

How to Deal with Columns in the Newspapers for High School Students

SHIBATA Naohisa

Abstract

The aim of this study is to suggest a new approach to columns in the newspapers to teach for high school students. Five different types of columns are chosen, and several sentences, which include the core meanings, are picked up in each column. Then interrogative sentences and their model answers with blanks, which are simplified in five basic sentence patterns, are added so that students will understand the main points of the paragraphs. In addition, easy words or expressions are inserted after difficult ones, when necessary.

In the procedures to teach, first, the three basic forms (introduction, body and conclusion), and the basic development of a topic from abstract ideas to concrete ones are explained to students. Then, five columns are introduced as typical examples : the first one will give students the importance of patience, the second one is useful in deepening the arguments, the third one shows students how to develop a foreign joke with criticism, the fourth one gives students a lot of courage to actively work on the world stage, and the fifth one gives students a lot of words related to animals, which is useful in increasing vocabulary.

Columns in the newspapers are filled with various topics about culture, sports, literature, tradition and foreign affairs. Especially, “Vox Populi Vox Dei” (*Tensei Jingo*) of *The Asahi Shimbun* is famous and even high school students know the column very well. It is worthy of attention as one of teaching materials if it is efficiently utilized in class.

1. Introduction

When we teach English in senior high schools, we usually use authorized textbooks which are well organized to use in class. One of the faults that textbooks potentially have, however, is lack of current topics. Ministry of Education Culture Sports Science and Technology (MEXT, 2015a) suggests that English proficiency to understand current topics should be cultivated. Then, teaching materials related to current English will give some hints to the present English education which is likely to put emphasis on teaching through textbooks.

One of the solutions to make up for current affairs is to deal with a column in the newspaper as teaching material. The reason to utilize “Vox Populi Vox Dei” (*Tensei Jingo*) of *The Asahi Shimbun* and its English version is that students know the column well, which is filled with a lot of interesting topics about culture and current issues. If columns are utilized effectively in class, students will become interest in English.

A paragraph fundamentally consists of three forms (introduction, body and conclusion), and a topic is developed from abstract ideas to concrete ones. The actual columns, however, have complicated forms and meanings. In this study, I would like to suggest how to deal with typical columns in a new approach mixed with interrogative sentences and their model answers, which are organized to help students grasp the core meanings of the paragraphs.

2. Method

2.1 Development

A story generally consists of an introduction, a body and a conclusion and basically develops from abstract ideas to concrete ones.

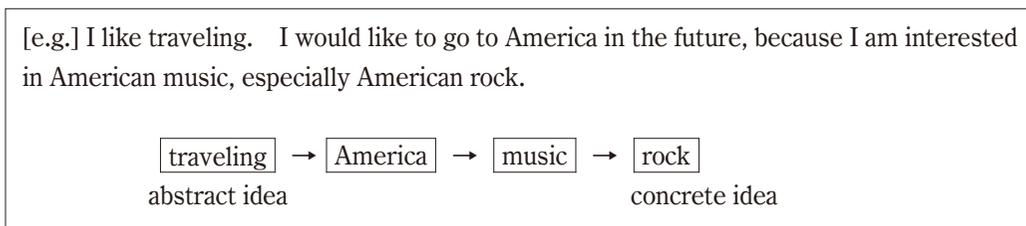


Figure 1. Typical forms of a story.

The actual columns, however, have various forms. In the first column (2018c), “a restaurant”, in which the recovery from natural disasters is chronologically described, is picked up and a lot of episodes are introduced in order, followed by concluding with encouraging words. It is easy for students to understand the brief outline, which instructs students on the importance of patience.

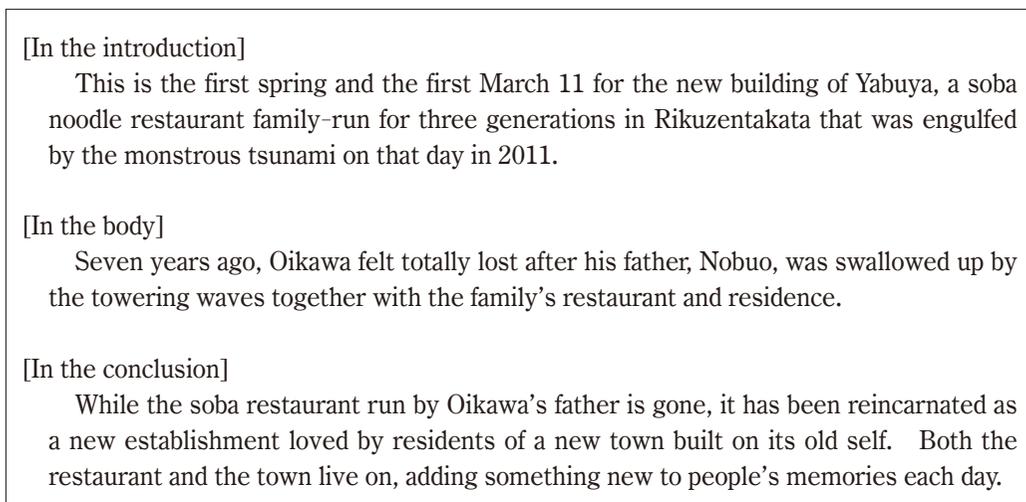


Figure 2. The first column.

The second column (2018d) treats a little difficult topic related to “official documents” or archives. The episodes of Former Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, who tried to seek the establishment of a system concerning archives, are described. Students can go on reading it in comparison with the situations of other countries, which is useful in discussing the problems of the issue with other students.

[In the introduction]

- a) It was 41 years after the bombing that Former Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda finally located photographs of the devastated city in the final days of World War II during his visit to the U.S. National Archives.
- b) He was stunned that the photos were missing in Japan but readily available in the United States.

[In the body]

- a) This experience drove Fukuda to vigorously seek the establishment of a system in Japan for the preservation of public records.
- b) At the National Archives in Britain, anyone can look at 1,000-year-old property registers, complete with the numbers of cattle and horses being raised.
- c) Norway has a facility capable of storing vital documents for 1,000 years.

Figure 3. The second column.

The third column (2018b) has two protagonists, in which Chinese President Xi Jinping has been lampooned as Winnie-the-Pooh, because they are both chubby and thought to be look strikingly similar. Students can learn what foreign jokes with criticism are.

[In the introduction]

- a) Winnie-the-Pooh tends to forget what exactly he is doing when he is handling honey.
- b) Pooh says : “And the only reason for being a bee that I know of is making honey. And the only reason for making honey is so I can eat it.”

[In the body]

- a) Chinese President Xi Jinping has been lampooned as Poor Bear because they are both chubby and thought to look strikingly similar.
- b) A cartoon recently appeared on the Internet showing Pooh, hugging a large pot of honey, which undoubtedly symbolizes power.
- c) It was no doubt a dig at the Communist Party’s move to repeal limits to the presidential terms.

[In the conclusion]

The man in power who looks like Pooh doesn’t seem to have the placid and easygoing nature the teddy bear has.

Figure 4. The third column.

The fourth column (2018d) is about Marie Kondo, in which surprising things are introduced : in Britain and the United States, “*kondo*” has become a synonym of the verb “clean.” Students will have hope or dreams to do well in the world stage, which is an ideal teaching material to give them some suggestions to acquire an international perspective.

[In the introduction]

March and April are the months of spring cleaning in the United States. People stop sitting around the fireplace, and start putting winter clothes and stuff away to declutter and refresh their homes.

[In the body]

- a) A book she published seven years ago, titled “Jinsei ga Tokimeku Katazuke no Maho” (The Life-changing Magic of Tidying Up), has been translated into 42 languages.
- b) Keep only what “sparks joy,” discard everything else.
- c) A cluttered room reflects a cluttered mind.
- d) Don’t forget to say “Thank you” to what you are throwing out.
- e) In Britain and the United States, “kondo” has become a synonym of the verb “to declutter.”

[In the conclusion]

I have no doubt that people on every continent will be needing KonMari method more and more.

Figure 5. The fourth column.

The fifth column (2018e) is about a zoo, in which a lot of words related to animals include. This type of column can be utilized to increase vocabulary in the special field.

[In the introduction]

Teruyuki Komiya, 70, a former director of Tokyo’s Ueno Zoo, recently published a book titled “Dobutsuen de Hataraku” (Working in a zoo) where he recalls his many joys, triumphs and failures throughout his 40-year career as a zoo keeper.

[In the body]

- a) Komiya was a toddler when he was smitten by an elephant.
- b) In senior high school, his passion turned to fish, and then to wild birds at university.
- c) A chimpanzee tormented him by stealing a feeding spoon.
- d) Just seconds before the ground began to shake, a male gorilla grabbed its mate and offspring in a tight embrace.

Figure 6. The fifth column.

2.2 Five basic sentence patterns to make interrogative sentences

The key to success of this study lies in appropriate interrogative sentences. If the questions require to pick up main points, not to translate the whole content, there is a high likelihood that students will answer the questions even in the long sentences. In this study, questions with interrogative pronouns (*who*, *what*, *where*, *which*, *whose* and *how*) are used, followed by model answers with blanks. Finally, students are required to summarize the story freely, mixed with interrogative sentences, mod-

el answers and others. Through these activities, students will grasp the main points of the content.

Basic sentences can be classified into “five basic sentence patterns” (MEXT, 2008a) that students have learned in junior high school. Shibata (2017) decided the range of usage in these sentence patterns : “objects” include *to-infinitive* and *how (etc.) to-infinitive*, “complements” include *noun* and *adjective*.

In the column (2018a), for example, interrogative pronouns (*what* and *when*) are used, followed by their model answers with blanks. The final question requires students to summarize the content, mixed with interrogative sentences, their answers and other sentences in the paragraphs, which will improve their understanding and help them to form the coherent notion concerning the content of the column.

“Kamishibai,” a form of traditional Japanese storytelling involving a live narrator and illustrated panels, was what Yoshi Tabata, who died on Feb. 28 at age 93, chose as the vehicle to recount her encounter with a devastating earthquake and tsunami that struck the Sanriku coast of the Tohoku region in 1933.

- What is Kamishibai? It is a form of traditional Japanese ().
- When did Yoshi Tabata die? She died on (). 28.
- What struck the Sanriku coast? The () struck.
- When did the tsunami strike? It struck in ().
- [e.g.] Kamishibai is a form of traditional Japanese storytelling. He talked about the tsunami by Kamishibai. She died on Feb. 28 at age 93.

Figure 7. Interrogative sentences.

3. Procedures

3.1 Exercises to confirm general forms

The general forms (introduction, body and conclusion) are explained, and then a basic exercise is presented to confirm their understanding :

Please put these sentences in order.

- a) For example, Natsume Souseki advised his students how to find out good books.
- b) Please read a lot of books if you want to develop as a person like him.
- c) Reading books is very important when you are in senior high school.

(c) → (a) → (b)

Figure 8. Basic practice to confirm general forms.

General development from abstract ideas to concrete ones in the column is explained, and then basic exercise is presented to confirm their understanding :

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

I like (). When I was ten years old, I began to play (). I was happy to become a (). [*pitcher, sports, baseball*]

Figure 9. Basic practice to confirm general development.

3.2 Exercises

The exercises of the first column (*Figure 2*) is as follows :

[In the introduction]

This is the first spring and the first March 11 for the new building of Yabuya, a soba noodle restaurant family-run for three generations in Rikuzentakata that was engulfed (*attacked*) by the monstrous tsunami on that day in 2011.

1. Please fill in the blanks.

- What is Yabuya? It is a () noodle restaurant.
 Where is the restaurant? It is located in ().
 What attacked in 2011? () did.

[In the body]

Seven years ago, Oikawa felt totally lost after his father, Nobuo, was swallowed up (*died*) by the towering (*very tall*) waves together with the family's restaurant and residence (*house*).

2. Please fill in the blanks.

- Who is Nobuo? It is the name of Oikawa's ().
 Why did Nobuo die? He died because of ().
 What did Oikawa lose? He lost the family's () and ().

[In the conclusion]

While the soba restaurant run by Oikawa's father is gone (*dead*), it has been reincarnated (*born again*) as a new establishment (*restaurant*) loved by residents (*people*) of a new town built on its old self (*restaurant*). Both the restaurant and the town live on, adding something new to people's memories each day.

3. Please fill in the blanks.

- What happened after his father is dead? The restaurant has been () again.
 What lives on? Both the () and the () live on.

4. Please summarize these paragraphs freely, mixed with interrogative sentences mentioned above or others.

(e.g. Yabuya is a soba noodle restaurant. It is located in Rikuzentakata. Tsunami attacked in 2011. Oikawa's father, Nobuo, died because of waves. Oikawa lost the family's restaurant and house. After his father is dead, the restaurant has been born again. Both the restaurant and the town live on.)

Figure 10. The exercises of the first column (*Figure 2*).

The exercises of the second column (*Figure 3*) is as follows :

[In the introduction]

- a) It was 41 years after the bombing (*air attacking*) that Former Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda finally located (*found*) photographs of the devastated (destroyed) city in the final days of World War 11 during his visit to the U.S. National Archives (*the place that historical records are kept*).
- b) He was stunned (*surprised*) that the photos were missing in Japan but readily (*easily*) available (*could be seen*) in the United States.

1. Please fill in the blanks.

- Who found photographs of the destroyed city? () () did.
 When did he find them? It was () () after the bombing.
 Where did he find them? He found them in the () () ().
 What was he surprised? He was surprised that the photos could be seen easily in the () ().

[In the body]

- a) This experience drove Fukuda to vigorously seek the establishment of a system (*Fukuda did his best to make a system*) in Japan for the preservation of (*to keep*) public records.
- b) At The National Archives in Britain, anyone can look at 1,000-year-old property registers (*tochi daichou*), complete with the numbers of cattle and horses being raised (*about the numbers of cattle and horses*).
- c) Norway has a facility (*building*) capable of storing (*to keep*) vital (*important*) documents for 1,000 years.

2. Please fill in the blanks.

- What did Fukuda want to make? He wanted to make a system to keep () ().
 What can people look at in Britain? They can look at () ().
 How many years can Norway keep important documents in a building? It can keep them for () ().

3. Please summarize these paragraphs freely, mixed with interrogative sentences mentioned above or others. Then please add your own conclusion.

(e.g. Yasuo Fukuda found photographs easily in the U.S. National Archives. It was 41 years after the bombing. He did his best to make a system to keep public records. In Britain people can see 1,000-year-old property registers. Norway has a building to keep important documents for 1,000 years. I think that public records should be kept for many years in Japan.

Figure 11. The exercises of the second column (*Figure 3*).

The exercises of the third column (*Figure 4*) is as follows :

[In the introduction]

- a) Winnie-the-Pooh tends to forget (*always forget*) what exactly he is doing when he is handling (*has*) honey.
- b) Pooh says : “And the only reason for being a bee (*why a bee lives*) that I know of is making honey. And the only reason for making honey is so I can eat it.”

1. Please fill in the blanks.

- What does Winnie-the-Pooh like? He likes () very much.
Why does a bee make honey? Because he can () it.

[In the body]

- a) Chinese President Xi Jinping (*shiichinpin*) has been lampooned (*joked*) as Poor Bear because they are both chubby (*fat*) and thought to look strikingly (*very much*) similar.
- b) A cartoon (*manga*) recently appeared (*came out*) on the Internet showing Pooh, hugging (*having*) a large pot of honey, which undoubtedly (*surely*) symbolizes (*shows*) power.
- c) It was no doubt (*surely*) a dig (*joke*) at the Communist Party’s move to repeal (*cancel*) limits to the presidential terms (*years*).

2. Please fill in the blanks.

- Who is Xi Jinping? He is a () president.
What does he want to do? He wants to () limits to the presidential terms.
What does a large pot of honey show? It shows ().

[In the conclusion]

The man in power (*Chinese President Xi Jinping*) who looks like Pooh doesn’t seem to have the placid (*peaceful*) and easygoing (*relaxed*) nature (*character*) the teddy bear (*Pooh*) has.

3. Please fill in the blanks.

- What doesn’t he seem to have? He doesn’t seem to have the () and () nature.

Figure 12. The exercises of the third column (*Figure 4*).

The exercises of the fourth column (*Figure 5*) is as follows :

[In the introduction]

March and April are the months of spring cleaning in the United States. People stop sitting around the fireplace, and start putting winter clothes and stuff (*things*) away to declutter (*clean*) and refresh their homes.

1. Please fill in the blanks.

- When are the months of spring cleaning? They are () and ().
 What do people put away? They put ()() and () away.

[In the body]

- a) A book she published (*produced*) seven years ago, titled “Jinsei ga Tokimeku Katazuke no Maho” (The Life-changing Magic of Tidying Up), has been translated into 42 languages.
- b) Keep only what “sparks (*feels*) joy,” discard (*throw out*) everything else.
- c) A cluttered (*unclean*) room reflects (*shows*) a cluttered mind.
- d) Don’t forget to say “Thank you” to what you are throwing out.
- e) In Britain and the United States, “kondo” has become a synonym (*same meaning*) of the verb “to declutter (*clean*).”

2. Please fill in the blanks.

- When did she publish the book? She published ()() ().
 What is the title of the book? It is () () ().
 What does an unclean room shows? It shows an unclean ().
 What do you have to say when you throw things out? You have to say ()().
 What does “kondo” means in Britain and the United States? It means to ().

[In the conclusion]

I have no doubt (*am sure*) that people on every continent (*land*) will be needing Kon-Mari method (*way*) more and more.

3. Please fill in the blanks.

- What will people be needing? They will be needing ()() more and more.

4. Please pick up surprising things and then add your own opinion.

(e.g. I was surprised at her, because her book has been translated into 42 languages and “kondo” becomes a verb to clean in Britain and the United States. I would like to learn more from her and clean my room.

Figure 13. The exercises of the fourth column (Figure 5).

The exercises of the fifth column (Figure 6) is as follows :

[In the introduction]

Teruyuki Komiya, 70, a former (*moto*) director (*encho*) of Tokyo’s Ueno Zoo, recently published a book titled “Dobutsuen de Hataraku” (Working in a zoo) where he recalls his many joys, triumphs and failures throughout his 40-year career as a zoo keeper (*shiiku gakari*).

1. Please fill in the blanks.

- Who is Teruyuki Komiya? He is a ()() of Tokyo Ueno Zoo.
 What was his job? He was a zoo ().

[In the body]

- a) Komiya was a toddler (*young child*) when he was smitten (*attracted*) by an elephant.
- b) In senior high school, his passion (*strong feelings*) turned to fish, and then to wild birds at university.
- c) A chimpanzee tormented him (*made him trouble*) by stealing (*taking away*) a feeding spoon (*a spoon for giving food*).
- d) Just seconds before the ground began to shake (*Just before the earthquake*), a male gorilla grabbed (*held*) its mate (*wife*) and offspring (*children*) in a tight embrace (*in its arms*).

2. Please fill in the blanks.

→ What did he like? He liked an () first, () in senior high school and () at university.

What made trouble for him? A () did.

What held its wife and children? A () did.

3. Please make a story about animals freely and then add your own conclusion.

(e.g. Teruyuki Komiya was a zoo keeper. He liked an elephant when he was a young child. His strong feelings turned to fish in senior high school, and then to wild birds at university. A chimpanzee made him trouble. Just before the earthquake, a male gorilla held its mate and children. I want to be a zoo keeper in the future.

Figure 14. The exercises of the fifth column (Figure 6).

4. Discussion

The exercises consist of the core sentences picked up from the columns, interrogative sentences and their answers. Students are required to finally summarize the paragraphs, mixed with interrogative sentences, their answers and others. The final summary will help students put their thoughts together and deepen their understanding. The first example is about a soba noodle restaurant in Rikuzentakata, which becomes a symbol of recovery from the tsunami and shows us the importance of patience. As students know this disaster very well, this topic is effective in making them feel like their own experiences and encouraging them to go on reading. The second one is about Former Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, who found photographs of the devastated city in World War 11 during his visit to the U.S. National Archives and did his best to make a system to keep public records. It is one of the important political topics that students have to pay attention to, because all the newspapers have reported the articles related to this kind of archives or public records. The third one is about Chinese President Xi Jinping, who wields absolute authority and is compared to Winnie-the-Pooh. A cartoon of Pooh appeared on the Internet, hugging a large pot of honey, which undoubtedly symbolizes power. It is a good opportunity to come into contact with a foreign joke. The fourth one is about 33-year-old Marie Kondo, who is an internationally famed home organization guru, whose book has been translated into 42 languages. Students will be surprised at the Japanese young lady

who becomes a famous person in the world, which is a good topic to direct their attention to foreign affairs. The fifth one is about Teruyuki Komiya who was a former director of Tokyo's Ueno Zoo. Generally, students feel close to a zoo and can easily remember the day when they used to visit a zoo. In addition, they can increase vocabulary related to animals with clear and specific images. When teachers teach current events, they have to take notice of students' interest and collect topics from various fields.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study is to suggest a new approach to the columns in the newspapers, which are filled with various topics, to teach for high school students, Especially, "Vox Populi Vox Dei" (*Tensei Jingo*) of *The Asahi Shimbun* is famous and even high school students know the column very well. Five different types of columns are chosen, and several sentences in each column, which include the core meanings to understand the paragraphs, are picked up for the study. Then interrogative sentences and their model answers with blanks are added, which are organized to concentrate on the main points of the paragraphs.

In the procedures, first, the basic forms (introduction, body and conclusion) and the basic development of a topic from abstract ideas to concrete ones are explained to students. Then, five columns are introduced as typical examples : the first one is about the recovery of a soba noodle restaurant in Rikuzentakata from the tsunami, which will give students the importance of patience, the second one is about Former Prime Minister Yasuo and archives, in which a kind of political topics are taken up for students to deepen the arguments, the third one is about Chinese President Xi Jinping and Winnie-the-Pooh, which shows students how to develop a foreign joke with criticism, the fourth one is about a success story of Marie Kondo, which gives students a lot of courage to actively work on the world stage, and the fifth one is about a former director of Tokyo's Ueno Zoo and a lot of animals, in which students can learn a lot of words related to animals and increase vocabulary.

As textbooks cannot deal with current topics, other teaching materials need to compensate for lack of information. In general, columns include a lot of unfamiliar words, however, they are filled with useful knowledge for students. Nevertheless, there are few previous studies to deal with columns or articles in the newspapers, which seems to be one of faults in English education. In this study, five columns are presented as typical examples, however, there are a lot of columns that have different forms and attractive themes. So, I would like to analyze as many columns as possible from now on.

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