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# Using the Web and Word Processors to Teach Students Strategic Competence<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This article reports the content of my conference presentations made to JALT participants during the fall of 2006. My goals during the JALT Hokkaido and national conference were to describe L<sub>2</sub> strategic competence and to discuss ways in which this could be achieved by relatively simple use of the web in particular and related technology: various computer applications, especially word processors, and electronic dictionaries. The intended audience were novice computer users who, at a minimal level, could make use of the wide accessibility of this high technology for making suggestions during class time. Beyond this, there are examples of exploiting authentic sites and using the laptop to enhance an EFL teacher's presentation for activities like classroom brainstorming or taking up answers of a certain length.

**Keywords:** *EFL, communicative competence, computer enhanced learning environments*

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<sup>1</sup> This is a report of my conference presentation of the same name, which was made September 23, 2006 at the JALT Hokkaido 23<sup>rd</sup> Language Conference. I also made this presentation on November 3, 2006 at the JALT 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual International Conference on Language Teaching and Learning, then entitled "Strategic Competence for our Students on the Web."

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this article is to report at length on my conference presentation whose title is the same. I have in mind to develop some of the points which the length of my talk could not address, or not address to the extent that an article allows. The goals of my conference presentation were two fold: first, to review literature on strategic competence; and second, this being the goal of a presentation whose audience included teachers, presumably like myself, who were yet at a novice level of computer expertise in the language classroom, to use this literature for direction it can provide in decisions we make about the use of technology such as the web, computers, word processors, and electronic dictionaries in our classrooms. I start from the premise that if language teachers cultivate students' current need to be efficient users of this technology, students may become more proficient in language interaction as well since they will have increased the number of topics of conversation in which they can more readily participate.

Specifically with regard to this article, I wish to discuss briefly the literature I reviewed during my talk, document the suggestions I made to the participants about how teachers who are novice in-class computer users can use this current technology in their teaching, and then evaluate the group activity I presented to the participants as a reflective analysis in the teaching of communication strategies.

## **Literature on strategic competence and communication strategies**

Canale and Swain (1980) specify three kinds of competence in their framework of communicative competence: (1) grammatical compe-

tence; (2) sociolinguistic competence; and (3) strategic competence. While the review of (1) and (2) are worthwhile in themselves, I will keep my comments brief here. “Grammatical competence,” first in Canale and Swain’s framework, assumes that accuracy on the structures of the language is a requisite for successful communication. Consider, for example, the article in English. Where it is omitted as there is no such feature of the Japanese language, the ear of the native speaker of English may be confused since this production is non-standard. Pluralization is another such example. Although, strictly speaking, a missing -s morpheme may not impede communication, a native-speaker may be confused when confronted with this input that is missing. When the occurrence of -s morphemes (both for pluralization and third-person singular) remains unproduced in discourse and reaches a certain frequency, the interlocutor receiving this input, rather than focusing on content, may more readily attend to the interference of the omission. In such cases, the production requires remedy so that the communication is not impeded. To achieve this, some revision of a grammar point, however concisely, may assist learners in producing the foreign language more accurately. “Sociolinguistic competence,” second in Canale and Swain’s framework, assumes stratification of societies where English is spoken, and that the right register according to the interlocutor addressed will be part of the communication. Hyams’ well-known quotation springs to mind to exemplify this type of competence: “... a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences, not only grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner” (1972, p. 277). In addition to the considerations of spoken language, there are the genres of written discourse. Contemporary newspapers and magazines have a style different from the classi-

cal literature of the language. Friendly e-mail intended for one's peers will have a tone different from e-mail explaining an absence sent to a professor.

Absolutely essential in the assumptions of my discussion is the third competence of their framework, strategic competence. Canale and Swain (1980) posit that "Communicative competence is composed minimally of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and communication strategies, or what we will refer to as strategic competence" (p. 27). For language teachers, it is felicitous that the definition is cast in this manner. Classroom teachers may have insights about communication strategies which are not yet formally described in the literature by the researchers. Reflecting on their practices, classroom teachers can describe communication strategies they may have discovered themselves in the presentation of their pedagogical activities. Indeed, certain strategies may become apparent incidentally at times when they believe their teaching has another focus. As a result, teachers can inform the research with thoughtfully written descriptions of the discovery in its context.

In addition to Canale and Swain's (1980) framework for communicative competence<sup>2</sup>, I cite conclusions drawn by Fröhlich and Paribakht (1984)<sup>3</sup> who undertook early studies on communication strategies while they were graduate students at the University of Toronto's Ontario

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<sup>2</sup> Canale (1983a) and Canale (1983b) formally place "discourse competence" in the communicative competence framework.

<sup>3</sup> I recommend the survey presented in this article for its qualitative description of these early studies in communication strategies. I reviewed this article in the tenth anniversary edition of *Studies in Culture* (Kirkwood, 2003).

Institute for Studies in Education. They assert that “Communication strategies (CS) may be resorted to when communication breaks down, due for example to memory lapses, insufficient structural or lexical knowledge, or little shared knowledge between interlocutors” (p. 71). The outcome they espouse is a high-level objective for language teachers. Contemporary technology may offer resources during class time for achieving this goal.

### **Electronic dictionaries**

During my conference presentation, I provided participants with a list of suggestions that could be exploited to the end of promoting communicative competence. The web is an obvious resource, but there is other related technology, possibly not yet described in the literature for language teachers, worth mentioning. Take the example of bilingual electronic dictionaries. I use one myself when I am on my own in Sapporo doing my routine errands. There is, in addition to the bilingual dictionary, a learner dictionary as part of the features which this device offers its user. I find that there is information about pluralization in the entries. When the issue of pluralization arises in a writing class of any level, it may be useful to mention that the electronic dictionary may include specific examples such as “butterflies, wolves, handkerchiefs, or hankercieve**s**, but sheep and deer.” Such is the case with the edition of the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* accessible in my electronic dictionary. This same learner dictionary included in the electronic dictionary includes examples of problematic syllable divisions at the end of a line of typing in English. “Practical” is articulated in spoken language in three syllables, but divided, according to this edition of the Oxford, as prac-tical at the end of a line of

written English. Similarly, “arbitrary” is articulated in four syllables, but divided as ar-bi-trary.

### Original laptop software applications

Before advising students about useful sites to visit on the web, teachers may find that software itself is an opportunity for explanation about technology currently in use. Various types of software will come as part of the computer when it is purchased. In the case of my *iBook*, I have *MacKiev’s World Book* software as part of the original purchase. This is an arrangement of encyclopedic information presented as entries, some with pictures and sound. I have found the material interesting myself and would be ready to recommend having a look to my students, who would find the visual presentation of such material quite appealing. Another piece of software I have shown to students during a visit to my office is the *World Book Atlas*, which is part of the software that came along with my *iBook*. It pin points two destinations on a world map and calculates the distance between the two. It would therefore catch the attention of students at a certain level who wished to learn or confirm the name in English of various geographic locations. It would also be appealing to students interested in travel. In this train of thought, the development of map sites on the web is exciting. Google (<http://maps.google.com/> and <http://earth.google.com/>) these days provides superb innovation in contemporary cartography.

### Word processors

As part of the software included in computers are word processors.

Some explanation about their use could be incorporated as classroom instruction, particularly for writing courses. At a certain level, spelling checkers may assist language learners in making their input match conventional orthography. For writers at a certain level, grammar checkers also offer feedback. I notice, for example, that the Microsoft Word grammar checker has a stylistic preference for ‘that’ over ‘which’ in restrictive clauses. That a word processor can give such feedback is of interest to me. In the case of language learners, these students must be at a level which allows them to react to the feedback which the word processor generates for not every suggestion that comes up will be germane.

In order to assist students learning to write with word processors, a language teacher may wish to mention what all novice users of this equipment discover at some point. In the first place, the ‘save’ command should be used routinely. The disappointment of losing from the screen what is being composed or edited due to some electrical glitch can be avoided. Later on, word-processed files can be accessed for editing writing in progress. On more than one occasion, I have had the experience of students in my writing courses who, when asked for a revision, have reverted to a manuscript written in pencil on notepaper although they did the work the first time with a word processor and printer. This, to me, seems like a regrettable misunderstanding about the purpose of a word processor. The task of editing should be quicker and easier by returning to a saved file. To start over again in pencil when the work is begun on a word processing file is the result of not understanding the intended purpose of the equipment.

In the same train of thought, text to be entered on the web should be first composed and saved in word-processed files for future reference. Not all e-mail accounts on the web have included “sent” files



from which correspondence can be retrieved. In order to check what was sent as e-mail at a later time, it may be useful to have these texts on hand saved as word-processed files. As for the convenience of certain kinds of e-mail accounts offered on the web, it is to be noted that their design may require backing through several web pages one at a time in order to find a certain date. Contrast this with e-mail archives saved in a system that allows quickly going backwards through months, even years, of dates without the tedious manoeuvre of clicking through web pages, one after the other. For students using an e-mail account of the former variety, they may do well to save important e-mail files in a separate file at the time of writing so that the business they are trying to resolve can be returned to as news comes in from their correspondent(s).

### **Web sites for reading**

This advice about saving word-processing files particularly in the case of e-mail lends itself as a bridge to the next topic, which is a number of suggestions for using sites on the web in order to increase communicative competence. While e-mail develops writing skills, a skill to which I will return at greater length later, let us turn our attention to, among the three remaining language skills, the number of authentic sites for developing reading. Many newspapers are now instantly available on the web. For a survey of current international news, students could be directed to Goggle News at <http://news.google.com/>. The number of links on this site includes top stories from the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India and South Africa to mention countries where English has official status. There are also links for stories about business, science

and technology, sports, entertainment and health. I will generally leave the development of pedagogical activities to the discretion of the teacher, who I assume may be looking for an “authentic real-world” resource. In this train of thought, however, it will be immediately apparent that it is not always necessary to develop pedagogical activities to accompany a web site to facilitate students’ learning. Part of our classroom talk can be to recommend to students with both the desire and aptitude exploring certain web sites at their leisure in order to develop the foreign-language skills such information can provide a self-directed learner. In general, in the usual course of a classroom lesson, it may often be enough to provide the web address of sites that teachers themselves would find interesting to visit for a variety of reasons. In addition, there is the technical side of the technology which needs to be explained for the benefit of novice users. Language learners steeped in the technology to a familiar level may find the explanation nonetheless helpful for the vocabulary it provides in context in the target language.

Japanese students may find the familiarity of life in their own country a shelter when reading in English. In this case, the following three English-language newspapers each have web sites: *The Japan Times* ([www.japantimes.co.jp/](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/)); *The Daily Yomiuri* (<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/>); and *Mainichi Daily News* (<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/>). Allow me to confirm that the web site for *The Japan Times* is, like the newspaper itself, a conventional presentation in English of the news. At the same time, I found that *The Japan Times Weekly Online* (<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/weekly/>) includes “translation notes for intermediate students of English,” as the explanation beside the icon to come from the site for *The Japan Times* claims. Specifically, I found Japanese versions presented beside the originals of two opinion columns

in English when I looked at *The Japan Times Weekly Online* of September 1, 2007 and again on March 14, 2009. Relative to the entire web site, it seems that the editorial policy is to present the translation notes sparingly at the beginning of the site. *The Daily Yomiuri Online* of course is the parallel edition of the original in Japanese. Students at a certain level could use the two editions connected with a link icon to look for cultural differences in the way the news is presented. On September 1, 2007 in the English edition, the shot of Jun Hiromichi practicing in a wheelchair for a 1500-m race catches the reader's attention as the site emerges. In the Japanese edition, it is a shot of the 5000-m race for women at the World Athletics Championships in Osaka. The picture shows a race in progress. It may be interesting to speculate why action shots of similar sports stories have been chosen to grab the attention of the respective readership of the two editions. The stories are similar but are not the same one. It is a comparison that may lend itself to speculation about cultural differences. More striking seems to be the presentation of news on the March 17, 2009. The Japanese edition of the web version features a picture of safari-park elephants with the description "elephant tango" in the headline. While this picture in its mid-top location quickly grabs the attention of the surfer calling up this web page, no such mention is made of elephants in any of the stories in the English version. As for the remaining newspaper web site, the one for *Mainichi Daily News*, there are many examples of links between the English stories and their Japanese originals. The links allow flipping back and forth between the two languages, as would putting the respective stories on two of the computer's windows side by side. When news stories are presented in two languages as a mirror translation presentation, this allows searching for equivalent vocabulary and expressions in the foreign language.

Another site providing much information in English about Japan is the one for Japan National Tourist Organization ([www.jnto.go.jp/eng/](http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/)). I believe this suggestion in itself may enable students to make the related association of information presented by their hometowns. Various geographic locations are presented in English on web pages although the quality of the authorship does depend on the members of the community providing the information. In contrast, the quality of written English at the JNTO web site is consistently reliable, and perusing it over the years, I have even found JR train schedules giving every detail needed for a journey between two points which the user specifies along with the desired time of departure. When the selection is made, the web site returns five possible itineraries. As for reading at a basic level, this task requires minimal levels of scanning. At higher levels of interaction, however, such a web search may lend itself to a classroom activity about going places or written descriptions about how to make the trip.

Trips to foreign countries where English is spoken being popular destinations for students studying the language, there are similar web sites well produced by official tourism boards around the world. For example, a popular Canadian heroine is Anne of Green Gables. An initiation to her legacy can be found using the visitors' guide for Prince Edward Island (<http://www.tourismpei.com/index.php3>). Currently details about where to see the musical is described, and on earlier searches, I have found short bits of information presented about locations related to this well-known Canadian literature. Before reading the story, appreciation for the geographic location could be developed by viewing pictures on the web site, which capture the well-known red sand of the island. Given the popularity of this destination for Japanese tourists, there is also a link which provides information in

Japanese.

### **Web sites for listening**

The web also provides opportunity to develop listening comprehension. NHK makes available its English-language news conventionally broadcast on short-wave radio through a RealPlayer audio file at <http://www.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/radio/program/index.html/>. I have mentioned the “shelter” which news about their own country in English may provide Japanese students at a certain level. For those who are prepared to learn about the culture and politics of other countries, the web offers many opportunities to listen to the news broadcast in many foreign languages.

I have yet to read an analysis of how news broadcasting can be graded for learners of foreign languages even though televised foreign-language news broadcasts have been aired in Japan now for many years. I have begun with my assumption that news about their own country in English may provide Japanese students the most “sheltered” experience. The usual schemata at a cognitive level will be readily accessible, one of the most important reasons being that the information itself will be essentially factual. Only the foreign language will need to be accommodated. Taking a great step, a level up from this would be international radio announcers broadcasting their news to a foreign audience. Such a service would be Radio Canada International at [www.rcinet.ca/](http://www.rcinet.ca/) where the voices from Canada would ideally explain various aspects of Canadian life that would be unfamiliar to listeners in other parts of the world. Whenever I have tuned into this programming myself, I have found that the listeners are required to do a certain amount of finding out over time. What I have recalled as immediately

relevant as commentary for people living outside Canada are comments from radio hosts about living in such a cold climate. However, many assumptions about life in these foreign places are left unexplained at the outset. For example, who is the incumbent governing leader and what party forms the government? What is the governing party's program? These, of course, are obvious questions. More subtle may be information related to the mosaic of Canadian life. There are, in addition to the two linguistic majorities, English and French, ethnic communities and then the indigenous, who are both the aboriginal and the Inuit. In this train of thought, there are lessons for children and their parents learning Canada's two official languages available through the international service. The English lessons are found in the French web pages, and the French lessons are found in the English web pages. Understanding news about the interaction between these groups in Canada requires some familiarity with both short- and long-term history and relative positions of various locations. A listener makes an investment of time to learn about current issues as various events and the agenda of the respective communities drive the country as a whole through its national business and along its political path. The BBC World Service (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio/>) and Voice of America (<http://www.voanews.com/specialenglish/>) offer similar programming. They aim to make presentations of news from various locations around the world to an international audience. That they provide background information in history and geography is implicit in their aims. The extent to which this is achieved may make some programming more successful than other programming for listeners learning the language.

As the highest level of listening development, I see access to regular programming for local and national audiences to be the most

challenging level for language listeners, who will have to come to the broadcast ideally with the same assumptions and background knowledge that the local communities share about the news. Perhaps in this context international stories will be easier to understand for the announcer will have to provide the local audience with some background about the location from which the news is taken.

I will return to British and Canadian radio sites for the examples they provide. At the BBC web site given earlier (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio/>), Radio 1-7 are offered in addition to BBC World Service. Much of the programming on Radio 1-3 is various kinds of music. Programming on Radio 3 includes drama and conversations about the arts. Radio 5 is a service for live news and sports. A certain amount of news makes up the programming on these channels, but it is Radio 4, formerly called "Intelligent speech," where a variety of radio talk programs are the focus. I suspect the most useful recommendation to learners of the language wanting to listen to discourse at length would be Radio 4 for those in pursuit of something more for insiders than the BBC World Service. More culture and music are offered on the recently launched Radio 6 and Radio 7. The heart of the national broadcasting of the BBC to its own people may well be its culture. At the same time though, part of the BBC web site includes instruction in learning English, even news English, with the link "Words in the News."

As for the web site of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation ([www.cbc.ca/listen/index.html](http://www.cbc.ca/listen/index.html)), a link is provided for some 30 urban centres (Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver) and regions (Western Newfoundland, Labrador, Inuvik, and Iqaluit) across the country. There are important blocks of time in the scheduling when regional and local programming originates from the designated locations. In such programs, local topics are routinely discussed and the local issues can

make for lively discussion on call-in programs. This local and regional broadcasting is complementary to the network broadcasting, at which time the same national programming is heard in all parts of the country. Producers at the CBC would affirm, I believe, that it is indeed a great challenge to find programs of interest to listeners spread out over six time zones in such diversified geographic locations, but that is the assignment they face. The national broadcasting includes not only news and current affairs but also talk (including documentaries, or sometimes lectures), drama, and the arts. The CBC does rather conveniently draw a line between talk, “Radio 1,” and music, “Radio 2,” by broadcasting these services on separate stations. Like the BBC programming, this division may serve usefully when advising learners of the language about the kind of discourse they should listen to given their level of development.

### **Web sites for writing**

In my advice about word processors, I did briefly touch on the subject of e-mail, which I would recommend as an activity on the web for learning to write. Before discussing writing skills that can be developed by various tasks on the web, a few preliminary observations about the using a keyboard are in order. Students may be novice typists or may have otherwise developed a certain amount of skill in this regard. Typing, being a motor skill, requires a certain amount of practice before coordination between the hand and the keyboard is productive. At this level, there are various kinds of communication in which learners of the language can participate: messengers, chat-rooms, blogs, and forums. This kind of communication may also provide impetus to hone the technical skill of accuracy on the keyboard.



As for various common writing tasks found on the web, there are reservations, payments, applications, and the feedback given on questionnaires and evaluations. Suggest that writers at the most novice level begin by printing out the form to be completed. Completing these documents longhand before entering the data at a keyboard allows for some thoughtful editing and the leisurely consultation of a conventional dictionary, ensuring accurate spelling. Even the simplest on-line forms may require research or follow up to be performed while the computer is turned off. For example, the credit card to which payment is to be billed has been left at home. Similarly, all individuals will be assigned a certain number of membership numbers according to the interests they develop, but the right one for a certain form may not be readily available at their fingertips while they are logged on.

More proficient writers developing research skills should be encouraged to use the web as a research tool. As a writing teacher, I have also used information I have looked for on the web in order to provide specific feedback to my students. I will briefly describe the activities that made up part of the instruction that I was giving as a first-year English course at Hokkaido University. The newly adopted curriculum included both speaking and writing objectives. To this end, students found in the textbook I required topics that they wanted to develop at greater length for a speech which they would both compose (fulfilling various writing objectives) and then later read (fulfilling various speaking objectives) to their classmates. A popular topic inspired from the textbook material was Jackie Chan. One student providing biographic information about Chan's career mentioned a movie title that did not resonate for me. I was able to find the name of the intended film myself on the web, and specified the exact title when I returned this student's first draft. Another student writing

about Chan mentioned “Blues Lee,” which puzzled me until I confirmed on the web that like Chan, Bruce Lee had been a martial arts actor. On a draft from another student, the “IUCN Red List” appeared in the description with only enough information, I thought, for readers versed at length in the activities of this group. For myself, I had to begin with the siglum, which stands for “International Union of Conservation of Nature.” I confess I do not recall if I took advantage of the opportunity occasioned by this lack of understanding on my part to talk about “insiders,” and what they can be assumed to know. Perhaps certain circles of people would immediately understand IUCN, but in the case where this knowledge is not shared, a developing writer needs to learn to define and specify terms, and describe the group’s objectives in such a way that the explanation would be coherent for a reader unfamiliar with this union.

As part of the writing lesson, the teacher could recommend various search engines. *Yahoo!* ([www.yahoo.com/](http://www.yahoo.com/)) is popularly used for web surfing, and includes a Japanese version among those intended for international users. There is also MSN ([www.msn.com/](http://www.msn.com/)).

### **Web sites for speaking**

Indeed, students visiting typical English-language web sites of their own choice is the ultimate goal of teachers of self-directed language learners. It is also clear at times, however, that the language teacher is also a conceiver of innovative tasks that allow students sheltered experience at certain times in their language development. Such is the case for many speaking tasks. I recall teaching third-year night students speaking. For this group, merely asking them to prepare for a conversation by finding any web site of interest to them seemed to be

enough. In the next class meeting, they chatted with their partners about what they had found on the web until I was ready to go on to the next activity. Some news stories may reappear on the web, as in other media, over a length of time. For example, I recall that the story of Japanese abductees in North Korea caught the attention of the media. For this third-year speaking course, there were certain dilemmas that lent themselves to a discussion in critical thought. For example, how would young Japanese be enticed by their captors in the first place?

In the case of groups that would not be ready to take the step of studying news stories, any daily living or consumerism sites could be used to this end. Simple tasks could be conceived from sites that provide weather and particularly time around the world ([www.worldtimeserver.com/](http://www.worldtimeserver.com/)). I have in mind problems such as, “Your best friend is studying in New York. You want to chat with your friend before his/her bedtime. When should you make your call from Sapporo?” A follow up question to draw the distinction between winter and the other seasons would allow students to learn about the convention of daylight saving time, which is not observed in Japan (or on the Hawaiian islands either). Currency converters ([www.xe.com/](http://www.xe.com/) or <http://edition.cnn.com/BUSINESS/>) could be used to determine the current value of 10,000 yen in other countries where students may be thinking of traveling. A possible follow up step to the conversion of money may be to use a search engine to find out the value of hotel rooms in these places. These are simple sheltered tasks allowing the development of both internet and foreign-language skills. I believe they also appeal to students looking for “real-world” activities with a travel theme.

## **Keyboarding in a computer enhanced learning environment**

To conclude my comments about the use of various technology to promote communicative competence, I want to share from my experience of using my laptop in place of the blackboard or whiteboard. No doubt there is specific software being developed or marketed for this purpose while I prepare this manuscript. I have not, however, gone beyond the most accessible word processing applications on my laptop—*Word* and *Appleworks* in addition to preparation on *Powerpoint* presented during class time. Fonts of the right size lend themselves well to activities intended for the whole class. I think, for example, of brainstorming activities I have done with third-year writing students. I invite my students to share various ideas that they have about a certain topic. At the keyboard, I act as scribe as they provide their reactions. As follow up, I may comment about their vocabulary and grammar. It is a time that allows the group feedback on the omissions of the article and the -s morphemes. This is facilitated by the word processor's yellow highlight bar summoned with the command keys and click of the mouse when the cursor is in place. Certain textbooks give rather open-ended questions. When students' answers are relatively short (one or two sentences), the projection of their replies while I do the typing allows me to comment on these grammaticalities or other points that come up in the textbook presentation. There is also trouble shooting that comes up. Student work sent to my university e-mail address may occasionally seem to have a glitch, and I am unable to open the document in its file. The e-mail, however, forwarded to one of my web e-mail addresses can be accessed by choosing a "view" command. During a lesson, I turn on my laptop, talk about the breakdown of technical glitches using a file from my desktop, and suggest

some familiarity with various webmail sites may enable them access to an in-coming file when their usual service fails.

The level of competence I am describing here may be more technical than strategic, I confess, but I nonetheless believe that inherent in my keyboard presentation to the students is a statement about honing various skills on the computer and on the web. A computer and the web offer self-directed students many opportunities to develop strategic competence. While my reflections here have become more technical, I want to say that I do hope to continue to use my laptop for this kind of instruction in my classroom. It allows me make eye contact with students rather than turning my back. The production of what would otherwise appear on the blackboard is more efficient, and the readability is consistent and clear. In this train of thought, I advised the participants at my conference presentations that perhaps it was time to consider what would be good public style for teachers using a keyboard in this way. Most of us have learned to type as a private activity. The word processor has made speed the essence. It has also made editing a quick and simple matter. I realize when my students are an audience to my typing that I must go at a certain speed that allows for them to copy and I must also avoid making mistakes myself so that they do not inadvertently become part of the students' notes. My appeal in class for careful proofreading is one made for the teacher as well, I have come to learn.

### **Group activity in strategic competence inspired from original material found on the web**

As a follow up to my suggestions about strategic competence, I presented an activity to my participants which I developed from authen-

tic material I found on the web. Perhaps a brief description of my language learning and cultural needs will assist the reader in understanding how I made this selection. Although a resident now of fifteen years, my proficiency in Japanese does not surpass the most basic assessment of survival level. I manage with the small amount of vocabulary I have learned. I would estimate that borrowed *katakana* words from English make up the largest number. With this in mind, I realize I need to know about the culture around me since prominent in my mind as an objective for students is that they would be able to describe their culture to non-Japanese in English. To fulfill my need, I have been reading the *Mainichi Daily News* since I got my own internet connection ten years ago.

What caught my attention in the edition of the March 19, 2006 on-line edition of the *Mainichi Daily News* was Shinobu Kobayashi's "Takizakura Bento—adding cheer to cherry blossoms." There were two things about the article that struck me. First, I was impressed by the memorable description she had written of the Miharu Takizakura, a cherry tree whose fame is such that it has been conferred with the designation of "national natural treasure." There is the activity described in Miharu, generally a quiet place except when *ohanami* viewing arrives, at which time motorists arrive in great numbers and then take up seasonal activities close to the tree. The *bento* itself is sold at Koriyama Station.

Second, as I began to read through the description of the *bento*, I then experienced dissonance as this part of the article included Japanese cuisine vocabulary reaching the level of expertise of chef, in my estimation. The number of such terms begged my attention. I found twelve of them in three paragraphs.

I thought as a paired activity, it would be interesting to present

these words to the participants as the “workshop” concluding my time slot. I began by distributing an envelope to each pair and asking them to look at the 12 words, each one presented on a small strip. Then I asked the pairs if they could explain in English and separate the vocabulary familiar to them from the unidentifiable words. There were participants familiar enough with *bento* ingredients to explain in varying degrees, and for the Japanese, it was an opportunity for them to explain in English.

The next part of the activity was to look at three paragraphs in question for meaning in context. The pairs went through their unidentifiable stacks and tried to make inferences from what they read. “*Age*,” meaning “fried,” occurred in four of the terms. There were two examples where text cohesion could be used to understand vocabulary, one of which worked for anglophones understanding that “*sankaku*” means triangle. The second names a certain kind of fried tofu after the town of Miharu. “*Ekiben*” is understood as “*eki*” for “*train station*” followed by the first three sounds clipped from “*bento*.” From my own experience, I began reading the article knowing that “*sakuramochi*” is a popular confection of the cherry blossom season made of a cherry paste on rice cake. I also recognized “*tamago*” (egg) and “*kurumi*” (chestnut), which turned out to be modifiers of the selected terms.

By the time I distributed the original article and projected the original color photo, we were relieved, I assume, to find that Kobayashi included a glossary at the end of her article. Beyond the inferences of text cohesion just described, it provided an authoritative explanation for all but two terms I had originally handed out to my participants. What she assumed to be an obvious term requiring no explanation is “*nitsuke*,” fish or vegetables boiled in *shiyoyu*, which I have found in a

dictionary. The second remaining term was “*sakurameshi*,” a “*chameshi*” (tea-rice), prepared with *shiouyu* and *sake*.<sup>4</sup>

I judge that my follow up activity was valuable as an exercise in cooperative learning and cultural exchange and that it was particularly pertinent given the participants at my presentation. The right selection for any language classroom could be made in a similar way. This requires that teachers select authentic material from the web keeping in mind the background of the intended learners.

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<sup>4</sup> I was able to e-mail my colleague Kazuko Nakagawa of *Nihonbunka* for this explanation prior to my presentations, and was grateful to share her reply with my participants.



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