

Practical Report on Encouraging High School Students to Learn Editorials

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to encourage high school students to learn the editorials of *The Asahi Shimbun* or *The Japan Times*. The editorials deal with current topics that students have to learn. Fifteen minutes were allotted before the main lessons of “English Expression 1” for the second-year students (n=20) and “English Expression 2” for the third-year students (n=20).

There are three elements for students to understand the editorials: “Vocabulary” which means that difficult words are simplified into easy ones, and background information is added when necessary; “Grammar” which means that complicated sentences are rewritten into easy ones, using only the “five basic sentence patterns” that students have learned in junior high school; “Structure” which means that a topic is made clear by developing from abstract ideas to concrete ones. Finally, they are given “Exercises” to deepen their understanding.

The level of difficulty in each editorial is different. If there is not enough time, the number of the paragraphs to be discussed in class is reduced. According to this survey (n=20), all the students could understand the editorials.

1. Introduction

An editorial is significant for high school students to learn in class, because it treats current topics about politics, economy, culture and other important affairs. It is, however, difficult for them to understand the editorials with a lot of unfamiliar words and complicated sentence structures.

There are three elements to teach the editorials: “Vocabulary” which means that unfamiliar words are replaced with easy ones and background information is added when necessary; “Grammar” which means that complicated sentences are simplified into easy ones, using only the “five basic sentence patterns” that students have learned in junior high school; “Structure” which means that a topic becomes obvious by developing from abstract ideas to concrete ones. Finally, they are given “Exercises” to deepen their understanding.

2. Method

2.1 Subjects

Twenty second-year students of “English Expression 1,” and twenty third-year students of “Expression 2,” both elective subjects, participated in this study.

2.2 Materials

The editorials of *The Asahi Shimbun* and its English edition on the Internet, or *The Japan Times* are used. They are filled with current topics that students are interested in. An editorial is an article

in a newspaper presenting the opinion of the editor or editors.

2.3 Vocabulary

The editorials include a lot of difficult words, which have to be simplified into easy ones: *courteous (kind)*, *colossal (large)*, *magnificent (great)*, *assassinate (kill)*, *scamper (run fast)*.

Background information is added when necessary: in one article about recent US culture, for example, “Black Friday” is the day after Thanksgiving, when stores all over the country have huge sales. This day is the start of the holiday shopping season, which lasts until the end of the year. They say that on this day, the large volume of sales pulls a lot of stores out of the “red” into the “black.”

2.4 Grammar

Complicated sentences are simplified into easy ones, using only the “five basic sentence patterns” that students have learned in junior high school. Some examples follow:

(1) Subject + Verb, (A sentence includes a subject and a verb):

a) *The tree attained its full growth.* → *The tree grew.*

(2) Subject + Verb [*be*, non-*be*] + Complement [noun, pronoun, adjective], (A sentence includes a subject, a verb, which is *be* or *become*, and a complement, which is classified as a noun, a pronoun, or an adjective):

a) *Tom is registered as a student.* → *Tom is a student.* [be - verb + noun]

b) *The pencil belongs to you.* → *The pencil is yours.* [be - verb + pronoun]

c) *Nothing is cuter than a child.* → *Children are cutest.* [be - verb + adjective]

(3) Subject + Verb + Object [noun, pronoun, gerund, *to* - infinitive, *how* (etc.) + *to* - infinitive, *that* - clause],

(A sentence includes a subject, a verb, an object, which is classified as a noun, a pronoun, a gerund, a *to* - infinitive, a *how* (or *what*, *where*, *when*, *which*) + *to* - infinitive, or a *that* - clause):

a) *He has a fancy for the book.* → *He likes the book.* [verb + noun]

b) *She found pleasure in taking a stroll.* → *She enjoyed walking.* [verb + gerund]

c) *You know the way of dealing with it.* → *You know how to do it.* [verb + how]

d) *Judging him by appearances, he looks like a teacher.* → *I think that he is a teacher.* [verb + that]

(4) Subject + Verb + Indirect Object + Direct Object [noun, pronoun, *how* (etc.) + *to* - infinitive],

(A sentence includes a subject, a verb, an indirect object and a direct object. The indirect object is a word or group of words representing the person or thing with reference to which the action of verb is performed, generally coming between the verb and the direct object. The direct object is a word or group of words representing the person or thing upon which the action of a verb is performed or toward which it is directed):

a) *He handed a flower to her, finding it on the table.* → *He gave her a flower from the table.* [verb + indirect object + direct object]

b) *Finding the way of giving the answer for the question, he showed it to me.* → *He showed me how to answer the question.* [verb + indirect object + direct object (how)]

(5) Subject + Verb + Object + Complement [noun, adjective], (A sentence includes a subject, a verb, an object, and a complement. The complement is a word or group of words governed by a verb that complete the meaning of the predicate. An adjective or noun is used as the complement. The relation between an object and a complement in the sentence of “the news made me happy” is that “I was happy.”):

a) *Hearing the news, I felt that I was happy.* → *The news made me happy.*

b) *She maintained the hygienic room.* → *She kept the room clean.*

2.5 Structure

The editorials generally consist of an introduction, a body and a conclusion. The differences between these forms give students fundamental information to understand what editors want to insist.

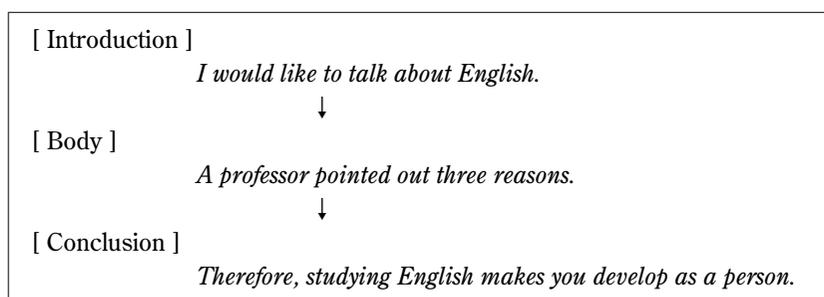


Figure 1. Structure with three forms

The editorials basically develop from abstract ideas to concrete ones. The development of the contents also gives students some information about the topic to understand accurately.

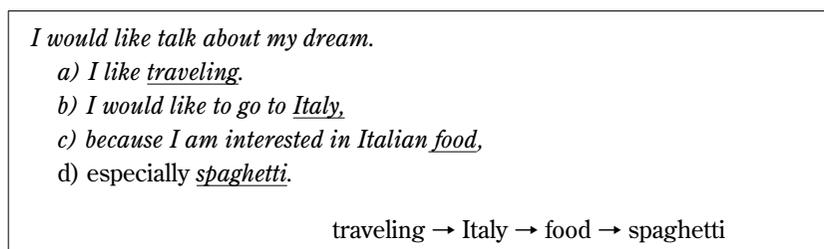


Figure 2. Development of the contents

3. Procedures

Students took a pretest in the first class of “Expression 1” and “Expression 2.” Fifteen minutes were allotted before the main lessons of “Expression 1” for twenty second-year students and “Expression 2” for twenty third-year students. The level of difficulty in each editorial was different. Since fifteen minutes was not enough time, the number of the paragraphs to be discussed in class was reduced.

3.1 Pretest

Twenty second-year students of “Expression 1” and twenty third-year students took the pretest, which consisted of ten questions to confirm whether students had understood “five basic sentence patterns” that students had learned in junior high school. They were required to translate English sentences into Japanese ones:

- (1) He goes to the library by bus. [SV]
- (2) She is very cute. [SVC]
- (3) They became friends. [SVC]
- (4) He likes ice cream. [SVO]
- (5) He enjoyed talking. [SVO]
- (6) I think that he is a student. [SVO]
- (7) I gave her a flower. [SVOO]
- (8) I made her some coffee. [SVOO]
- (9) He calls you Hanako. [SVOC]
- (10) The news made me happy. [SVOC]

Figure 3. Pretest to confirm whether students would understand the “five basic sentence patterns”

3.2 Vocabulary

The editorials included a lot of difficult words, which had to be simplified into easy ones. Some examples follow:

- a) China *announced* (→ *said*) last week that it would end its one-child *policy* (→ *action*).
- b) The *protagonist* (→ *hero*) went to America last year.
- c) Tell me the names of your favorite writers as they *occur* (→ *come*) to you.

Figure 4. Three sentences to be simplified

Background information was added when necessary. The following example included technical terms related to culture, which had to be accompanied by necessary explanation in Japanese:

We are in “*shousho*,” one of the “24 *sekki*” of a year in the old “lunar calendar.” *Shousho* means “little heat” and is said to be the first day of the summer, July 7 in the “solar calendar.”

↓ (information)

- a) What is “shousho?”
- b) What is “24 sekki?”
- c) What is “lunar calendar?”
- d) What is “solar calendar?”

Figure 5. A cultural example which included technical terms

The next example required some economic knowledge before students could understand “*the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement (TPP)*,” which had to be accompanied by necessary information

in Japanese:

Prime minister Yoshihiko Noda on Friday announced that Japan will take part in talks on *the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement* (TPP).

↓ (information)

a) What is TPP?

↓ (additional information)

b) Why is TPP important?

Figure 6. An economic example which included technical terms

3.3 Grammar

Complicated sentences were replaced with easy ones, using only the “five basic sentence patterns.” Basic practices were presented to confirm whether the students understood these five basic sentence patterns:

Please fill in the blanks with the words in the list given below.

a) The tree attained its full growth. → [SV] The tree ().

b) Nothing is cuter than a child. → [SVC] Children are ().

c) He has a fancy for the book → [SVO] He likes the ().

d) He handed a flower to her, finding it on the table. → [SVOO] He gave her a ().

e) Hearing the news, I felt that I was happy. → [SVOC] The news made me ().

happy, cutest, grew, book, flower

Figure 7. Basic practices to confirm whether the students understood the five basic sentence patterns

3.4 Structure

The general concepts of a “introduction,” a “body” and a “conclusion” were explained, which are important to learn the editorials. Basic practices were presented to confirm whether the students understood these three concepts:

Please put three sentences in order.

a) The teacher advised his students how to read books.

b) Please read a lot of books if you want to become a writer like Natsume Souseki.

c) Reading books is very important.

(c) → (a) → (b)

Figure 8. Basic practices to confirm the general concepts of three forms

General development from abstract ideas to concrete ones in the editorials were explained, since it is useful to learn the editorials. Basic practices were presented to confirm general development of the topic:

<p>Please fill in the blanks with the words in the list given below.</p> <p>I like (). When I was ten years old, I began to play (). I was happy to become a ().</p> <p style="text-align: right;">[pitcher, sports, baseball]</p>
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Figure 9. Basic practices to confirm general development

3.5 Exercises

Finally, students were given “Exercises” to put the sentences from the editorials in order, which are the main activities in my study to encourage the students to learn editorials. The next three examples have been chosen from the same editorial.

In the first exercise, four sentences which had been picked up in the first part of the editorial were simplified in random order. Students were required to put them back in their original order:

<p style="text-align: center;">(original) Sept. 15, 2015</p> <p>In recent years, abnormal weather phenomena such as typhoons, torrential rainfall and twisters are happening in greater frequency and severity, which is often associated with the effects of global warming. We increasingly hear of severe weather described as “unprecedented” or the “heaviest in decades.” In most cases, both residents and officials of the municipalities in affected areas will have had no firsthand experience of a disaster of such magnitude.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓ (simplified)</p> <p>(1) Strange weather often happens, [SV] (2) because it is global warming. [SVC] (3) We call it the “heaviest,” [SVO] (4) and we didn’t have the same weather. [SVO]</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓ (in random order)</p> <p>* Please put them in order</p> <p>(a) We call it the “heaviest,” (b) because it is global warming. (c) Strange weather often happens, (d) and we didn’t have the same weather</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(c) → (b) → (a) → (d)</p>

Figure 10. The first exercise in the first part of the editorial

In the second exercise, three sentences which had been picked up in the second part of the editorial were simplified in random order. Students were required to put them back in order:

(original)

Last week's flooding was caused by record-breaking torrential rain that hit the Kanto and Tohoku regions. The last time the Kinugawa River, which flows through northern Kanto, breached its embankments was reportedly in 1949. Many of the residents as well as officials in the city, may not have imagined that the levee along the river would fail on Thursday.

↓ (simplified)

(1) The Kanto and Tohoku had the heaviest rain last week, [SVO] (2) but people didn't imagine the great damage of the Kinugawa River. [SVO] (3) The river had the great damage in 1949, too. [SVO]

↓ (in random order)

* Please put them in order

(a) but people didn't imagine the great damage of the Kinugawa River.
 (b) The Kanto and Tohoku had the heaviest rain last week,
 (c) The river had the great damage in 1949, too.

(b) → (a) → (c)

Figure 11. The second exercise in the second part of the same editorial

In the third exercise, four sentences which had been picked up in the third part of the editorial were simplified in random order. Students were required to put them back in order:

(original)

Nearly five hours before the levee ruptured, the agency also issued a special warning for people in Ibaraki Prefecture to "take immediate actions" to protect their lives. Such a warning was introduced in 2013 after authorities determined that local residents were not adequately informed of the danger of flooding when torrential rains hit the northern Kyushu in 2012.

↓ (simplified)

(1) People had some advice for their lives. [SVO] (2) When the Kyushu had the heavy rain in 2012, [SVO] (3) people didn't have information. [SVO] (4) They could get information after that. [SVO]

↓ (in random order)

* Please put them in order

(a) When the Kyushu had the heavy rain in 2012,
 (b) people didn't have information.
 (c) People had some advice for their lives.
 (d) They could get information after that.

(c) → (a) → (b) → (d)

Figure 12. The third exercise in the third part of the same editorial

In the fourth example, Figure 10, 11 and 12 were put together, but three sentences were removed from the final question list. Students were required to put them into appropriate places:

(original) Sept. 15, 2015

In recent years, abnormal weather phenomena such as typhoons, torrential rainfall and twisters are happening in greater frequency and severity, which is often associated with the effects of global warming. We increasingly hear of severe weather described as “unprecedented” or the “heaviest in decades.” In most cases, both residents and officials of the municipalities in affected areas will have had no firsthand experience of a disaster of such magnitude.

(Figure 10)

Last week’s flooding was caused by record-breaking torrential rain that hit the Kanto and Tohoku regions. The last time the Kinugawa River, which flows through northern Kanto, breached its embankments was reportedly in 1949. Many of the residents as well as officials in the city, may not have imagined that the levee along the river would fail on Thursday.

(Figure 11)

Nearly five hours before the levee ruptured, the agency also issued a special warning for people in Ibaraki Prefecture to “take immediate actions” to protect their lives. Such a warning was introduced in 2013 after authorities determined that local residents were not adequately informed of the danger of flooding when torrential rains hit the northern Kyushu in 2012.

(Figure 12)

↓ (simplified)

- (1) Strange weather often happens, [SV] (2) because it is global warming. [SVC]
 (3) We call it the “heaviest,” [SVOC] (4) and we didn’t have the same weather. [SVO]

(Figure 10)

- (5) The Kanto and Tohoku had the heaviest rain last week, [SVO]
 (6) but people didn’t imagine the great damage of the Kinugawa River. [SVO]
 (7) The river had the big damage in 1949, too. [SVO]

(Figure 11)

- (8) People had some advice for their lives. [SVO]
 (9) When the Kyushu had the heavy rain in 2012, [SVO]
 (10) people didn’t have information. [SVO] (11) They could get information after that. [SVO]

(Figure 12)

↓ (exercise, with three sentences removed from the lists below)

- (1) Strange weather often happens, (2) because it is global warming.
 (3) We call it the “heaviest,” (4) [] (Figure 10)

- (5) The Kanto and Tohoku had the heaviest rain last week,
 (6) but people didn’t imagine the great damage of the Kinugawa River.
 (7) [] (Figure 11)

- (8) People had some advice for their lives.
 (9) When the Kyushu had the heavy rain in 2012,
 (10) people didn’t have information. (11) [] (Figure 12)

* Please put three sentences in the list below into the better places.

- (a) Then they could get information in 2013.
 (b) and we didn’t have the same weather.
 (c) The river had the big damage in 1949, too. [SVO]

Figure 13. The fourth exercise combining Figure 10, 11 and 12

In the fifth exercise, which contained a lot of difficult words, students were required to put seven simplified sentences in order:

(original)

However, the progress of the work remains slow and there is no timetable for when it will be completed, due partly to the cutbacks on public works spending in recent years. In fact, work to strengthen the embankments along the Kinugawa River was under way just downstream from the site of last week's disaster, with work at the site itself reportedly scheduled next. It will be difficult to eliminate the risk of flooding through infrastructure improvements.

↓ (simplified)

(1) *However* (→ *But*), the *progress* (→ *pace*) of the work (2) *remains* (→ *keeps*) slow and there is no *timetable* (→ *plans*) for (3) when it will be *completed* (→ *perfect*), (4) *due to* (→ *because of*) the *cutbacks* (→ *cut*) on public works. (5) Work to *strengthen* (→ *make stronger*) the *embankments* (→ *banks*) along the Kinugawa River (6) was *under way* (→ *starting*) *downstream from the site* (→ *at the lower place*) of the *disaster* (→ *damage*), (7) with work *at the site scheduled* (→ *and work at the place was planned*) next.

↓ (in random order)

* Please put them in order

- (a) But the pace of the work
- (b) when it will be perfect
- (c) keeps slow and there are no plans for
- (d) was starting at the lower place of the damage,
- (e) because of the cut on public works.
- (f) and work at the place was planned next.
- (g) Work to make stronger the banks along the Kinugawa River

(a) → (c) → (b) → (e) → (g) → (d) → (f)

Figure 14. The fifth exercise with a lot of difficult words

3.6 Survey

Finally, all the students are asked orally the following questions in the final class: "Which is better, the lessons with editorials or the lessons without them? Why?"

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Pretest

All the students obtained full marks. Judging from the results of the pretest, all the students understood the five basic sentence patterns, which meant that they would be able to keep up with the editorials simplified into easy sentences.

4.2 Materials

The editorials which are filled with current topics about culture, politics, economy, and other important affairs have been used successfully in class. As students are interested in diverse topics,

a government approved textbook is not enough to satisfy students' interests. The editorials are well written, providing various kinds of information before the main lesson in class.

4.3 Vocabulary

The editorials contained a lot of unfamiliar words, which had to be simplified into easy ones. It was easy for students to understand the editorials without difficult words. In addition, background information was given when necessary, which encouraged students to study English more.

Over time and repeated exercise, if students try to learn more editorials by constantly flipping through a dictionary, they will be able to increase their vocabulary.

4.4 Grammar

Complicated sentences were simplified into easy ones, using only the "five basic sentence patterns" that students have learned in junior high school: (1) Subject + Verb, (2) Subject + Verb + Complement, (3) Subject + Verb + Object, (4) Subject + Verb + Indirect Object + Direct Object, (5) Subject + Verb + Object + Complement. Students could understand the editorials with ease through simple and familiar grammar.

Over time and repeated exercise, if students try to learn more complicated sentences which have not been simplified, they will gradually become familiar with the editorials in the original.

4.5 Structure

The editorials are generally made up of an introduction, a body and a conclusion. Through this method, students were able to understand these sentence structures. The editorials basically develop from abstract idea to concrete ones. Students understood the general development of the topics.

4.6 Exercises

Finally, students were given "Exercises" to put the sentences in order. Difficult words and complicated sentences in the editorials used for "Exercises" were simplified. Students tried various kinds of "Exercises" and were able to enjoy the editorials.

4.7 Survey

All the students enjoyed the lessons with the editorials and pointed out two reasons: (1) they learned various things about current topics, (2) Simplified editorials were easy for them to understand.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this research is to encourage high school students to learn the editorials. Fifteen minutes are allotted before the main lessons of "English Expression 1" for the twenty second-year students and "English Expression 2" for the twenty third-year students.ng

It is difficult for students to understand editorials with a lot of unfamiliar words and complicated sentence structures. There are three elements to teach the editorials: “Vocabulary,” “Grammar,” and “Structure.” In the activities on “Vocabulary,” difficult words from the editorials are replaced with familiar ones, and background information is added when necessary. In the activities focused on “Grammar,” complicated sentences are simplified into easy ones, using only the “five basic sentence patterns” that students have learned in junior high school. In the activities on “Structure” which means that a topic becomes obvious by developing from abstract ideas to concrete ones. Finally, “Exercises” which are the final trials for students to deepen their understanding of the editorials.

According to this survey, all the students said that they enjoyed the editorials.

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