platforms create an educational environment conducive to group thinking and collaborative learning. They aid teachers in efficiently organizing learning activities and planning lessons. Additionally, these platforms play a crucial role in promoting learners' well-being, improving self-regulated learning, and enhancing motivation, thereby elevating the overall learning experience.

Methodology

A total of eighty-seven elementary school students from Taiwan participated voluntarily in the current study. These students were selected from four different cities, namely Tainan, Kaohsiung, Pingtung, and Taitung, ranging from Grade 3rd to Grade 5th. The study involved the completion of one questionnaire on language learning preferences, one pretest, and one posttest. The language instructions covered Indigenous languages, Hakka, and English, with all courses delivered through the digital bilingual education platform. The participants engaged in the courses for a duration of ten weeks. During the first week, all participants completed a pretest assessing language comprehension. In the final week, participants took a posttest on language comprehension and filled out the questionnaire on language learning preferences. SPSS was utilized to analyze all quantitative data collected in the study.

Findings and discussions

The initial research question aimed to investigate the impact of the digital bilingual education platform on language learning achievements among elementary school students in Taiwan. Comparisons of pretest and posttest scores were depicted in Figures 2 and 3. Specifically, schools A and B participated in the Indigenous language courses. In the pretest phase, the pass rate for School A was 26.72% (see Fig. 2), and in the posttest phase, it increased to 34.35% (see Fig. 2). For School B, the pretest pass rate was 60.5% (Fig. 2), and in the posttest phase, it rose to 66% (Fig. 2). School C participated in the Hakka courses, with a pretest pass rate of 60% (Fig. 2) and a posttest pass rate of 93.33% (Fig. 2).

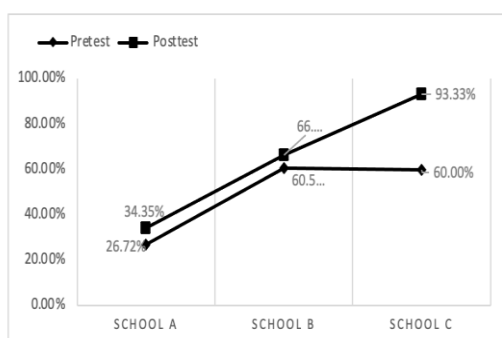


Fig. 2.

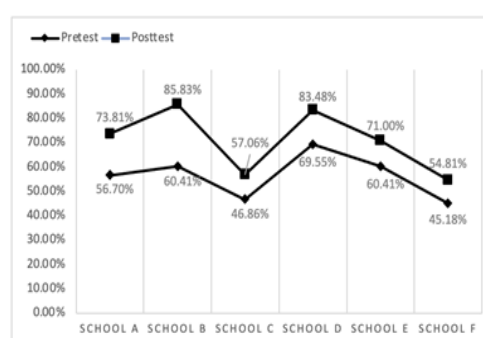


Fig.3.

Six schools participated in the English courses, and the pretest pass rates and posttest pass rates for each school are presented in Figure 3. For School A, the pretest pass rate was 56.7%, and in the posttest phase, it increased to 73.81%. School B had a pretest pass rate of 60.41%, which improved to 85.83% in the posttest phase. In the pretest, School C had a pass rate of 46.86%, and in the posttest, it increased to 57.06%. School D's pretest pass rate was 69.55%, and in the posttest, it rose to 83.48%. School E had a pretest pass rate of 60.41%, and in the posttest, it reached 71%. Lastly, School F started with a pretest pass rate of 45.18%, which increased to 54.81% in the posttest phase (Fig. 3).

TABLE 1. Progress rate of different languages

Types of Language	Progress rate
Indigenous Language	6.82%
Hakka	33.33%
English	14.47%

Participants in Indigenous language, Hakka, and English courses demonstrated significant progress in language achievements. The progress rate for Indigenous language, Hakka, and English was uniformly 6.82% (see Table 1).

The second research question aimed to investigate elementary school students' language learning preferences through the bilingual education practices facilitated by the digital bilingual education platform. Analyzing the feedback from Indigenous language groups (as indicated in Table 2), three main areas of student interest emerged: Indigenous Education, Disaster Prevention Education, and Safety Education. The data reveal a clear preference among students for content that directly connects to their daily lives. This underscores their strong inclination towards practical and applicable knowledge in these specific domains, underscoring the significance of integrating relevant and culturally responsive material into their education.

TABLE 2. Indigenous language

Item	Course	Mean	Rank
1.	Multicultural Education	4.3	6
2.	Family Education	4.4	5
3.	Life Education	4.2	7
4.	Gender Equality Education	4.2	7
5.	Indigenous Education	4.9	1
6.	Safety Education A	4.7	4
7.	Environment Education A	4.0	10
8.	Environment Education B	4.1	9
9.	Safety Education B	4.8	3
10.	Disaster Prevention Education	4.9	1

Based on the feedback obtained from Hakka language groups (as depicted in Table 3), students primarily expressed interest in Environment Education A, Environment Education B, and Environment Education C. This suggests a notable preference among students for content centered around environmental topics. Their interest underscores a desire for practical and pertinent knowledge in these domains, emphasizing the significance of integrating environmental education into their curriculum.

TABLE 3. Hakka

Item	Course	Mean	Rank
1.	Multicultural Education A	4.0	10
2.	Multicultural Education B	4.3	8
3.	Gender Equality Education A	4.3	8
4.	Gender Equality Education B	4.8	5
5.	Family Education	4.6	6
6.	Environment Education A	5	1
7.	Environment Education B	5	1
8.	Environment Education C	5	1
9.	Outdoor Education	4.5	7

10.	Safety Education	4.9	4
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The feedback collected from English language groups (as illustrated in Table 4) indicates that the primary areas of interest for students include International Education, Career Planning Education, and Family Education. This suggests that students are particularly attracted to content that holds relevance to their daily lives. Their interest in these specific areas underscores a desire for practical and applicable knowledge that can be directly applied to their personal and professional lives. Integrating these topics into their education has the potential to boost student engagement and contribute to overall improved learning outcomes.

TABLE 4. English

Item	Course	Mean	Rank
1.	Literacy Education A	4.1	10
2.	Environment Education A	4.6	4
3.	Environment Education B	4.6	4
4.	Family Education	4.7	3
5.	Multicultural Education	4.2	9
6.	Career Planning Education	4.8	2
7.	Literacy Education B	4.5	7
8.	Life Education A	4.5	7
9.	International Education	4.9	1
10.	Life Education B	4.6	4

Conclusion

This research study holds significant relevance in the realm of technology-based language learning and teaching. Its findings offer valuable insights that can assist policymakers, teachers, and students in addressing the challenges presented by the contemporary educational landscape. By illuminating the utilization of digital platforms in English language learning, the study addresses a crucial knowledge gap and emphasizes the necessity for self-reflection among language instructors. Furthermore, the study convincingly illustrates the significant advantages linked to the adoption of digital bilingual education platforms. Its aim is to provide insights for shaping government policies and guiding future research in this domain. The contributions of the study go beyond the immediate findings, contributing to the evolution of language learning strategies and the adept integration of technology in language education. Through highlighting the potential for enhanced language learning outcomes, the research has the potential to bolster support for bilingual education initiatives. In conclusion, the insights derived from this study have the potential to enrich language learning experiences and provide valuable guidance for educational policies promoting the integration of technology. By underscoring the advantages of digital platforms, the study advocates for continued exploration of their incorporation in language education, fostering a more dynamic and effective learning environment.

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