

In this issue:

A REPORT ON THE
2020 CUE
CONFERENCE

THREE FEATURE
ARTICLES



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News and articles from the JALT College and University Educators Special Interest Group



Sojo University, Kumamoto

Photo by Mark Howarth

A happier new year

Well, 2020 is now behind us and we head into much more hopeful year, with lessons learned and new skills acquired.

Like everything else, our publication schedule for 2020 was hampered in unforeseeable ways, and despite repeated efforts to get and keep everything on track, we're bringing you this issue very, very late. Our authors have been waiting a long time for their articles to see the light of day. We thank them for their patience and are pleased to present their work.

Crystal Rose-Wainstock, CUE's publicity officer, along with 2020 CUE Conference co-chairs Wendy Gough and Mary Hillis, brings us an account of the SIG's conference back in September. In our three feature articles, Mary Hillis returns to discuss academic

writing, Jonathan Isaacson gives an account of his journey into podcasting, and Christopher Ott shares how he gets his speaking classes off to a good start.

As always, but especially if you're new to the *Circular*, please check our website for an explanation of what the SIG and this publication are all about. Indeed, read and enjoy this and our previous issues for an idea of what we like to publish. Submissions are always open.

Steve Paton, Editor

JALT CUE SIG Publicity Update

The 2020 CUE Conference took place in September, and we wanted to take a look back at how the first online CUE Conference went. The following thoughts are from the CUE Conference co-chairs, Wendy Gough and Mary Hillis.

From Wendy:

We were sad to have to cancel the face-to-face conference after the NanKyu chapter offered to host it at Sojo University in Kumamoto. This was an opportunity for us to reach out to CUE members living outside the central Japan corridor as well as to have a conference that people might want to bring their families to. Rachel Barrington was working with the university to provide space for regular slideshow-based presentations as well as a new "Showcase Poster" presentation format that CUE's membership chair Robert Dykes had suggested and was coordinating. The NanKyu chapter was also planning an afternoon tour of Kumamoto Castle for conference attendees.

When we decided to move the conference online, we offered free admission as well as free unvetted presentation slots to publishers who have regularly supported CUE conferences over the years to say thank you for supporting the SIG. Overall, the presenters seemed comfortable with the Zoom format in the sessions I hosted, and they had lively interactions with the audience members. The YouTube Premier presentations, where the presenters submitted pre-recorded presentations then made themselves available during their presentation time for Q & A, also seemed to go well. Gretchen Clark suggested hosting Zoom sessions for Q & A during the YouTube Premier presentations, which I hadn't thought of. It was a great idea, and I think it enhanced the presentations nicely.

Overall, the conference was a success due to the willingness of the presenters to try this new format and the work of the conference planners Sean Gay (webmaster), Dan Newbury (programs), Mary Hillis (conference co-chair), and myself.

From Mary:

Thank you to everyone involved with our first online conference. We had a good turnout for the event and over 25 concurrent sessions. In the sessions I moderated, there were a variety of interesting topics and the speakers were well-prepared. Plenary talks were given by Masaki Oda (Tamagawa University) and Jennie Roloff Rothman (Kanda University of International Studies). We would like to thank them for sharing their time and ideas with us, and we are pleased to share that the conference was awarded a Platinum EVE (Equal Voices in ELT) Award. If you are interested in getting involved, we would like to welcome new volunteers to help with the next conference, so please get in touch with a CUE officer.

Thank you to everyone who helped make the CUE Conference a success!

The CUE SIG Annual General Meeting took place at the JALT 2020 Online Conference on Saturday, November 21st. At the meeting, CUE SIG officers presented reports for 2020. The report was shared in the December 2020 CUE Newsletter. Please contact CUE Publicity (publicityjaltcue@gmail.com) if you would like access to the report.

Crystal Rose-Wainstock, CUE SIG publicity officer

Note from Glen Hill (former CUE SIG Publications Chair)

Thanks to the amazing efforts of the CUE conference organizers, the 2020 online conference was a great success. What's more, it generated 11 submissions of proceedings papers to be published in the *OnCUE Journal Special Issue* later this year. Readers should keep in mind this opportunity for resume-building opportunities. Not every submission is accepted, but the articles are usually a bit shorter, which should make any budding author happy. And, OCJSI looks for reflection articles, too, not just proceedings of one's presentation. A reflection article is a conference attendee's responses to one or more of the talks, including a plenary/keynote. Even if you didn't present at a conference, writing up something can not only add to your resume but also give you a different approach to developing your writing skills.

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Feature articles

All about you and me

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Students are often taught to avoid first- and second-person pronouns in academic writing assignments. While it is not necessary to completely avoid the use of personal pronouns in academic writing, students can be taught ways to limit their use. To achieve this aim, I propose several strategies and in-class activities to support students' development.

Strategies

There are four commonly used strategies to limit personal pronoun usage: utilizing the "it structure", substituting common nouns, using an impersonal pronoun, and citing information and evidence from sources. Each of these strategies will be explained, using examples from an assignment where students were asked to give their opinion on a university policy to implement a common lunch period.

The it structure

The it structure is a method that students can use to transform sentences. For example, the sentence "I will write about why you should eat lunch" could be changed with the it structure to "It is

important for students to eat lunch." Students can follow the basic pattern to transform or write sentences for their essay: "it + is + adjective + for ... + infinitive" (Hinkel, 2004). However, there are several points to be aware of when using this sentence construction. First, students should vary their adjective choice so that the same word is not used each time. In addition, students should not overuse this construction because beginning a sentence with "It is" shifts the emphasis to the end of the sentence, making the idea weaker.

Common nouns

The next strategy is to replace a personal pronoun with a common noun. If a student wrote the sentence, "The common lunch period is very important for me," then they should consider which specific group of people "me" refers to. In this case, the common nouns would be "students and faculty," so the sentence could be rewritten as, "The common lunch period is very important for students and faculty." Although this strategy is relatively easy to apply, students should be aware of two common pitfalls. One is that plural nouns, such as "students" or "people", should be used when talking about a situation in general. Another is that the chosen common noun should not be overused in the paragraph; in other words, writers should strive for a balance between the common noun (e.g., students or people) and the corresponding pronoun (e.g., them).

Impersonal pronouns

The third strategy is to utilize the impersonal pronoun “one”. If a student wrote, “You can eat lunch every day” the sentence could easily be changed to “One can eat lunch every day.” For student assignments, “one” has a formal tone and therefore should be used sparingly. If students do still choose the impersonal pronoun, then it is important to remember that “one” is singular, so subject-verb agreement should be checked.

Citing information

Unlike the previous strategies, the final strategy of citing information from sources requires more than restructuring the sentence; students need to not only find appropriate information but also document it correctly. For example, if a student wrote, “If I don’t have time to eat lunch, then I can’t do my best on assignments and tests”, then the student can be encouraged to research information instead of using personal examples for support. The student could search for the negative effects of not eating lunch. With this information, the student can write a new sentence, such as “Skipping meals leads to a lack of essential nutrients that causes your energy and concentration to drop (Weintraub, 2017).” Students must paraphrase and cite source ideas properly in their assignments.

Classroom activities

To raise student awareness of the use of personal pronouns in academic writing, teachers can include classroom activities at various stages of the writing process.

Classroom activities for noticing personal pronouns, examining writing strategies, transforming sentences, and peer-reviewing classmates’ drafts are outlined below.

The first activity is to have students notice the personal pronouns in a model paragraph by highlighting all the first- and second-person pronouns they read. After finding these, students can discuss the following questions: Are personal pronouns used in the model paragraph? How were they used? Why were they used or not used?

The second activity is to have students identify the strategy used in a specific sentence. Students should read a list of sample sentences and identify which of the four strategies (it structure, common nouns, impersonal pronouns, cite a source) has been used in each one.

The third activity is a paragraph-length fill-in-the-blank activity. For this activity, the teacher prepares a paragraph but removes three to four sentences in which the strategies are used and places these sentences in a list. Students read the paragraph, choose the correct sentence from the list, and insert it into the correct position in the paragraph. In this way, students can see strategies in use at the paragraph level and see how they can work together.

The next activity is transforming sentences. Students can change a sentence with a first-person pronoun to a sentence using a common noun, impersonal pronoun, or it structure. This

can be done orally as a pair activity or written as an individual activity.

The final activity is a self- or peer-review activity. For this, students answer key questions about their partner's paragraph: Does the writer use personal pronouns? Does the writer use personal stories and experiences, or information from sources for support? What can the writer do to improve this assignment?

Conclusion

Many students have learned never to include personal pronouns in academic paragraphs and essays. As writing conventions continue to change and students write for different audiences and purposes, choosing an appropriate voice and employing a variety of sentence structures are becoming increasingly important skills. Four strategies for avoiding personal pronouns include "it structure," common nouns, impersonal pronoun, or citing information from

sources. These writing skills can be honed through classroom activities which encourage students to notice and practice these strategies.

References

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Weintraub, L. (2017, September 19). Nutrition: Tired of afternoon fatigue? Try these to turn it around. Daily News. *Los Angeles Daily News*. <https://www.dailynews.com/2017/09/19/nutrition-tired-of-afternoon-fatigue-try-these-to-turn-it-around/>

Note: This article is based on a presentation delivered at the JALT 2019 Conference in Nagoya.

Submit an article!

What's happening in your teaching?

What obstacles have you overcome, and how?

What ideas or opinions do you have that others might be interested to read?

What have you read, heard, or seen recently that's changed your approach to teaching, either in or out of the classroom?

CUE Circular aims to publish quality, interesting, practical articles about the day-to-day nature of teaching in our sector.

www.jaltcue.org/cuecircular

Podcasting as an extensive listening resource

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The benefits of extensive reading (ER) for language learners are well known and hard to deny, which is why I incorporate ER into my classes. However, I have always found one serious drawback. That is the matter of students who are not avid readers in their first language. How can I expect students without positive L1 reading habits and all the strategies that come with those habits to develop good reading habits in their second language? One of the central tenets of ER, as highlighted by Thornbury (2006), is “the more leisurely reading of longer texts, *primarily for pleasure*” (p. 191, emphasis added). If students do not enjoy reading in their L1, reading in L2 will almost certainly not be a pleasurable experience.

To combat this, I allow my students the option of doing either ER or extensive listening (EL) to fulfill their homework requirements. With ER, it is simple for my students to find materials; my school has a fair selection of graded readers available both online and in our library. For listening, students are much more on

their own. Of course, I make lists of recommendations, primarily podcasts and YouTube channels aimed at ESL/EFL students. For some students, these recommendations are sufficient; students can find materials that are both level-appropriate and interesting. Unfortunately, this is not always the case for everyone.

This situation of having students who are not readers and who cannot find listening samples that are both level-appropriate and interesting led me to the idea of creating my own podcasts for students. Podcasts are still a growing medium, with new shows and services seemingly available daily. This includes content from within the TESOL world.

So why jump on the bandwagon as a teacher? For me, there were two reasons for creating an original podcast: one for myself and one for my students. The personal reason for making a podcast is quite simple. I enjoy podcasts. They are an easy way to entertain and educate myself about pretty much any topic one can think of. This idea ties into the student-centric reason I created the podcast series. Because I find podcasts to be such a useful tool for personal education, it stands to reason that students might find them useful as well. And, rather than stopping at simply giving them a list of recommended podcasts for their EL, I thought that creating podcasts specifically for them would make the podcasts more engaging. According to a podcast listening survey done in the US, the number one reason given by 75% of respondents for lack of interest in

podcasts was that “podcasts just aren’t for you” (Edison Research, 2019). Of course, a survey of the general public in the US isn’t completely applicable to Japanese university students, but human nature is universal enough to assume that similar reasoning would be present in at least a noticeable number of my students. Therefore, it was my belief that, given the option of podcasts made by their teacher, tailored specifically for them, people’s feeling of detachment from podcasts could be lessened at least somewhat.

Once the decision had been made to create podcasts for students, the issue of what topics to cover arose. As stated previously, I am attempting to make podcasts more personal for students. As such, I found that the two most common themes that emerged through 50 episodes were (a) personal information about myself, and (b) comparisons between Japan and other cultures, primarily the US, where I am from. While it has not been a conscious decision to focus on these two themes, they both seem logical and relevant for materials aimed at a monocultural student body. While not every student is curious about the details of their teachers’ lives—in fact, the majority of students probably don’t really care all that much about their teachers’ personal lives—familiarity with the subject of a discussion makes it more relatable. Cultural comparisons abound in textbooks and all manner of language teaching materials for obvious reasons. Additionally, creating my own podcasts allows me to finely tailor the topics to suit students’ specific interests or to focus on

subjects that we have talked about or will talk about in class.

Creating my own podcasts has also allowed me to track student engagement as well, in a limited sense, thanks to the analytics provided by the podcast hosting service. While the response from students hasn’t been overwhelming, those who have engaged with the podcasts I have created have reacted positively, based on their ER/EL homework submissions.

Of course, there are areas to improve and hopefully increase student engagement. One method, which I already employ, is providing students with a feedback form. If students have a topic they would like me to discuss, they can submit an online form requesting an episode about it. While the initial response was slow, with repeated reminders and promotion of this option, student engagement has improved, and students are regularly making requests for topics they are interested in. A further, future improvement is to categorize episodes roughly based on the language level used. I try my best to not use too many low-frequency words, even providing some Japanese support for certain vocabulary. However, I attempt to use language that is as authentic and “normal” as possible. Depending on the topic, difficulty can vary quite widely. Ideally, episodes should be labelled as easy, moderate, and difficult to help students select episodes appropriate to their level.

While the initial response was somewhat muted, through continued promotion of the podcast as a resource they can have

some direction over, student engagement has begun to improve. Creating these materials has been a learning experience, and with more time and effort, I believe I can improve my podcast even more, with my students in mind, and create something that will engage students on a more personal level than other EL resources available to them.

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Starting class with Chit Chat

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Start a lesson by getting students engaged and piquing their interest, and that lesson may have a good chance of being successful and well-received. That same lesson, however, if taught without first stirring student interest, may not achieve the class objectives as successfully. In my experience, getting class started on the right foot by setting an engaging and motivating tone can pay dividends throughout the lesson. In this piece, I offer an approach to beginning a class that raises student interest and prepares them to actively participate. Thus to begin, I'll attempt to pique your interest.

“Do you like 'mɒnəʊpəʊli?”, was a question that my university Spanish teacher once asked, with a grin on his face, to begin his class. His goal with the question was to emphasize the importance of word stress in languages. (For those like myself that aren't confident in their International Phonetic Alphabet reading skills, 'mɒnəʊ is pronounced with the stress on the first syllable, as in the phrase “*mano a mano*”). He was off to a good start as no one in the class could understand what he

was saying, even though he repeated the question multiple times. Then the teacher asked the question again, but this time with the stress on the correct syllable: “Do you like mə'nɒp(ə)li?” With this simple class warm-up, I was thoroughly entertained and would never forget the importance of syllable stress, even when talking about a common, popular board game that everyone knows (Monopoly).

How to start class is a question all teachers are faced with. One way is to lead with a warm-up activity designed with the aim of getting students engaged and ready to learn. My Spanish teacher did just that. His class warm-up routine was to regale us with language-related stories, such as the one above, or anecdotes drawn from his time spent in Spain and Mexico. I think he was onto something as two decades later I still remember much of what I learned at the beginning of those Spanish lessons. What was it that made his class warm-ups so memorable? It seems to me that he was palpably interested in what he had to tell us. What he had to say was not only interesting but also a novel glimpse into the world of Spanish into which we were journeying. Now, years later, I find myself starting my own university language classes in a similar manner and enjoying a similar level of success.

Chit Chat is what I have termed the 10-15 minute warm-up activity that I begin my classes with. To start the activity, several questions relating to a topical subject, topical to me and/or the students, are projected onto the whiteboard. Student comprehension of the questions is

checked, and if necessary, example answers are given. Then in pairs, students take turns asking each other the questions on the board. This is followed by me sharing with the students a personal story that relates to the question(s). It is a simple format, but it has been very effective in getting lessons started on the right foot, with students looking interested and engaged. It sounds simple enough, but there are three ingredients that I feel are crucial for the Chit Chat component to succeed.

Perhaps the most essential element for Chit Chat to succeed is for the teacher to have an interesting story or anecdote that they are eager to share with the class: it is the enthusiasm that drives the activity. An example of a successful anecdote is one I told about binge-watching TV shows. There was a TV show I had recently discovered, and I had been binge-watching it on a nightly basis. I was excited to share the experience, as well as the language necessary to discuss it. To start the class, the following questions were written on the board:

1. Have you ever binge-watched a TV show?
2. Have you ever spent a whole day watching a tv show?
3. What is the most addictive tv show you have ever watched?

After students had asked each other the questions, I dove into my story relating to the questions. In an unforced, enthusiastic, and often humorous manner

I spoke of binge-watching this show, the sleepless nights, and how the show was the most addictive show I'd ever watched. The energy and interest I had in the topic appeared to keep most of the students focused and engaged in what I had to say.

In addition to a general enthusiasm for the Chit Chat topic, the activity benefits by having a sense of mystery surrounding the questions. Students should feel puzzled and wonder where these questions are leading and what story will follow them up. In one Chit Chat session, students were given the following questions to ask classmates:

1. What's your favorite smell?
2. Are there any smells that you really don't like? What?
3. Do you like the smell of _____?

As Chit Chat is prefaced by no other activities, students should find it strange to start a class by talking about the topic of smell. However, by the time this Chit Chat was conducted, students were already aware that questions would connect to a topical story that I had. And, I hoped, while they were talking about smells, they were wondering what kind of story related to smells I would present them with. In the case of this Chit Chat, I jumped into an excited talk on the fragrance of *kinmokusei* tree flowers, and how, since they were currently in bloom, I was in heaven and constantly outside smelling the *kinmokusei* tree in my yard.

Below are some other Chit Chats that I have done in class that worked quite well.

1. Do you have a favorite bottled green tea?
2. If you are thirsty, which would you rather drink, green tea or oolong tea?
3. What is the strangest vending machine drink you've ever had?
4. What is the worst vending machine drink you've had?

(This Chit Chat was followed up by me talking about a black bean tea I'd purchased from a vending machine the previous week, how it was the worst vending machine drink I'd ever had, and how the variety of healthy drinks in Japanese vending machines is surprising for an American. I also spoke on how you can't buy green tea from vending machines in the US.)

1. How often do you rent movies?
2. What is the last movie you rented?
3. Do you use Netflix?
4. Do you think Tsutaya will ever go out of business?

(After this Chit Chat, I told students about a DVD I'd rented the other day, how happy I am that Japan still has a national video rental chain, and how most video rental stores have closed in the US, though you can now rent movies from vending machines.)

1. Will you spend Christmas Eve and Christmas Day with your family?
2. Will you get presents from your parents?
3. For you, what is the smell of Christmas?
4. Does Christmas make you sad?

(This Chit Chat was done before Christmas, and I told students how Christmas in Japan makes me sad because Christmas, as I know it, is a family holiday, but my family is in the US. I also explained that I am sad because I can't enjoy the smell of Christmas, which for me is the smell of a real Christmas tree in the house.)

The final key to making Chit Chat a success is to have it free of pressure. In these warmups, students are not required to remember the language that appears in the questions, they are not tested on it, and participation in Chit Chat is not reflected in their grades. This adds to the fun factor of the warm-up. Students are free to focus on enjoying the conversation and learning interesting details from their fellow students and the teacher.

Chit Chat has been a fantastic way to start my classes. Most students actively participate in the activity. It appears to wake them up, get them excited about class, and make them more engaged in the class. Provided a teacher has stories they'd like to share with their students, I believe this is a good option for beginning an English class.

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