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This article is part of a collection of practitioner research on the theme of "Exploring Grassroots, Innovative, and Creative Approaches to Language Learning Materials Development Through Inclusive Practitioner-Research" for Issue 8 of the Learner Development Journal (LDJ8), edited by Anna Costantino, Assia Slimani-Rolls, and Nour El Houda Bouacha. Published once a year, each issue of the Learner Development Journal follows a Community of Practices approach over a period of approximately 18 months in which contributors work together, under the guidance of the editors, to share, respond to, and develop their research and writing.

Designing Social Media Tasks in a University CLIL Course: An Action Research Inquiry

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Multimodal texts are ubiquitous in modern communication and prevalent on social media platforms. However, the processes of understanding and producing texts combining different semiotic modes are not self-evident. Although typical university students consume large amounts of social media content, they largely take a different approach to their posts than content producers or influencers. In 2023, I designed tasks and projects where second-year students at a university in Japan composed mock social media posts for a semester-long required EFL CLIL course called "Japanese Manga and Globalization." To understand whether the students found these new tasks, which combined student-led investigation of English language texts with processes of creating social media content, engaging and effective, I conducted an action research inquiry. Analysis of student work and feedback about the tasks revealed some challenges students face when producing multimodal texts using digital tools. In this inquiry, I will report issues related to multimodal literacy and the use of digital tools I observed in my classroom. I will also share what I learned from guiding students through language learning tasks incorporating skills and strategies associated with the production of social media posts.

マルチモーダル・テクストは現代のコミュニケーションのいたるところに存在し、ソーシャル メディア プラットフォーム上で普及している。しかし、異なる記号論的モードを組み合わせたテクストを理解し、生み出す過程は明らかとはなっていない。一般的な大学生はソーシャルメディアのコンテンツを大量に消費するが、コンテンツ制作者、或いはインフルエンサーとは大きく異なるアプローチをとっている。2023年に日本の大学2年生を対象とした1学期にわたる必修のEFL CLILコース「日本のマンガとグローバリゼーション」にて、模擬ソーシャルメディア投稿を作成する課題とプロジェクトを設計した。学生主導の英語テクストの調査とソーシャルメディアコンテンツ作成プロセスを組み合わせたこれらの新しい課題が、学生にとって魅力的かつ効果的であるかどうかを検証するために、アクションリサーチ調査を実施した。諸課題に関する学生の取組みとフィードバックの分析により、デジタルツールを使用したマルチモーダルテクストを作成する際に学生が直面するいくつかの課題が明らかになった。この調査では、著者が教室で観察したマルチモーダルリテラシーとデジタルツールの使用に関連する問題を報告する。また、ソーシャルメディアの投稿の作成に関連するスキルと方略を組み込んだ言語学習タスクを学生に指導する中で得た知見も共有する。

Keywords

action research, multiliteracies, materials development, task-based learning, social media-based tasks
アクション リサーチ、マルチリテラシー、教材開発、タスクに基づく言語指導法、ソーシャルメディアにおける言語学習用タスク

When I assigned group presentations to first-year students at a private Japanese university post-pandemic, I hadn't anticipated how the cohort that did at least some high school online would immediately turn to the Internet to search for ideas. Feeding the assignment question into Google's algorithm, students immediately accessed a list of "dos and don'ts" from a blog post that seemed tailor-made for this particular learning task. Sitting through the third blatantly plagiarized student presentation of said list, I realized that going forward I would have to specify what I had taken for granted until that moment—presentation content must be student-generated.

In response to the problem of students outsourcing their creativity and critical thinking to the Internet, I decided to focus on active, collaborative, student-led materials development as a pedagogical strategy. I thought that the affordances of social media with which students were already familiar could provide exciting new classroom tools while offering students a unique learning experience. Further, I expected that giving students a common purpose and a realistic, imagined audience that could potentially be accessed via social media would yield the results I wanted in the classroom, namely, motivation to communicate using English in a generally monolingual EFL context (Japan) and opportunities for students to

engage in original, meaningful, creative production of multimodal texts. Multimodal texts are composed by combining different modes to arrange various semiotic materials, such as text and images. As a result of those combinations, multimodal texts must be read and understood using different "grammar" than when interpreting text alone.

For over five years, I have taught a semester-long Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) class to second-year students at a national university in the Kanto region of Japan. CLIL is an approach to teaching within the constructivist tradition that centers communication about content in the foreign language classroom (Hemmi & Banegas, 2021). CLIL is understood in terms of "four Cs"--content, communication, community/culture, and cognition–and collaborative work on meaningful tasks is used to actively engage learners. Using an academic text and excerpts from English translations of Japanese manga (comics/graphic novels) as reading material, my course content introduced some basic history of the development of Japanese popular culture and its distribution and reception internationally, along with academic concepts useful for analyzing common themes in Japanese popular culture. Although the course was designed around reading and discussion, prior to this action research inquiry I was still assigning a standard essay as the final project. I felt that this format did not fit the flow of the semester, that it felt tacked on and, although on topic, seemed to exist merely to serve the purpose of completing an evaluation. I realized the shift from a semester's worth of active, in-person discussions to a final writing assignment was a problem in the overall design of the course. It was time to develop a new approach to the final project.

In this action research inquiry, I recount the process of a) designing tasks in which students produced mock social media posts and podcast content, b) analyzing those student-created materials, and c) reflecting on questionnaire data and written student feedback regarding the tasks. Rather than superimposing my experiences and views of social media onto these new tasks, I wanted to gauge how students would approach the tasks authentically. The goal of this inquiry was to gather information to help improve the projects in future cycles especially by adjusting the scaffolding for the tasks in response to student needs uncovered during this cycle. Following Burns (2010), I organized the first cycle of implementing these changes which I report on here using the headings the Plan, the Action, the Observation, the Reflection.

The Plan

My goal with this project was to redesign my course so that it would include both explicit instruction in multimodal literacy and realistic, creative tasks for language learning. For previous cohorts who completed the course to be examined in this paper, students had been assessed in three areas:

- class participation in group discussions about the course content
- weekly homework assignments including reading comprehension questions about the textbook, writing prompts, and comprehension questions about my original video lectures
- written projects in lieu of term-end exams.

A typical 90-minute class session included time for students to discuss the homework questions, as well as a small-group discussion guided by prompts distributed in class where they talked about their experiences with popular culture (at certain times in the semester students recorded these conversations to submit for credit). It also included a student-directed language learning task in which they used excerpts from English translations of well-known

Japanese manga titles, such as One Piece, Full Metal Alchemist, and Demon Slayer, to conduct a table read and work together to analyze/research the language of the text.

In the semester when this inquiry was undertaken, the syllabus contained one key change—three new projects completed over the course of the semester which would replace the final essay. My plan was to develop multimedia activities which centered student language-production as means to creative ends. To scaffold the productive activities, I decided to add social media use as a topic for group discussions and writing prompts so that students would have an opportunity to reach consensus with their group on the definitions of terms and share about their own patterns of social media use and levels of expertise.

Modern methods of communication are increasingly digital among all generations and with the spread of social media, our consumption of information and entertainment has shifted to multimodal content which is available to us on our smartphones practically anywhere. To put the experiences of my students in context, the Japanese Government reported 102 million Japanese users of social media in 2022 (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, n.d.). The most widely used social media sites among Japanese of all ages are Line, YouTube, Instagram, X (formerly called Twitter), Facebook, and TikTok (Statista Research Department, 2023). In a survey of 1059 Japanese university students, Kimura (2023) found that 94.7% used social media with 84.8% on Twitter (now called X), 84.5% on Instagram, 27.1% on TikTok, and 17.4% on Facebook.

Social media thrives on multimodal content which is not read in the same way as stand-alone text. Since the New London Group's (1996) advocacy for the concept of multiliteracies, the need for explicit classroom instruction in multimodal literacy has been increasingly addressed in the field of education. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) predicted that "Not being 'visually literate' will begin to attract social sanctions" (p. 3). For Miller and McVee (2012), the skills related to producing multimodal texts are not merely necessary in professional contexts, but are "now required for civic, personal, and workplace lives" (p. 3). Multimodal communication, especially that disseminated over the Internet, has permeated our cultures and now has a conspicuous place in our daily lives.

That does not mean the processes of understanding and producing such texts are intuitive. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) posited a theory for reading images, concluding that it was necessary to understand images as functioning within their own "grammar" which is situated historically and culturally. Kress et al. (1997) observed that relying solely on the written language does not lead to an understanding of multimodal texts; it is necessary to consider the written language along with the other semiotic modes in the same text. Ledin and Machin (2020) characterized Kress and van Leeuwen's theory of multimodal analysis as an attempt to break down visual designs to their basic components to understand how they function and in what ways we employ these resources for communication.

Although awareness of the importance of multimodal literacy has increased, the situation in classrooms has not kept pace. Specifically within the context of introducing multimodal literacy in L2 instruction, Lotherington and Jenson (2011) observed that

> We are now so socially enmeshed in digital literacy practices that the concept of optional extrication from the digital world is not realistic, yet language and literacy instruction continues to resist digitized multimedia and multimodal literacy practices as optional or secondary to flat textual practices. (p. 239)

Reinhardt (2020) considered the implications of students' contact with Web 2.0 and the shift toward social media as follows:

> … L2 learners now, more than ever (a) have access to authentic, multifarious L2 usage and discourse contexts both inside and outside of class, (b) demonstrate a vast range of literacies, experiences, and dispositions towards technology, and (c) need autonomous learning skills to direct their own learning, as they engage in L2 learning activity on their own outside of the teacher's sight. (p. 235)

In order to properly address these conditions and provide effective instruction, he proposed new metaphors for understanding the role of social media in the learning process, arguing that these new methods of communication should be understood "not only as tutor, tool, or communities, but as windows, mirrors, doorways, and playgrounds" (p. 236). Social media as windows allow students to observe authentic L2 communication; as mirrors, it helps them to engage in identity work and play which reflects to them their emerging bilingual identity; as doorways, it allows them an entry to the communities of practice, and as playgrounds, they encounter places to experiment.

Based on my understanding of the importance of multimodal literacy and belief in the relevance of language learning tasks on social media platforms, I began designing the new projects. However, implementing such tasks would prove to be less than straightforward. Poore (2015) discussed the use of social media in classroom tasks as follows:

> There is growing evidence that, because of their hyperlinked architecture, social media can prove more distracting than focusing… The trick is to design teaching and learning tasks that demand deep, considered engagement with a topic, as opposed to surface occupation with a technology or tool. (p. 7).

I certainly had my own view of social media based on personal experiences as a user with private (not publicly accessible) accounts (Facebook since 2007, Instagram for the past two years, and Twitter for two weeks once in the early 2010s), an "Elder Millennial" who can remember when computers were first introduced in my elementary school in the U.S., an educator at the tertiary level for 12 years, and a parent of teenagers with access to social media. Mine is an ambivalent relationship with the medium; I certainly consume more social media content than I produce, and until recently only viewed it as a tool to maintain contact with people I already knew in real life. I felt it was important not to make assumptions about how my students consumed and produced social media, but, rather, to enter into discussion with them as a learner. While trying to develop appropriate tasks and to strictly view them as "mock" posts, that is, materials that would not be released on actual social media platforms for consumption or critique, my foremost goal was for the assignments to build students' confidence as communicators through English and for them to produce materials that they could be proud of.

The plan for this intervention was to introduce tasks that would approximate the production of social media posts designed by a creative team for the purpose of introducing English study or other educational content related to the theme of the course (Japanese popular culture in the age of globalization). Poore (2016) argued that, while we think of recent generations as digital natives, it is not appropriate to expect every student to be social media savvy. She recommended educators who incorporate social media into their classroom routines remember the following:

> (1) not all students grow up with digital technology at their fingertips, (2) that there is nothing "innate" about any group of people, but (3) that we should use any positive features furnished by digital technology for the benefit of our teaching and learning. (pp. 54-55)

Throughout this research cycle, I would need to keep in mind that the students might not be using social media in ways that I anticipated.

For this inquiry, I used an action research framework. Lewin (1946), whose work remains influential in the action research tradition, emphasized the importance of understanding one's unique research site to engage in an ongoing cycle of "planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action" (p. 206). My goal was to engage in reflexivity throughout this trial semester. Ermeling (2010) advocated focusing on a particular effect or expected result to examine during the research process, noting that because "[a] complex intervention such as teacher inquiry is likely to set in motion many effects" (p. 380), it is necessary to find a way to distinguish between outcomes that are due to the intervention and those that would result from pre-existing teaching methods/routines. While these new projects would influence everything about the semester, I needed to identify particular aspects of the experience from the students' perspectives that would inform decisions about keeping or adapting various activities in my lesson plans for future semesters. Burns (2010) recognized that action research is a local endeavor and researchers "must be cautious about making large claims or generalizations about [their] findings" (p. 133). She understood the benefits of the deep reflection undertaken during the research cycle in terms of how they impacted the workings of the classroom in practical ways, noting that AR "often has a dramatic effect on how teachers build their personal knowledge about aspects of their teaching" (Burns, 2010, p. 142). The inquiry would guide my planning and teaching processes but also had the potential to give me new channels to listen to students and foreground their experiences both in the course of the semester and in planning for future action research cycles.

For this inquiry, I also borrowed from the framework of exploratory practice (EP). Slimani-Rolls and Kiely (2019) described EP as a method of inquiry which "prioritizes the development of teachers' understanding in context" (p. 11). Inquiries, usually referred to as puzzles, are initiated by the teacher to better understand the learners and specific learning context to improve the quality of life in the classroom. Hanks (2019) saw the EP framework as involving learners as researchers and "prioritiz[ing] working for understanding before problem-solving; it traverses/transgresses cultural boundaries of research" (p. 165). In EP there is an emphasis on making the data collection process and instruments subordinate to the course objectives and educationally enriching for the students. These classroom activities that double as data gathering opportunities are referred to as PEPAs—Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities. I was determined to collect and analyze valuable feedback throughout the process of designing and implementing the new tasks without distracting from the course objectives, focusing on students' responses to the new projects in terms of their novelty, user-friendliness, and effectiveness via activities that also served the students' learning.

The Action

In Spring 2023, I reorganized the course for a class of 22 students. I adopted a flipped classroom, giving students homework assignments of reading the textbook and watching my recorded video lectures with accompanying comprehension questions for both. This allowed me to devote the bulk of class time to collaborative student group work. All in-class activities were designed to help students plan and complete the necessary steps for finishing three larger assignments in place of a traditional final examination. For these assignments, I provided guidelines for creating mock posts for a particular platform with the purpose of teaching English language learners something about the English language or of presenting an analysis of manga using the principles introduced in the

textbook *Japanese Popular Culture and Globalization* (Tsutsui, 2010). For all of the assignments, students read, analyzed, and researched text from excerpts of published English translations of Japanese manga titles. Thus, the content of the projects could be compiled from what students read for homework and in class with their groups without additional research. Students worked with different groups for each project. For the first assignment, students were given 3 weeks to make a 5-minute video that could be posted to YouTube. They also worked on composing a thread of posts à la Instagram or X (the social media platform known as Twitter at the time) for 3 weeks. While the first two assignments focused on introducing grammar and vocabulary from the materials students examined in class, for the third assignment they spent 5 weeks applying the content from the textbook to create a 20-minute episode of a podcast in which they analyzed some aspect of the production, distribution, or criticism of manga.

In the next section, I will reflect on the design and implementation of the first two tasks, the YouTube video and the social media posts. At the time of designing the tasks, I was not aware of the gap in the popularity of podcasts between English-speaking countries and Japan. As it turned out, when I asked the students at the beginning of the third project, "Who has heard the word 'podcast' before?", only two students raised their hands and the rest simply shook their heads, "No." This was especially surprising considering that the Japanese word for podcast is the transliterated loanword from English, "poddokyasuto." My original plan was to give students creative freedom to produce content relevant to their own experiences. Considering the unanticipated, additional step of explaining what a podcast was and how to access them, I decided that the third project was not suitable for this exploratory inquiry.

While I did give students basic parameters for composing mock social media posts for credit, I also wanted to leave the assignments open-ended to allow them freedom to create posts that reflected what they saw in their feeds as opposed to priming them with examples from what had been provided to me by the algorithm on my own social media accounts. Nearly every week students produced materials as part of the classwork, typically collaborating on one image in groups of two to four students. For this activity, I made the expectation explicit that the materials would be multimodal through written instructions such as "With your group, discuss how to present your list of words and phrases visually in a creative manner." I also clarified in the class that I meant they should combine the content they chose to present with a visual image that would help other learners understand and remember it. This weekly activity provided students opportunities to get used to working with their groups (three different groups throughout the semester) before the "real work" of each project and, theoretically, the content generated in these preliminary activities could be incorporated into the final production.

The data set for this study comprises the materials students made collaboratively for the first two group projects, individual answers to class discussions that students gave by show of hands in class or in writing over Microsoft Teams (n.d.), written reflections about the projects students submitted along with the materials for credit, and responses to a questionnaire about the projects. The written reflections were submitted for credit within a week of the project deadline. The questionnaire was distributed at the end of the 15-week semester (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Timeline of Assignments*

Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Project 1 Group Work			|_____	_____	_____	_____|									
Project 1 Reflection							*								
Project 2 Group Work							|_____	_____	_____|						
Project 2 Reflection										*					
Questionnaire															*

The Observation

Project 1: Five-minute YouTube Video

For the first project students worked in groups of three or four to make a scripted, 5-minute YouTube video introducing original educational content that they designed from the course materials. First, students worked in groups to conduct intensive reading of manga excerpts in English. I instructed them to compile lists of any vocabulary or grammar structures that were unknown or difficult for them and then to engage in independent research of those language items. From the lists, they grouped a few items into a theme of their choosing and created a video that included images to support their explanations. The resulting product was an educational resource for an imagined audience of English learners around the world. Throughout this process, which was completed exclusively during the class time, I was available to answer their questions related to the project. However, I purposefully tried not to influence what they produced in terms of aesthetic or the delivery of the content in keeping with the larger goal of learning about students' use of social media in order to design and scaffold realistic tasks.

First, I elicited student feedback regarding their previous experiences with social media. For one of the class discussions during this project, when I asked for a show of hands, no students reported that they had made YouTube videos before. I then asked students to submit their written responses to the question "Have you watched videos related to learning English? Describe one video or the theme and aesthetic of the channel" on Microsoft Teams. Of the 18 responses, six referred to media other than YouTube (four to specific foreign movies, and one each to Japanese anime with English dubbing and English-language cartoons) and one did not make the source of the media clear ("the news in English for English learners"). The remaining 11 responses included specific channels or reference to "YouTube" or "shorts feed." Eight of these referred to Japanese channels which introduce English language for specific purposes (such as the Eiken standardized exam or university entrance exams) or English language and culture generally. Two students reported watching TED videos and one student did not include enough information about whether the channels were produced for a Japanese or international audience. From this data, I concluded that students were mainly consuming videos produced for a Japanese audience rather than an international one.

The Project 1 assignment resulted in six student-produced videos. To facilitate student communication, I set up private channels on Microsoft Teams. The channels served two main functions for the students: collect and organize digital materials in a central, online location and communicate and plan asynchronously outside of class. Students could also

submit their finalized files to me for evaluation within the channel. After informing them that I could also view everything posted in the channel, I quietly observed the students' progress on the projects. The following products resulted from this process:

- two videos where students filmed themselves
  - one skit (Group 6)
  - one "talking heads" style presentation (Group 4)
- four combining PowerPoint slides with voice-overs.

Table 2 displays the various visual elements that students chose to include in the videos. It is notable that five of the six groups opted to include screenshots of pages or individual frames from manga.

Table 2. *Visual Elements Students Included in Project 1 Videos*

Group	Screen-shots of class materials	Different font colors	Clip art	Images from the Internet	Icons	Hand-drawn images	References	Student-produced Animation	Scenes from Anime	Credits
1	○				○					
2	○		○					○		○
3		○	○			○	○			
4	○	○								
5	○	○	○	○						
6	○			○					○	

Of the four videos that included PowerPoint slides and voice-overs, three groups produced AI-generated speech for the voiceovers by using programs on the Internet.

Example Project A. Students in this group modeled the video on listening materials. Using free AI-generated voice software available online, the video included instructions for listening and repeating the English content. The Japanese translations were provided only after the images and English had been introduced and the viewers were instructed to repeat the English sentences twice. Image 1 contains a screenshot from the video. The colors are muted and the design is simple with bold, solid black lines complementing the black and white manga. The section of the excerpt from the manga that contains the target sentence on the slide has been marked by the students in a red frame. With the combination of icons and AI-generated voiceover and the nearly monochromatic color scheme (apart from the pop of color that calls attention to the source material), this video had what I describe as a futuristic feel.

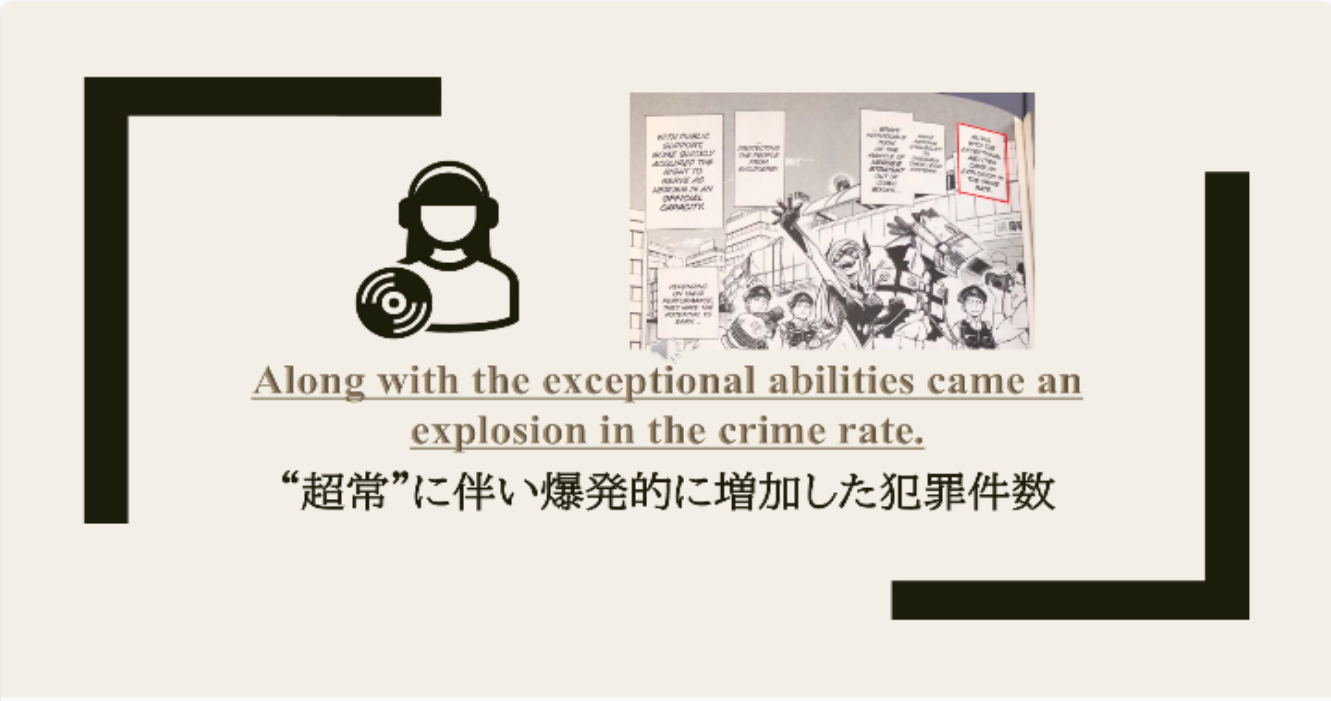

Image 1. *Screenshot from the Group 1 Video*

Example Project B. Students in another group assembled various elements to create rudimentary animation. After introducing the concept of onomatopoeia and providing examples on the same concept in the L1 (Japanese), they synthesized the onomatopoeia collected from the source materials of anime excerpts that had been distributed in class with an original story. The combination of the sound effects and background music with the simplified images (excerpted screenshots are shown in Images 2-4) gave the video the ambience of a retro video game. In this instance, the AI-generated voice contributed to the video game vibe, resulting in a fun and nostalgic feel.

Image 2. *Screenshot from the Group 2 Video: Japanese Examples of the Concept*

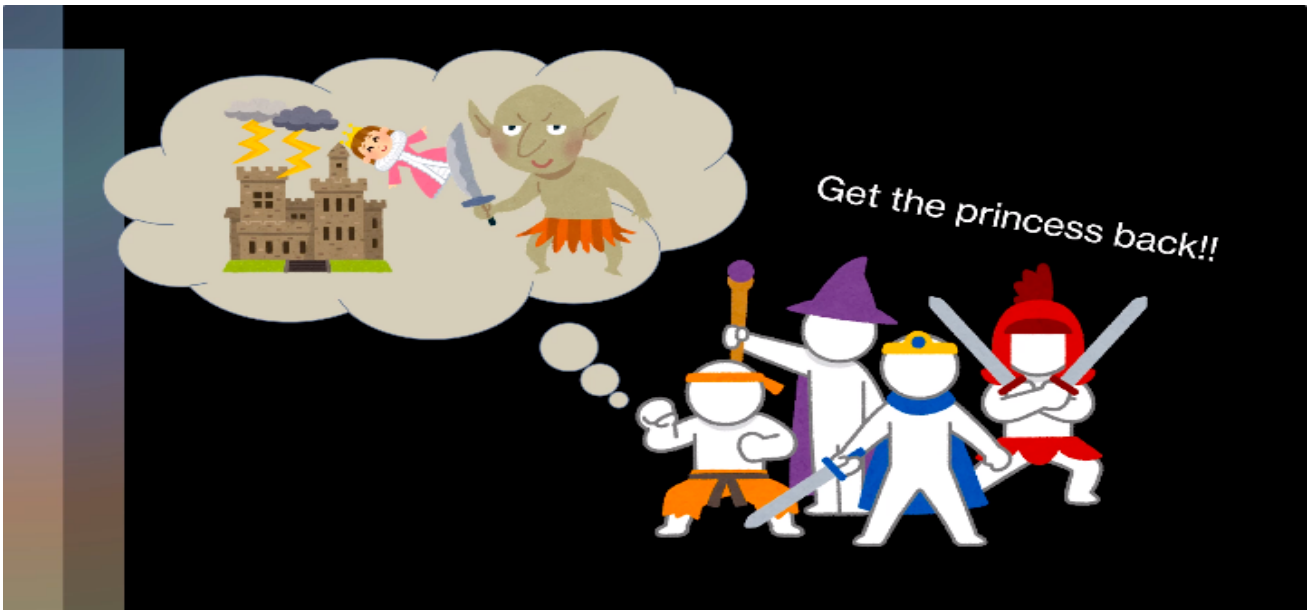

Image 3. *Screenshot from the Group 2 Video: Simple Graphics and Storyline*

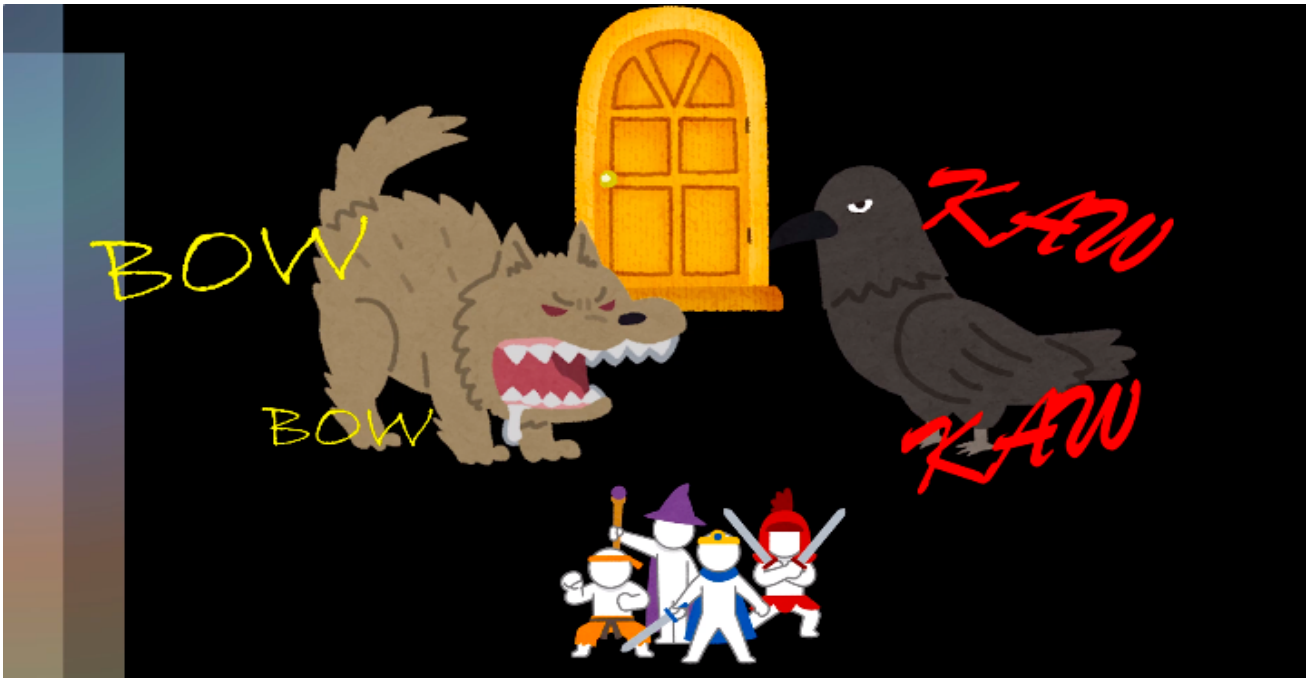

Image 4. *Screenshot from the Group 2 Video: Presenting the English Target Language in a Novel Context*

Student Reflections on Project 1. As part of the assignment, students also submitted their reflections on the process. I asked students to write a two-paragraph reflection that included a report of what they contributed to the project, an evaluation of how the group worked together, the grade that they would assign their group's project, and their thoughts about the project in general. In addition, I conducted a survey at the end of the semester where I asked students for feedback regarding each of the three projects. In this class of 22, 17 students completed the written reflection assignment for Project 1, and 16 answered the end-of-the-semester survey about the project.

In response to the anonymous survey about the project conducted 8 weeks after its completion, 15 of 16 respondents answered "yes" to the question "Do you think that Project 1 (a video for YouTube) met the goals of this course?" When asked to express their agreement with the statement "I feel that Project 1 was useful for me personally," seven chose "strongly agree," eight chose "somewhat agree," and one chose "somewhat disagree." Overall, it appears that students had a positive response to the project and found it useful. More nuanced evaluations were provided in the written reflections submitted 1 week after the project due date. I used descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2016) to categorize these student reflections on the project, considering students' attitudes toward the process of making video content and what aspects they found challenging or rewarding. After extrapolating 15 separate codes through an inductive approach, I applied Braun and Clarke's (2022) thematic analysis to answer the following research question: *What did students identify as salient affordances of this project?*

From the coded data, I identified five themes in students' responses to the project. While developing the themes, I looked for trends in student answers that would help me construct conclusions about what specific pedagogical support I could provide in future courses to increase student satisfaction with the process of working together to create social media content. The themes I identified are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. *Theme Summary for Research Question 1*

Theme	Characteristics
Editing videos was intimidating, but WE managed	After initially experiencing anxiety over their lack of technical skills, students noted gaps in quality between their products and the fare they normally view on YouTube. However, when students felt there had been a fair distribution of labor, they reported that the process was enjoyable and their technical skills had improved because of the group work.
With more time, we could have done so much more	Students noted dissatisfaction with the finished products in terms of the aesthetic, the method of recording audio components, and the level of quantity and detail of the content, but expressed optimism that they could have overcome these shortcomings with more time.
Group work success depended on similar levels of motivation and open communication	If students shared motivation, they could engage in open and enjoyable communication. Through active communication, students felt they could work together to distribute the tasks evenly among group members and have a fun experience. This communication was at times facilitated by Microsoft Teams.
In-depth investigation of only a few English words and phrases was possible	Using the Internet and dictionaries, students could focus on crafting a detailed, practical explanation of particular words and phrases. However, the additional task of preparing the video limited the time that could be spent on investigation of target language items.
Opportunities to learn English through group work and to practice presentation skills resulted in gains	Students could research and present information about English words and phrases within their groups during planning and preparation for filming. In the case of groups that recorded a "live action" video, students recognized the project provided opportunities to practice presentation skills.

First, in addition to students' claims of no experience creating content for YouTube as reported above, they further reported initial feelings of anxiety toward using the tools of recording and editing videos. Without prior experience, it became necessary for students to research and experiment with the tools on their own. As shown in Table 2, different groups took completely different approaches to the creative process and the final videos contained completely different formatting elements. Students reported they had overcome the

initial stress of facing the assignment through active communication with their groups and establishing a fair distribution of labor. For example, one student reported,

> Everyone in the group had no experience making videos and was very anxious to hear about the project. However, it was very fun to complete the video while talking with everyone.

With the exception of Group 2 whose video included student-created animation sequences thanks to what other students in the group reported as the work of one student, all students faced the challenge of the assignment on what appears to have been equal footing. This necessitated active communication as students worked out what they would be able to accomplish during the course of the project and tempered their expectations of the finished products.

While students could overcome the initial challenges of completing a novel assignment, many expressed that the allotted time did not allow them to master sufficient video production skills. Due to the lack of experience articulated in the previous theme, they could not just jump into the production process. Some student comments reflected the theme "With more time, we could have done so much more," as they reported making concessions, adopting different formats than originally planned, and working outside of the allotted class time in order to make the deadline. In fact, the outsourcing of the audio material to AI voices was attributed to this lack of time by one student. Students also expressed a desire, had there been more time, to improve the videos through the inclusion or polishing of elements such as sound effects, end credits, and smoother transitions between clips. Further, some students wanted to commit more time to the English language learning content by introducing more detailed explanations of the words and phrases or by investigating more lexical items.

Although the videos themselves did not completely meet students' expectations, many used the word "fun" to describe the process of engaging in collaborative work with their groups, as also reflected in the student comment representing the first theme. While group work was not universally successful, students were able to articulate reasons for their various levels of satisfaction and evaluation, which can be summed up in the theme "Group work success depended on similar levels of motivation and open communication." Fortunately, most of these comments were positive and detailed either the individual's concrete communication strategies or the cohesiveness of the group. One student did report that the different levels of motivation in their group had stymied the communication process, leaving this student dissatisfied with both the process and results.

The fourth theme highlights students' reflections on whether this project helped them develop English knowledge or skills. Because the project required students to engage in specific tasks that, as previously noted, were not familiar to them in either an educational or private context, the bulk of the time was spent on planning and preparing the multimodal projects. The dual nature of the project resulted in a learning task where "In-depth investigation of only a few English words and phrases was possible." Students noted that they had gained a deeper understanding of the target words and phrases by using tools such as the Internet and dictionaries to investigate the items and by and large they expressed satisfaction with the outcomes. One student described the process as follows:

> We need to look deeper into the words to give a more detailed explanation, so we could learn the use of English word, like its meaning, idiom, and its image. In terms of learning the practical meaning of English words, this project is very effective.

However, another student saw this affordance as less than optimal for an English course, noting:

> I did not think this project was good. There were two reasons. First, this is because I learned only a few grammars and vocabulary words. In my group, each member researched and presented one grammar or vocabulary word per person. Therefore, I learned only three grammars or vocabulary words at most. While there were three group work classes, there was too little established knowledge. Second, this is because the time to study English was very short. In my group, we presented with our PowerPoints, and it took long time to prepare them. I did not think that this is efficient way to learn English.

For this student, the split focus of the project was a detriment to English acquisition and the time spent preparing for the video did not prove to be a reasonable trade-off.

For some students, the limited number of lexical items mastered simply meant that they could develop other skills. The fifth theme—"Opportunities to learn English through group work and to practice presentation skills resulted in gains"—shows that for some students skills other than investigating or learning English words and phrases were a positive affordance of the project. One student expressed appreciation for the novel task as follows:

> This project was an opportunity that we interact with classmates whom I hadn't talked so much. So, it was good opportunity for us. And group work is very good because we were able to make up for each other's shortcomings. Lecture is important for learning English, but I thought that cooperating others in this way, our English skill would improve more and more.

Group work provided opportunities for learning other skills and learning from and with the other students instead of from a unidirectional lecture. Although the number of discrete lexical items mastered was relatively low, as shown in the previous theme, the group discussions allowed students to connect with their classmates and work together toward a goal.

Project 2: 10-item Thread in the style of Twitter (X) or Instagram

For the second project, students were instructed to prepare a thread using popular social media sites with the objective of teaching someone about the English language through their posts. I decided to keep the parameters broad to see how students would attempt this project, so, apart from which sites to use for the mock posts and how many items to produce (a thread with 10 items on X [Twitter] or Instagram), my only instructions regarding the content were, "The posts that you make for this project should all be related somehow—same theme, same original manga/chapter from the textbook, etc." I based the instructions for this activity on Poore's (2016) advice against using Microsoft Word to compose content intended for other platforms because of the difference in cognitive styles required by the different programs and potential problems when pasting content created in Word into other platforms. Accordingly, I included the following practical instructions regarding the composition of "posts":

> Research has shown that for many people, using a different program (such as Microsoft Word) to create projects for one platform (such as Twitter) results in them approaching the creative process in an inauthentic way. Use the actual platform (Twitter or Instagram) to create the posts. Post to "Private," take screenshots, then edit the screenshots to cover your personal information (username, profile picture, etc.).

Using this strategy, I hoped to improve student satisfaction with their multimodal compositions by encouraging them to use appropriate tools.

Of the five group projects, two (A and B) were balanced with visuals and text, two contained no images (D and E), and one (C) utilized hand drawn images and emoji rather than screenshots or clip art. Excerpts from one of each category are displayed below. Image 5 shows the first three slides from Group A, an exemplary project. Image 6 displays the first three slides from Group D in which there appears to have been minimal consideration of a multimodal approach to introducing the information. Image 7 contains three non-consecutive slides from the Group C project. Images from this project were chosen to convey the "analog" approach taken to adding images to the posts. It appears that each group member contributed two corresponding pages, so I have chosen pages that were presumably composed by three different students working independently. These mixed results among the group projects in terms of the amount of visual content were further surprising considering that the in-class activities throughout the semester in which students created mock social media content were oriented toward multimodal materials production.

Image 5. *Screenshots from Group A Project*

Group A submitted 13 slides. Of the slides, 10 contained both English and Japanese and three were English only. It is noteworthy that all of the projects included some Japanese on the posts. This would seem to run counter to the original instructions that the project be for an international audience.

Three of the four students in Group A completed the reflections after the project. One student wrote:

> Our content was based on the post on Instagram. I thought we can make the content similar to it, but we couldn't make it original, so I evaluated B for our work. Since I don't

> ordinarily see many posts of learning content when I use SNS services, it was hard for me to imagine what kind of content to make.

Another student concurred, "*We searched many posts on Instagram and I found these types of posts.*" In this case, it is clear that the students were using existing content on Instagram as a reference, with the risk of plagiarism. The quality of the project demonstrates that they successfully accessed and analyzed the content of other posts, as can be seen from the variety of elements, the clear pedagogical structure of the quiz format, the friendly tone to the viewer ("Let's think about it together!"), and the presence of hashtags. In fact, this was the only group to include hashtags in the project. Another student commented on the easy access to educational content through social media, adding, "*Through this project, I decided to use Instagram and twitter well.*" Although the format of this social media project cannot be considered completely original, the student reflections revealed they had actively engaged in collecting and analyzing social media posts.

Image 6. *Screenshots from Group D Project*

Group D took an entirely different approach. The theme of these materials is indicated in the Japanese title "Useful phrases for when you want to answer questions vaguely." Every slide in this thread contains Japanese, with the first slide containing only Japanese. The source material is not indicated and there are no images on any of the slides. Each phrase is recontextualized in an original example dialogue.

Only two of the four members of Group D completed the reflections for this project. One wrote, "*I don't usually post on Instagram so this project was a bit difficult for me. However, I had experience seeing similar posts, so I was able to mimic them.*" This highlights a difference in how students use social media. The other student described the process of trying to choose images which, apparently, were discarded for the final draft. "*When I made pictures, I feel*

this is difficult. People won't read pictures that have many sentences, but few sentences are not informative. We have to adjust appropriate amount of sentences." This observation reveals the student's concern with how to balance the semiotic materials in the project, demonstrating a clear understanding of the need to consider the audience. In its final iteration, Group D's mock social media thread relied on a single mode—written text. Matters such as font choice, font size, and background color are considered important in multimodal texts; however, the group clearly made a choice not to include images. Unfortunately, there is no data in the set to explain why.

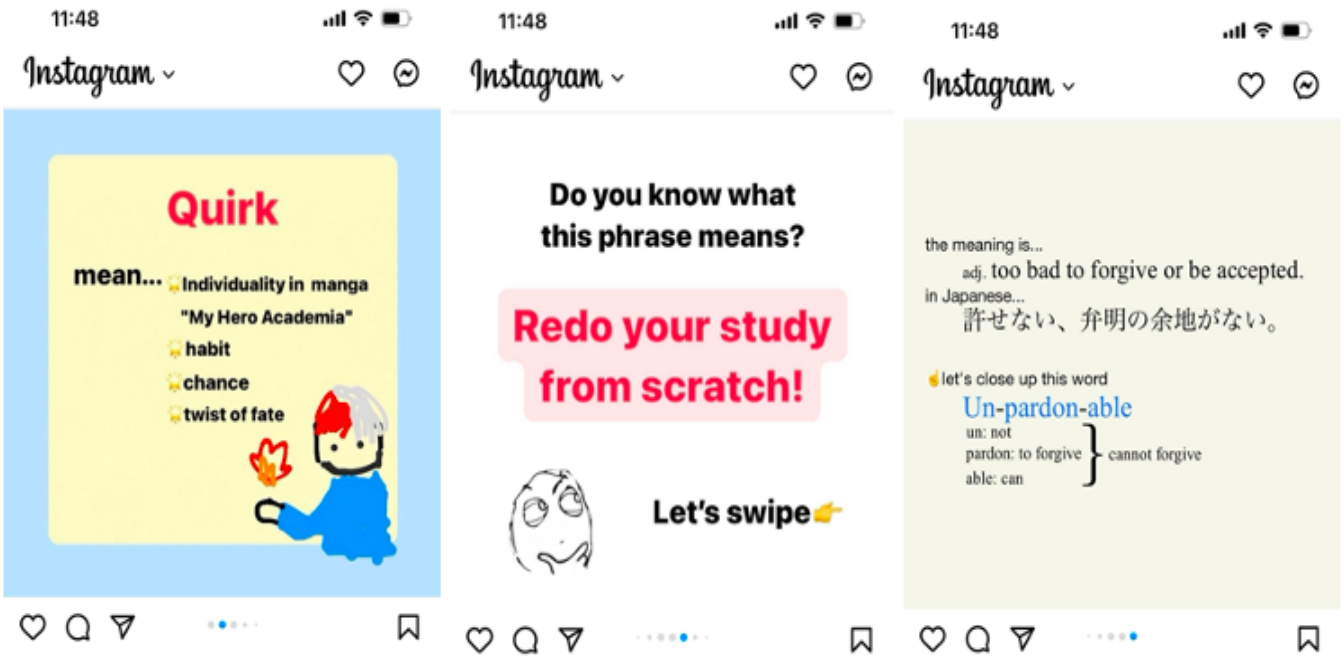

Image 7. *Screenshots from Group C Project*

Group C was the only group to include an apparently hand drawn (using digital tools) image and emojis in the posts. These slides were chosen specifically to display the variety of semiotic material included in the project. Each group member appears to have contributed a pair of slides, one that asks the viewer a question about a target word or phrase and a corresponding slide that explains the usage. In this thread, all of the slides except for the one bilingual slide included above were English only, so it would seem that most of the members of this group approached the project as one for an international rather than Japanese audience.

Overall, the projects used multiple modes and produced colorful posts that accomplished the objective of introducing English language content. While the use of different semiotic materials, the "modes" in multimodal texts, varied in the projects, there was across the board a noticeable absence of images that could be classified as memes. However, it is clear from student feedback that the projects reflect what students have encountered in their own social media feeds and through active searches for language learning materials.

In the end-of-year survey, conducted five weeks after the deadline for Project 2, 14 of 16 respondents answered "yes" to the question "Do you think that Project 2 (a thread of posts for Instagram or Twitter) met the goals of this course?" Among responses on a Likert scale to the statement "I feel that Project 2 was useful for me personally," eight chose "strongly agree," seven chose "somewhat agree," and one chose "somewhat disagree."

The Reflection

Each of the projects presented unique challenges in terms of communicating the assignment to students, organizing the class periods effectively, and supporting students as they applied their prior knowledge and creative approaches to producing materials. In this section I will consider the challenging aspects of each project in terms of pedagogy: the range of basic computer skills that students brought to the projects, my own images of what I expected students to produce, the challenges of "reading" and "writing" multimodal texts such as memes, and my approach to evaluating the projects.

As students prepared Project 1, the 5-minute YouTube video, it became apparent that without a framework for producing the videos some students resorted to the familiar format of group presentations supported by PowerPoint slides, producing videos that closely resembled the sorts of presentations that they give in both English classes and courses conducted in Japanese. In EFL courses at a Japanese university, Hunt (2019) introduced film as a subject for study. He found that although students implicitly understood the grammar of film, explicit instruction in that grammar gave students analytical tools that could be used to analyze other forms of media. In the future, Project 1 could be better scaffolded by providing explicit instruction on how videos work, asking students to watch selected educational YouTube videos and tease them apart in group discussions while engaging in analysis of the different modes of communication and how they comprise a whole.

While some students fell back on familiar strategies to complete the assignment, a few students who already had experience using editing software produced materials that exhibited a grasp of how to create multimodal videos, demonstrating a high level of creativity. Dahlstrom (2021) observed that those students with prior knowledge of digital production skills, often obtained in informal settings, had an advantage over their peers. Dahlstrom proposed expanding student multimodal literacy to prevent the marginalization of those who lack such skills. To address the difference in skills and experience, a video lesson assigned as homework in this flipped classroom could be used to introduce video editing software. For instance, a demonstration of the basic functions of a commercially available software with a free trial period that students could take advantage of within the time frame of the project could be added to the course content, thereby explicitly informing students about the tools of the trade and providing an opportunity for hands-on learning of a specific program. That said, as shown in the thematic analysis of student reflections, the opportunity to engage in group work and tackle the challenges of new digital tools with their peers proved to be a valuable experience for many students. Considering the availability of online tutorials and the benefits of using a trial-and-error approach with most software, it may be appropriate to prioritize allotting more time for the project over providing more scaffolding. This is certainly an area where the ideal balance may depend on the mood of a particular cohort or the skills that groups in future cycles bring to the table. To improve students' perception that they are indeed learning English through this project, a solution may be to set a translanguaging goal such as spending a certain percentage of the preparation time talking about the project using English as the base language or encouraging students to use the English version of a software and access English-medium tutorials.

While I was aware that the use of AI-generated voices is a common element in videos posted on the Internet, I was still surprised by students' decisions to use such tools for this assignment since none of them had reported previous experience making YouTube videos. Although I was initially taken aback by the results, I came to think of the use of such tools as an effective scaffolding/motivating element. Hunt (2019) argues that "Development of

multimodal literacy awareness may offer opportunities for meaning making that extend beyond the learners' present L2 capabilities, while developing awareness of audience and rhetoric" (p. 129). Although I have centered speaking/discussion in this course, students appropriated an online tool to produce the audio component of the videos, effectively taking the pressure off group members to perform and compare their performances. Using the tool allowed them to control the quality of the video within the constraints of time and available environment for recording during the class time. In this case, learners exercised their agency, drawing on their knowledge of digital tools apart from my instruction. Through this experience, I learned a different way to think about scaffolding the projects from the students' initiative in accessing and using a tool that was not even on my radar. Their action challenged my preconceived notion of what a speaking project needed to be, forcing me to reconsider the goals of the project. If I wanted to prioritize realistic tasks, I would also need to be open to this novel semiotic material.

Project 2 demonstrated a different set of challenges for the students. For Project 1, simply turning on the camera and recording themselves speaking resulted in a sufficient combination of textual and visual elements. The reduction to two-dimensional, fixed images without voice recordings or sound effects meant that students would need to create or find various materials and plan and execute their arrangement. Of course, it would have been perfectly acceptable to allow students to make videos for these other platforms, though these would have been shorter due to the constraints of each platform. Instead of repeating the video project, I wanted to experiment with a different type of multimodal composition. However, it is certain that I underestimated the complexity of the task.

I thoroughly expected students to include Internet memes in their mock posts, either by combining existing viral memes with captions to introduce their educational content or by creating unique memes that presented the educational content in creative, memorable ways. Miltner (2018) identifies meme making and distribution as "a ubiquitous, arguably foundational, digital media practice" (p. 412). That students used social media platforms to compose their projects but did not include memes raises questions about meme culture regionally and across generations. It is possible that students are versed in the grammar of memes but lack a fundamental understanding of their function sufficient to create novel memes. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) concluded, multimodal literacy is not innate and should be taught alongside traditional literacy. Even though students are avid consumers of social media, it may not be automatically clear to them how the posts are functioning multimodally, especially considering the niche humor often encountered on social media platforms.

To understand the issues associated with Internet meme literacy in particular, it is further necessary to analyze the competencies associated with their production and dissemination. Knobel and Lankshear (2007) studied Internet memes to identify the differences between memes that achieved virality and Dawkins' original conception of "meme" as the unit of transmission of culture. According to Dawkins (1976), in order to replicate, a meme requires qualities of longevity, fecundity, and copying-fidelity. In addition to these qualities, Knobel and Lankshear (2007) found that the fecundity of Internet memes was observed in three patterns: humor, intertextuality, and anomalous juxtaposition. Further, literacy in memes is also highly dependent on an understanding of the shared experiences and practices through which people access emerging "affinity spaces" on the Internet. They saw the study of memes as a challenge to the dominant definition of digital literacies because, while "contributing a multimodal 'meme text' that has the maximum appearance of veracity… requires a range of finely-honed technical skills and competencies" (Knobel & Lankshear,

2007, p. 220), understanding memes requires understanding them within larger, complex systems of meaning. While I had expected students to be familiar with the grammar of memes, in fact, they seemed not to be aware of the genre. Further investigation about my students' exposure to memes is certainly needed to inform future scaffolding of the task in Project 2.

Finally, the issue of evaluation needs to be addressed in future cycles. As can be seen from the data, the projects revealed a range of skill levels when using digital tools such as editing software. Cartner and Hallas (2020) argue that multimodal literacies require a novel form of assessment in place of those developed for traditional print forms. The inclusion of carefully designed rubrics, distributed to students in advance of each project, could also serve as a scaffolding tool when students are approaching the daunting task of creating social media posts.

Takeaways

Through this project, I realized the centrality of multimodal literacy to the ability to create materials that incorporate different modes. In order to successfully scaffold tasks that ask Japanese university students to produce multimodal texts, I resolved to keep these six points in mind moving forward.

Don't make assumptions about students' social media use.

It is not a given that students are using the Internet to study English or social media to consume English-language content. Instructors preparing to introduce social media-related tasks in the classroom should, if they haven't already, curate a list of social media channels and accounts that are producing high-quality, English-medium, English language instruction materials. I decided to show actual examples in future classes, such as the official Instagram account of Merriam-Webster Dictionary (@merriamwebster).

Don't expect that because students consume large amounts of social media, they will be able to construct multimodal posts such as memes.

Consumption of social media does not always result in the sort of reflection on and analysis of the hidden grammar of multimodal texts that is necessary to produce such texts. Scaffolding this process by guiding students through engaging in analysis of such texts using an existing academic framework may be an appropriate substitute for the productive tasks described in this exploratory inquiry.

Don't expect that students are able to use editing software.

While students may be "digital natives," different levels of access to and training in the digital tools required to compose multimodal digital texts result in potentially different skill sets even among peers who consume social media in comparable ways. Consider allowing students to sketch or storyboard their ideas or use other analog processes for creating their multimodal texts.

Do provide a clear purpose for the tasks that is separate from creating social media posts.

Because students may not have the skills to produce sleek multimodal texts, instructors may need to temper their expectations. This could have a significant impact on the methods of evaluation, considering that some students may be skilled in the production of multimodal tasks due to different learning and life experiences (some may even already be social media

influencers!). The evaluation criteria should be clearly communicated to students and instructors may want to consider maintaining a flexible approach.

Do scaffold every step of the process.

Even though social media is ubiquitous and communication is increasingly multimodal, traditional education systems have not yet adapted to a multiliteracies approach. In addition to presenting the academic concepts, demonstrating how to apply them is important. This may also require devoting some class time to demonstrating software and allowing students to experiment with the tools together.

Do keep a reflexive approach throughout.

Instructors should be open to student feedback and demonstrate receptivity to their ideas. Because these tasks may be new to the students and more challenging than expected, it is important to be open to making adjustments in terms of the schedule and length of assignments if they express they are having difficulties with the process. It is critical to always remember that the point of the tasks is to engage students in a topic rather than focusing on mastery of the tools.

Review Process

This article was open peer-reviewed by Mayumi Abe and Paul Collett of the Learner Development Journal Review Network. *(Contributors have the option of open or blind peer review.)*

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吉良アマンダは中央大学経済学部助教。TESOLの修士号を取得し、関東地方の高等教育機関で12年間、外国語としての英語を教えている。マルチモーダル分析、教材開発、タスクベースの教授法に研究の関心を寄せる。授業や探究的実践の他に、西東京でハイキングを楽しんでいる。

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