

A Study of the Effect of Three Different Types of Feedback on Writing: Part 1 - Research Questions, Participants, Site, Materials, and Procedures

By
Peter Duppenthaler

Introduction

This is the first of a three-part series describing a one-year study involving the use of journals with a group of 99 second-year students at a Japanese girls' high school. As we shall see, the students in the study are very similar in both ability level and background to those at our school, and therefore the findings should be applicable to our students. In Part 1 I will include a brief introduction, the research questions, and information on the participants, site, materials, and procedures used in the study. Part 2 will be devoted to an analysis of the data. Part 3 will include a discussion of the findings, suggestions for further study, and conclusions. I will omit a detailed overview of the literature on the use of journals in academic settings as this topic has already been covered in Duppenthaler (2002a & 2002b). Interested readers may refer to these articles.

The study investigated the effect of three different types of teacher feedback on students' journal entries, and possible positive transfer effects on their in-class compositions. The three types of feedback were (a) meaning-focused feedback, (b) positive comments, and (c) error-focused feedback (see below for details). The major purpose of the analysis was to determine if there were significant group differences among the three treatment groups. This was done by using a linear combination of eight dependent variables to maximize mean group differences if they in fact existed. The eight variables were: number of words, number of clauses, number of error-free clauses, Flesch-Kincaid Readability Index, and four vocabulary indices. The independent variable was treatment group assignment with three levels (i.e., types of feedback). For more on feedback see Duppenthaler (2001a & 2001b). Clauses were used as a measure of quality because in her study of the writing of two groups of low-proficiency English language students in Japan, Ishikawa (1995) found that clauses rather than T-units, "best quantify the overall quality of each individual [writing] sample" (p. 68).

A review of the literature indicated that meaning-focused feedback might have been

expected to be more effective than the other two types. For example, Kepner (1991) reported that while error correction in journals did not result in any significant improvement in students' written accuracy, a "message related comment," type of written feedback was "significantly related to the production of higher-level writing in college intermediate-level L2 student journals" (p. 311).

However, much of the literature supporting the idea of meaning-focused feedback as the most effective type of teacher feedback is impressionistic. In addition, the empirical studies which do attempted to document "improvement" over time, such as the acquisition of morphemes (Kreeft, 1984; Staton, 1988; Peyton, 1990) often depend on very small sample sizes; these three, year-long studies included only five, 26, and five students respectively. Later studies using larger sample sizes, such as Minjong (1997), were for shorter periods of time, often ranging from ten to 12 weeks at most.

Although some researchers (Semke, 1984; Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986; Aly, 1992) reported little positive value for error correction, many students seem to prefer it (see for example Cathcart & Olsen, 1976; Radecki & Swales, 1988; Harrison, 1993; Timson, Grow & Matsuoka, 1999). It was therefore felt that error-focused feedback might be viewed positively by students, and that this might lead to increased motivation.

Finally, it was felt that positive comments should be included as one of the treatment types because informal discussions with teachers in Japanese high schools in the Kansai area who had used journals indicated that this was a common, if not the most common, type of feedback.

A review of the literature also indicated that there had been few studies on the effect of feedback in journals in Japan. In addition, most of the attempts to document the effect of journals on improvement or acquisition of language had been carried out in college and university settings; with only one study (Harrison, 1993) involving an intact class having been carried out in a Japanese coeducational high school. Even though this study pointed out the importance of feedback in journal writing, it made no attempt to document either the effect of feedback or any improvement in the students' writing. It simply reported the teacher's belief in the effectiveness of journal writing.

The study I carried out built on the existing body of research on journals in educational settings. It extended it in four ways: (a) by using journals as a means of delivering different types of feedback and investigating the relative extent of improvement these types of feedback resulted in, (b) by carrying it out in a new environment (i.e., a Japanese girls' high

school), (c) by using a relatively large sample size of 99 students, and (d) by providing treatment for an entire academic year.

Research Questions

As stated above, the purpose of the study was to investigate which of three types of teacher feedback was the most effective in improving (defined below) students' writing in their journal entries and in the students' in-class compositions (i.e., if there was a positive transfer effect of the treatment provided in the journals on in-class writing).

The three types of feedback given in the students' journals were (a) meaning-focused feedback (often referred to as "dialogue journals") in which I engaged in an ongoing, interactive dialog with the participants, commenting on the content of each journal entry, and asking for additional information and clarification (For example, when a student wrote about a movie she had been to, I would comment on the movie if I had seen it, and ask what she had liked best about it and where she had seen it. If I had not seen the movie I would ask for more details about the story and how to get to the movie theater.); (b) positive comments, in which I did not engage in an ongoing, interactive dialog but only responded with short positive comments on some but not all of the entries with phrases such as "well done," "that was an interesting story," and so on (the short comments on selected entries were provided in order to ensure that, as in the case of the other two treatment groups, the students were certain that their entries were being read); and (c) error-focused feedback in which I neither engaged in an ongoing interactive dialog nor provided positive comments but only corrected all errors in the participants' journal entries, in red, with no revision required on the part of the participants.

Participants were divided into three treatment groups based on the three types of feedback. Due to the request of the school where this study was carried out, it was impossible to have a true control group, one in which participants wrote journals but received no feedback.

"Improvement" was operationalized as a significant increase over time in (a) quantity, as measured by the number of words per entry; (b) accuracy, as measured by the number of error-free clauses per entry; and in three measures of (c) quality, the number of clauses per entry, readability, as measured by the Flesch-Kincaid Readability Index, and vocabulary, as

measured by four vocabulary indices generated by Nation's VocabProfile computer program (sometimes called the LFP [Lexical Frequency Profile]).

The VocabProfile computer program is used to compare a text against vocabulary lists to see what words in the text are or are not in the lists, and to see what percentages of the items in the text are covered by the lists. The program uses four lists: Token%1, Token%2, Token%3, and TokenNot. Token%1 is the percent of words in the sample that are found in the list of the first 1000 most frequently used word in English. Token%2 is the percent of words in the sample that are found in the list of the second 1000 most frequently used word in English. Token%3 is the percent of words in the sample that are frequently found in upper secondary school and university texts from a wide range of subjects. The last list is TokenNot which is the percent of words in the sample not found in any of the other three lists.

In this study, improvement in vocabulary was operationalized as a significantly greater use of Token%2 and Token%3 vocabulary. This was based on the assumptions that (a) Token%1 would be the preexisting working vocabulary of all three groups; and (b) that TokenNot vocabulary, words that are frequent in upper secondary school and university texts, would be words that the students would need to look up in their dictionaries and would not be part of their working vocabulary.

The three research questions of this study and their associated hypotheses were:
Research Question 1: Do students who receive meaning-focused feedback show a greater degree of improvement over time in their journal entries than students who receive either positive comments or error-focused feedback?

Hypothesis 1: The number of words per journal entry over time will be significantly higher in the group which receives meaning-focused feedback.

Hypothesis 2: The number of error-free clauses per journal entry over time will be significantly higher in the group which receives meaning-focused feedback.

Hypothesis 3: The number of clauses per journal entry over time will be significantly higher in the group which receives meaning-focused feedback.

Hypothesis 4: The Flesch-Kincaid Readability Index per journal entry over time will be significantly higher in the group which receives meaning-focused feedback.

Hypothesis 5: The use of Token%2 and Token%3 vocabulary per journal entry over time will be significantly higher in the group which receives meaning-focused feedback.

Research Question 2: Do students who receive meaning-focused feedback show a greater degree of improvement over time in their in-class writing samples than students who receive either positive comments or error-focused feedback?

Hypothesis 1: The number of words per in-class composition over time will be significantly higher in the group which receives meaning-focused feedback.

Hypothesis 2: The number of error-free clauses per in-class composition over time will be significantly higher in the group which receives meaning-focused feedback.

Hypothesis 3: The number of clauses per in-class composition over time will be significantly higher in the group which receives meaning-focused feedback.

Hypothesis 4: The Flesch-Kincaid readability index per in-class composition over time will be significantly higher in the group which receives meaning-focused feedback.

Hypothesis 5: The use of Token%2 and Token%3 vocabulary per in-class composition over time will be significantly higher in the group which receives meaning-focused feedback.

Research Question 3: Do students who receive meaning-focused feedback show a greater degree of positive motivation than students who receive either positive comments or error-focused feedback?

Hypothesis: The degree of motivation, as measured by a posttreatment questionnaire, will be highest in the group which receives meaning-focused feedback.

Site

An Overview of Saint Mary's School

The School

Saint Mary's (a fictitious name) is a mid-sized, Catholic, girl's school in the Kansai area. It was established by an order of French, Catholic, teaching sisters approximately 75 years ago. Its goal at that time was to provide educational opportunities and religious training to children and young women in Japan. At present, it is a government accredited Gakuen (educational institution) encompassing kindergarten through junior college. Although there are only a few sisters in the school at present, the educational goals and philosophy of the

school have remained unchanged since its founding. The stated educational philosophy of Saint Mary's is "Through Catholicism and religious training to educate and bring up women of purity and obedience" (Saint Mary's informational brochure). When I asked what "purity and obedience" meant in this case, I was told that it meant "purity of heart and mind, and obedience to God" (Mr. S., personal communication, March 20, 1998).

There are still a number of similar educational institutions in Japan. Although there has been a growing trend toward coeducational education since the war, many private girls' schools remain. Most of these began as religious schools. However, with the decline in the number of religious teaching staff, the number of lay teachers has increased in religious schools. As mentioned above, there are only a few sisters at Saint Mary's today and none of them is directly involved in teaching. Although the school's founding philosophy has remained unchanged the majority of the teachers in the English Department at Saint Mary's feel that their job "is to teach so students will pass the [college] entrance exams" (Mr. S., personal communication, March 20, 1998). This is no different from other high schools in Japan.

The general emphasis of the English program at Saint Mary's High School is "almost equally divided between the four skills [i.e., reading, writing, speaking, and listening] but a little heavier on reading and writing because of the [college] entrance exam" (Mr. S., personal communication, March 20, 1998). In general, the school leaves the English language curriculum development and implementation up to the teachers in the English Department. English is a required subject at the school from junior high school through high school, and, according to the present head of the English Department, "students just can't avoid it. It's a mandatory subject. Like it or not they have to study English" (Mr. S., personal communication, March 20, 1998). The majority of the students' parents agree with the teachers in the English Department - the purpose of studying English is to pass college entrance exams; however, "some want more emphasis on oral English but after all, they all want their kids to go on to famous colleges and universities" (Mr. S., personal communication, March 20, 1998).

From the above we can see that at least as far as the English Department is concerned, Saint Mary's is a fairly typical Japanese high school. Teachers consider their main job to be to prepare students for college entrance exams and the majority of the parents agree with the teachers. Even though, due to the decline in the birth rate, there are now more spaces at colleges and universities than applicants, there is still competition to enter top-ranking colleges and universities; any high school whose students can enter such universities will have fewer problems in attracting potential students and thus a greater chance of sur-

vival. This opinion is commonly held by Japanese high school teachers with whom I have had discussions.

The Teachers

There are ten full-time teachers, all Japanese, and eight part-time teachers (six Japanese, one American and one Canadian) working in the English Department at Saint Mary's High School. All of the full-time teachers have BAs from Japanese universities and Japanese high school teaching credentials. In addition, one of them holds a master's degree in TESOL from an American college. All of the Japanese teachers of English have traveled abroad, but only one of them, the present head of the department, has lived abroad for any length of time. The teachers' ages range from the early twenties to the early fifties.

There were four full-time teachers who were responsible for the second year students involved in this study. In addition to their regular duties, these teachers were responsible for seeing that the students turned in their journals on Friday and for making sure the students picked up their journals on the following Monday. Teacher A, (Japanese, male, in his early 30s, with 7-8 years of high school teaching experience) was responsible for the required reading class. Teacher B, (Japanese, male, in his early 40s, with 15-20 years of high school teaching experience) was responsible for the required writing class. All of the second year students involved in this study met with teachers A and B once each week. These two teachers were responsible for administering the questionnaires given at the beginning and end of the treatment period, and the three in-class writing assignments given at the beginning, middle and end of the treatment period.

In addition to teachers A and B, one full-time English teacher, teacher C, (Japanese, male, in his early 50s, with 22 years of high school teaching experience) helped to coordinate, and administer the in-class writing samples and questionnaires. He did not teach the students and did not have any contact with them except for the aforementioned activities. The elective drill class was taught by a full-time teacher, teacher D, (Japanese, female, 27 years old, with 3-4 years of high school teaching experience), and the elective oral English class was taught by a part-time, native-speaker of English, teacher E, (American, female, in her mid 30s, with 12 years of high school teaching experience, all at Saint Mary's, MA in TESOL in progress). The majority of the students in the English program elect to take the drill class and, mainly due to scheduling problems, only about 20 or so students elect to take the oral

English class. With regard to the three groups of students involved in this study, five or six in each of the three different treatment groups elected to take the drill class and only one or two in each treatment group elected to take the oral English class.

The Students

The vast majority of the students at Saint Mary's are from middle- or upper-middle-class families. One hundred percent of the students who graduate from Saint Mary's High School go on to higher education. Most graduates decide to major in liberal arts but a few major in science. Approximately 65% of the graduating seniors go on to attend four-year colleges and universities in Japan, with approximately 30% electing to attend junior colleges, and the remainder electing to attend senmongakko (vocational schools) in order to become nurses, dental technicians, pharmacists, and so on. Although the students go on to higher education, according to my informant, who has had more than 20 years of experience at the school, "the students are not as serious as the teachers are. They want to have a good time in high school" (Mr. S., personal communication, March 20, 1998).

The Parents

Most of the parents are college graduates. According to my informant, in the past the tuition at Saint Mary's was rather high and only wealthy families could afford to send their daughters to the school. Nowadays, although the tuition is by no means low, many more families are able to afford the tuition and, as a result, the socio-economic background of both the students and the parents is much more diverse than it was even a few years ago. Today, the vast majority of the parents expect that their daughters will go on to higher education. Although some parents express a desire for their daughters to have a variety of educational experiences during high school, again, according to my informant, "after all they [parents] want their kids to go on to famous colleges and universities" (Mr. S., personal communication, March 20, 1998).

The English Program at Saint Mary's School

Junior High School English Language Program

During all three years of junior high school, students are required to take five hours of English a week. In this case, "English" means classes in reading and writing taught by Japanese English teachers using mainly the grammar-translation method. In addition to these classes, all of the students are required to take one hour a week of oral English with a native-speaker of English (either the Canadian man or the American woman), and one hour a week of French taught by a Japanese teacher. There are approximately 180 students in each year. The students are not streamed during junior high school. At the beginning of each year, they are alphabetically assigned to classes according to family name.

The school has one language laboratory which is reserved for oral English classes. The students do not use computers or the Internet in school. Teachers, except for those teaching oral English classes, rarely use outside material in their classes. Textbooks are selected from those approved by the Mombusho (Japanese Ministry of Education). Clauses, which were used as one of the three measures of quality in this study, are first introduced in the second year of junior high school.

High School English Language Program

First Year

As in the case of most private educational institutions in Japan, almost all of the students who attend Saint Mary's Junior High School go on to the attached high school. In fact, only about ten percent of students in Saint Mary's High School (total enrollment of approximately 540 students) had not attended Saint Mary's Junior High School. As in the junior high school, there are approximately 180 students in each of the three years of high school. However, unlike the junior high school, high school students are streamed based on their high school entrance examination scores. Saint Mary's entrance exam is an in-house exam created and administered by the school. It is a two-hour, multiple-choice exam including mathematics, history, and English. The English section of the entrance exam includes questions on grammar and vocabulary, and short reading passages followed by comprehension questions. New

entrance exams are created each year following the same basic pattern as the previous year. Although no formal statistical analysis (e.g., reliability) of these entrance exams is carried out, the teachers who are responsible for the entrance exam have had a number of years of teaching experience and are quite familiar with the type of material that the students are expected to have mastered in junior high school, as well as the background of the students who regularly sit for the school's entrance exam.

In the first year of high school, all students are required to take four hours of reading and two hours of writing for a total of six hours of English each week. These classes are taught by Japanese teachers of English and are devoted to teaching translation, reading and writing, and vocabulary building. The main focus of the first year is on developing the students' general English. There are no elective classes during the first year. As mentioned above, students are streamed. The approximately 180 students are divided into a higher (two classes of approximately 35 each) and lower level (three classes of approximately 35 each) based on their scores on the entrance exam. Once the cutoff point has been decided, students are assigned to either the higher or lower level and then alphabetically assigned to individual classes.

Second Year

During the break between the first and second year, teachers again stream the students with an eye toward their possible success on college entrance exams for either higher- or lower-ranked colleges and universities. This time, students are divided into three levels: one higher-level class, one middle-level class and three lower-level classes based on their performance during their first year. The students in the lower three levels are then assigned to classes on the basis of alphabetical order.

All of the students are required to take seven hours a week of English (five hours of reading and two hours of writing) during the second year of high school. This is the year in which students begin their intensive preparation for college entrance exams. All of the required English classes, as well as their other academic classes, are geared toward preparing the students for these college entrance exams.

In addition to the seven hours of required English classes, there are two, two-hour per week, elective English classes: Oral English and English Entrance Examination Drill. Oral English is taught by one of the two native-speakers of English, and the drill class is

taught by a Japanese English teacher. The drill class is devoted to teaching "what the students will need to pass college entrance exams" (Mr. S., personal communication, March 20, 1998). It is strictly a test preparation type of class. Students are taught test taking strategies and work through sample entrance examination questions. Out of the roughly 180 students in the second year, approximately 50 students elect to take the drill class each year and 15 to 20 sign up for the oral class. According to my informant, "Most [students] don't take OE [Oral English] because it conflicts with history class, or math, or some other required subject" (Mr. S., personal communication, March 20, 1998). Except for their elective classes, all of the second-year students have the same teachers.

Third year

At the beginning of the third year, students are again divided into three levels based on their previous year's work. Third year students are required to take five hours of required English classes (three hours of reading and two hours of writing). In addition to the five hours of required English classes, there are three elective English classes: Reading (two hours per week), Oral English (two hours per week), and English Entrance Examination Drill (three hours per week). Both the reading class and the drill class are taught by Japanese English teachers, and are designed to provide additional practice in material that may appear on college entrance exams. Oral English is taught by one of the native-speakers of English part-time teachers, and is designed to "provide opportunities to engage in various activities to foster oral communication" (Mr. S., personal communication, March 20, 1998). As in the second year, the majority of the students take the drill class, followed by reading, and finally oral English.

School Activities Designed to Encourage an Interest in Foreign Languages

The English Program at Saint Mary's High School has a number of activities designed to increase students' interest in foreign languages. Its ESS (English Speaking Society) club has a regular membership of about 15 students divided fairly evenly among first, second, and third year students. The club meets twice a week after school and the members enjoy watching movies and playing games such as bingo and scrabble. There is a school-wide recitation contest for junior high school students but none for those in high

school. Instead, from time to time high school students are encouraged to write essays and make speeches in class, and the better of these are selected to take part in essay and speech contests held outside the school, usually in the Kansai district, three or four times a year. There are no foreign exchange students at Saint Mary's, and only a very few of the students have pen pals.

The school offers an annual three-and-a-half week Summer Study Abroad program at a small liberal arts college in Vermont. Students live in the college dormitory except for a three-day home stay with an American family in the area. Students study English for three hours in the morning five days a week. The classes are taught by staff hired for the program by the college. In the afternoon, students often go on field trips with their teachers or shop in the local town. Approximately twenty students a year take part in this program. Students are accompanied by one of the Japanese English teachers from Saint Mary's.

It should be noted that in addition to English, students are required to take French in both the junior and senior high school at Saint Mary's. The school offers a "Travel Abroad" program to southern France every summer. This is a two-week program with an emphasis on "cultural exchange." It does not include language classes; however, students live with French families during the entire time, and visit religious and cultural sites in the area. Students are accompanied by one of the Japanese French teachers at Saint Mary's.

Participants

As mentioned above, all second-year students are divided into one higher-level class, one middle-level class, and three lower-level classes based on their performance during their first year of high school. The students in the three lower-level classes are assigned to individual classes on the basis of alphabetical order.

The 99 participants in this study consisted of the students in the three lower-level classes. Second year students were selected because the teachers at the school felt that second-year students had enough English and enough time to be able to write a journal in English. In fact, they felt that this was the only year that it was possible for the students to do it - first-year students were either too busy getting used to school or did not have enough English to be able to write a journal in English, and third-year students were either too busy preparing for entrance exams or under too much pressure worrying about taking

them. In addition, the lower-level students were selected because they constituted the largest group of students at one ability level. The teachers were also less willing to involve higher-level students in anything that might "distract" them from their main task of preparing for college entrance exams. In short, through a process of mutual give and take it was decided to limit those who would take part in the study to the 99 second-year students in the three lower-level classes.

In order to guard against any pretreatment ability differences among the three classes, the participants were given a cloze test during the first week of school and blocked into three treatment groups of 33 students each, based on their scores on the cloze test.

An in-class writing sample collected during the second week of school indicated that there were no significant differences among the three treatment groups. In addition, a pre-treatment questionnaire dealing with the students' "language history," administered during the second week of school, also indicated that there were no significant differences among the three treatment groups.

Materials

Note: Due to space limitations, samples of the materials are not included here. Interested readers can see them in Duppenenthaler (2002c)

Notebooks

Each student was provided with one KOKUYO brand, 33-line per page, B5 size, bound notebook in which to keep her journal. The journals were color coded by intact class rather than treatment group in order to help facilitate the collection and return of the notebooks.

Recording Form

A one-page form was attached to the inside front cover of each notebook. The form included spaces for the participant's name and student identification number, and space for the date of each entry and the number of words per entry.

Information Sheet in Japanese on How to Keep a Journal and Suggested Topics

The information sheet consisted of three sheets of A4 paper. It was in Japanese and contained a brief description of a journal, how it worked, and sample topics. All of this information was presented in the form of a series of questions and answers, and was adapted from a similar form and information found in the Introduction and Unit One of Pen Plus Paper (see Jackson, 1993). The question and answer format was used because both the teachers at the school and I felt that the students would find this type of format to be enjoyable and that this would increase the students' interest in the topic.

Cloze Test

The Japanese English teachers at the school and one American consultant with six years of teaching experience at the school were asked to select a passage from a commercially available textbook for second-year high school students that had not been used at Saint Mary's. This was to ensure that none of the students would have seen the passage before. The teachers and the consultant were asked to select a passage which they felt would be challenging but not too difficult for the majority of the students.

The teachers suggested using a multiple-choice format for the cloze test as they felt that this would help to ensure that all of the students would be able to finish the test within the time limit. An additional advantage to using a multiple-choice format was the ability to machine score the tests which meant that I would be able to quickly complete the analysis and block the students into treatment groups.

A 40-item, multiple-choice cloze test with four options (a, b, c, d) for each item, was developed using the selected passage and submitted to the teachers and the consultant for review. A final version, incorporating their suggestions, was approved by them. Due to time constraints, there was no time to pilot the cloze test. However, it was felt that the teachers' and consultant's combined years of teaching experience at the school and familiarity with the particular type of students involved in the study would have a very positive effect on the reliability of the test (this will be discussed in more detail in Part 2).

Bilingual Pretreatment Questionnaire

A bilingual pretreatment questionnaire was developed by the author in consultation with the Japanese English teachers at the school and the American consultant. The final version consisted of 10 questions designed to determine the students' language history (i.e., familiarity with/and exposure to English outside of their regular classes). It was used to check for any pretreatment differences among treatment groups.

Bilingual Posttreatment Questionnaire

A bilingual posttreatment questionnaire was also developed by the author in consultation with the group mentioned above. The final version consisted of 20 questions. The first 10 questions were exactly the same as those in the pretreatment questionnaire and were used to check for any differences among treatment groups that might have occurred during the year. Questions 11 through 20 were designed to find out how the students had felt about keeping a journal, and to see if the experience had resulted in any motivational differences among treatment groups. Question 20 also included space for comments by the students.

Three In-class Writing Sheets

Fifteen in-class writing sheets were developed. Each sheet included a simple set of instructions in English, a four-frame picture sequence which the students were to use as the basis of a 200-250 word story, the first line of the story, and space to write the story and record the number of words written.

Picture sequences were selected for their clear story line and because writing stories about them did not necessarily require prior knowledge of the subject, which might affect the students' writing. In addition, other researchers (Ross, Shortreed, & Robb, 1988; Ishikawa, 1995) have used similar picture sequences to gather writing samples from students.

The particular four-picture sequence sets used in this study were taken from a set of commercially available pre-first grade EIKEN (STEP, Society for Testing English Proficiency) study guides published in 1997 (see Akao, 1997). The four-picture sequence sets are used as prompts for the speaking part of the pre-first grade STEP test.

The Japanese English teachers at the school and the American consultant were

asked to sort the 15 sheets into three levels of difficulty (high, middle, and low) based on their teaching experience. This resulted in three high, eight middle, and four low level sheets. The teachers were then asked to select three sheets from the eight middle-level ones to be used as the in-class writing sample sheets. They were asked to select sheets which they felt were equal in difficulty, and that the participants would find interesting and not too difficult. These three sheets were used for the three in-class writing samples.

Procedures

Three months prior to the initiation of the study, the head of the English Department at Saint Mary's was approached about the possibility of conducting a study at the school. After a period of negotiation, approval was obtained from the school to carry out a one-year study involving three intact classes of second-year senior high school students during the 1998-1999 academic year.

I was not involved in teaching any of the participants in the study; however, I did provide all of the journal feedback.

The materials used in the study were developed after approval was received from the school. These included (a) a recording form to be attached to the inside front cover of the notebooks, (b) an information sheet in Japanese on how to keep a journal and suggested topics, (c) a cloze test, (d) a bilingual pretreatment questionnaire, (e) a bilingual posttreatment questionnaire, and (f) three in-class writing sheets which were to be used to collect writing samples at the beginning, middle, and end of the treatment period.

During the first week of school the three intact classes of second-year students (N = 99) were given the cloze test. The students recorded their answers on computer mark sheet cards. These cards are routinely used at the school and all of the students were familiar with using them. I machine scored the cards and analyzed the data for reliability.

The cloze scores were used to block the 99 students into three treatment groups. This was done by using the sort function in Microsoft Excel to sort the participants in descending order based on their cloze scores. Starting at the top and working through to the bottom of the list, the participants were assigned a number (one, two, or three) to represent the three treatment groups. This was done by assigning the number one to the first student on the list, number two to the second, number three to the third, number one to the fourth,

number two to the fifth, number three to the sixth, and then repeating this ordering sequence until all of the participants had been assigned to a treatment group. As it turned out, each of the three original intact classes was almost equally represented in each treatment group. A one-way MANOVA using the cloze test scores as the dependent variable and group assignment as the independent variable indicated that there were no significant initial differences among the three treatment groups.

During the second week of school, the participants filled in the bilingual pretreatment questionnaire. An analysis of the questionnaire indicated that there were no significant differences among the three treatment groups. In general, the participants did not engage in extracurricular English activities other than attending juku (cram schools).

The students also completed the first in-class writing assignment during the second week of school. The first in-class writing assignment sheets were distributed at the beginning of three regular writing classes, one per intact class, at different times but on the same day of the week. The students were given 35 minutes to complete the assignment. The students were told to read the instructions and to write as much as they could. No other instructions were given to the students. Students were allowed to use dictionaries. No student was absent from class on the day of the first in-class writing assignment. The sheets were collected and passed to me. I photocopied them so that they could be analyzed, and returned them to the school so that they could be returned to the students. A one-way MANOVA with total words, number of clauses, number of error-free clauses, and the various measures of quality as the dependent variables, and group assignment as the independent variable, was carried out. There were no significant initial differences among the three treatment groups.

During the initial negotiations with the school, the teachers indicated that the students would need to have time to get used to their new routines; therefore, it was determined that the actual writing of the journals would not begin until the fifth week of school. This also gave me time to analyze the initial data and to make any necessary adjustments in treatment group membership. Since none of the analyses revealed any significant differences among the three treatment groups, no adjustments were felt to be necessary.

At the beginning of the fifth week of school, the participants were told by the head of the English Department that they would be keeping journals during the year as part of their English study. They were informed that the journals would be read by a male American who did not work at the school but who had had several years of teaching experience in

Japan. They were told that during the course of the year he might make comments on what they had written or correct their English. They were told that they were free to write whatever they wanted in their journals and that only the American would read what they had written. They were informed that they were free to write as much and as often as they wanted, but that they should try to write at least once a week. They were also told that the journals would not be included as part of their regular class. Finally, they were told that they should put their journals in a box in their homerooms on Friday afternoon before they left school. The American would read them during the weekend and the students could pick them up in their homerooms on Monday. If they wanted to write something on the weekend they could do so on a piece of paper and either tape or glue it into their notebooks later. They were also asked to date each entry and to write the date and the number of words for each entry on the Recording Form attached to the inside front cover of their notebooks. After the oral explanation, each student was provided with one notebook, with the Recording Form attached, in which to keep her journal. The journals were color coded by intact class rather than treatment groups so that everyone could easily recognize the respective classes' notebooks. Each participant wrote her name and student identification number on the front of her journal. The students were told that if any student needed an additional notebook she could get one from her homeroom teacher. Following this, the teacher passed out the sheet of paper, in Japanese, containing the information on how to keep a journal and suggested topics. The students were given time to read this and to ask any questions. No individual written consent forms were obtained from the students because the journals were considered, by the teachers in the English Department, to be an integral part of the students' study of English.

Although the teachers and administration were eager to have the students keep journals as a way to engage in additional English practice, the administration did not want to use regular class time to have the students write in their journals. All journal entries were to be written at home on the students' own time. This was seen as necessary to protect the school against any possible complaints on the part of parents that the school was using regular class time to engage in an activity that was not directly related to school work (i.e., preparation for entrance exams). In addition, it was the school's policy that students were not allowed to engage in any outside activities, including writing in their journals, during examination periods. This meant that students were allowed to write in their journals during only seven of the first 14 weeks of school up to the summer vacation. During those weeks I went to the

school every Friday afternoon after most of the students had left school to collect the journals, collected the journals from the information desk, placed them in a small suitcase, and carried them home. No students were ever present in the room when I collected the journals. After arriving home, I read each journal and provided the appropriate feedback for each treatment group. I then recorded on my master list the number of words each student had written that week, made a note of any missing notebooks, and sent the journals back to the school by parcel service so that the students could collect them on Monday. If a particular student was unable to hand in her journal on Friday, she kept it until the following Friday and turned it in then; however, if it turned out that she had not written an entry for that week I noted the fact on the form inside the front cover of the student's notebook and on my master list.

The last journal entry before the summer vacation was in the 12th week of school. The journals were collected as usual that week but, as there were end of term exams during weeks 13 and 14, and as the school did not want the students to write in their journals during the summer vacation because they would be working on their regular summer homework, the notebooks were not returned to the students the following week. During week 13, I photocopied all of the journals. The journals were then returned to the school during week 14 and kept there until the students returned to school after the summer vacation.

The first week after summer vacation, week 15, was an examination week so no journal entries were written. No journals were written during week 16 because students were supposed to devote all of their efforts to preparing for the school's annual Culture Festival. Journals were written, collected, and returned as usual during weeks 17, 18, and 19. No journals were kept during weeks 20 and 21 because of examinations. Week 22 was a regular week. No journals were written during week 23 because all second-year students took part in the annual three-day school trip to Nagasaki. Journals were kept as usual during weeks 24 through 27. In addition, in week 24 the students completed the second in-class writing assignment.

Sheets for this writing assignment were distributed at the beginning of the participants' regular writing classes. The three writing classes were held at different times on the same day. The papers were distributed to the students who were then told to read the instructions and to write as much as they could. No other instructions were given to the students. Students were allowed to use dictionaries. The students were given 35 minutes to complete the assignment. The sheets were collected at the end of 35 minutes and passed to

me. I photocopied them and returned them to the school so that they could be returned to the students.

The journals were collected as usual at the end of week 27 but, as there were end of term exams, and as the students were give regular winter homework, the school again did not want them to write in their journals. Therefore, the journals were not returned to the students the following week. During week 28, I photocopied all of the journals entries covering the period since the summer vacation. The journals were then returned to the school during week 29 and kept there until the students returned to school after the winter vacation.

The first two weeks after winter vacation, weeks 30 and 31, journals were kept as usual. Week 32 was an examination week. Journals were kept as usual during weeks 33 through 36. The last journal entry was during week 37. The students also completed the third in-class writing assignment and the posttreatment questionnaire during this week.

The third in-class writing assignment was carried out in exactly the same manner as the previous two samples. The sheets were collected, passed to me, photocopied, and returned to the school.

The posttreatment questionnaire was given one day after the third in-class writing assignment. The questionnaires were collected and passed to me for analysis. They were not returned to the students. The same procedures as in the case of the pretreatment questionnaire were used.

During week 38, I photocopied all of the journal entries written after the winter vacation. The journals were returned to the school during week 39 and then returned to the students. In all, the students had written journal entries during 22 of the 40 weeks of school. A typed manuscript was made, based on the photocopies, and checked for accuracy - I read the original as a second native-speaker of English followed along in the typed version. Any corrections were then made in the typed version. The main statistical analyses, except for those already mentioned, were then carried out and will be described in detail in Part 2.

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