

# Between the Keys

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# The Newspaper: A Materials Writer's Gold Mine

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## Introduction

English language newspapers are available throughout the world and Japan is no exception with at least four nationally published dailies easily accessible at newsstands and a plethora of others available at specialty bookstores. Today, in the age of IT, access to newspapers is easier than ever; with the click of the mouse, one can access news stories on the Web from practically any English newspaper around the globe. Thus, this probably makes the newspaper the single most valuable, readily available, interesting, relevant, up-to-

date, educational, and authentic material that can be used in the ESL/EFL class. Since the early 1970s and the advent of Communicative Language Teaching, various sections of the newspaper have been exploited to satisfy the need for realistic and authentic language-learning materials, from the classified ads, weather forecasts, to news stories (Baddock, 1983; Nunan, 1989; Grundy, 1993; Sanderson, 1999).

Using a newspaper in the ESL/EFL class can be a daunting and frustrating experience for both the learner and the teacher if, on the one hand, pre-teaching activities are not carried out and, on the other hand, learners are not gradually introduced to the language and text-types prior to the full introduction of the newspaper as a resource for teaching and/or learning a second/foreign language. It is important when using newspapers to understand the methodological implications, the appropriate sequencing of activities, and the complexity of the language before

learning English can become relatively natural (Cross, 1992) for the foreign language learner.

The purpose of this article is twofold; firstly, it will present some arguments for using the newspaper in one's ELT class, and secondly, it will suggest ways and means of using the newspaper as a teaching/learning tool in ELT with elementary, intermediate, and advanced learners be they at the high school, college, university, or non-institutional (language school) level.



## Why use newspapers in ELT?

Newspapers are still an inexpensive resource in a market which has become ever more expensive and technological.

Most English teachers have used newspapers in their language class from time to time. But, many have not done so regularly, either because ESL/EFL studies have traditionally led on to the study of literature or because they felt that “newspaper language” was too difficult for their students. Since the mid-1970s, however, there has been a growing acceptance of “authentic materials” in ESL/EFL classrooms and students have been using such materials from quite early stages in their language-learning process—a departure from the strict grammar progression of earlier teaching methods. Newspapers are now widely accepted as valid language-learning instruments, whose diversity of interesting contemporary text-types includes not only journalists’ prose but items like cartoons, small ads, readers’ letters and weather reports, all of which are seen

and used by native speakers daily. Added to this, language teaching has reached beyond its traditional linguistic limits, since it has become more and more clear that a foreign language can be successfully learned only when it is studied in its cultural context (Nemetz Robinson, 1988, p. 100). Newspapers communicate the value system of a country, and there are few better means of bringing the foreign culture into the classroom than using a newspaper. Newspapers are still an inexpensive resource in a market which has become ever more expensive and technological.

Primarily, newspapers are valuable to language students and native speakers as carriers of news. But they are valuable to language students for other reasons too:

1. Language learning: newspapers contain a variety of text-types not easily found

in conventional language-learning materials and these contextualized language styles all provide good materials for language practice.

Often they are the teacher's and the students' only source of new language. With their fingers on the pulse of language development, newspapers are linguistically topical and up-to-date, and provide valuable linguistic data (Sanderson, 1999, p. 2).

2. Developing communicative skills: after deducing knowledge of the language features of different newspaper components, students can then use this knowledge in a range of communication activities, to exercise speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. Newspapers can be used effectively with a wide range of levels from elementary to advanced or with mixed-ability classes. Moreover, newspaper items are conveniently self-contained units which vary in length which offers a great deal of flexibility when lesson planning and selecting materials to meet certain criteria, i.e. length of item,

complexity of language, density of information, subject-matter and content, time availability, and level of the students.

3. Cultural learning: photographs, advertisements, articles, cartoons, letters to the editor—all can be used to teach something about the psychology, habits and values of people in the foreign culture: how people live, what they wear, do and think, and issues they feel are important. Language and culture are inextricably linked, and the newspapers of a given target community reflect its culture through the language they contain. "This is achieved through the cultural associations of words, and the shared experiences, knowledge, values, beliefs, emotions and attitudes that a writer assumes" (Sanderson, 1999, p. 2).

4. Interest and motivation: because newspapers contain so much variety

and because they contain stimulating (often visual) material, they are interesting for students to work with.

Newspapers report real-life events, and this arouses our natural curiosity about the world around us. For many people, reading newspapers is already an enjoyable and popular pastime. Newspaper-based activities in the language classroom become simply an extension of this interest. Furthermore, reading inside the classroom can help students discover their own tastes and interests, which in turn can play an important role in motivating them to read of their own accord outside the classroom.

Apart from these reasons for bringing newspapers into class, there is a further, perhaps more important, argument.

5. Educational: newspapers help keep us informed of what is going on in the world, and in so doing extend our knowledge and deepen our understanding. Thus, they are of general educational value and importance to students especially within an educational



system. As language teachers, we are also educators. For this reason, we are responsible for the development and general education of our learners, rather than merely instructors whose sole task is restricted to improving the students' language skills.

The daily newspaper can and should become as familiar to ESL/EFL students as the television. Newspapers used constructively as a base for learning can create a kindling of the mind and a more general activation of the senses than that afforded by television or radio alone.

### Who should use newspapers in ELT?

Generally speaking, any teacher can use newspapers in their ELT class providing they set out clear aims, pedagogical purposes, and sound objectives for doing so. In the classroom, the aim is to get students first reading newspapers and then working with what they have found in their reading which may mean anything from making a collage to crossing out what is distasteful (Grundy, 1993). A second methodological aim is to get the students to teach themselves, as much as possible, by giving them authentic, involving activities to work on. A third wider aim is to provide access to an important source of information, which also reflects significant cultural and political attitudes.

Its underlying purpose is not only to provide teaching/learning resources, but also to give students practice in the skills needed to enable them to read English language newspapers for themselves. Another purpose might be to help the students feel comfortable with and understand new information in current English newspapers which will take time and practice. Using newspaper materials, which both engage and challenge the learners, will

also enable teachers to meet the diverse needs and interests of their students. For the students, it provides them with purposeful and valuable language practice through activities and tasks, which help develop reading, writing, speaking and listening.

There are a multitude of sound pedagogical objectives for using newspapers in ELT from instilling in students a positive and comfortable attitude towards reading both inside and outside the classroom to promoting extensive reading by giving students the confidence and motivation and the ability to continue their reading outside the classroom as a pleasurable activity that can help promote autonomous, self-directed lifelong learning.

Not only teachers working with a mainstream, syllabus-based EFL class, but also those

who work with a relatively syllabus-free, learner-centered class can use the newspaper. In the former teaching context, activities based on written materials from the newspaper, for instance, make an

important contribution to class work where new ideas that promote authentic reading and integrate the four macro skills are always welcomed. In the latter teaching context, where there is a premium on new ideas, which involve students, using the support of a newspaper text will not only involve the students but also provide them with something real and substantial with which to work.

If there is one methodological point that almost everyone agrees on at present, from the linguists to the practitioners, is that learning should be relatively natural (Krashen, 1981). What is natural in an ESL context may not necessarily be the same in an EFL context. For instance, in an EFL context, authentic materials may be a scarce resource to be exploited to the full where learners come to expect everything to be explained before the next



topic is introduced. In an ESL context, by no means everything needs to be fully understood, and not everything need be used, just what is most relevant and appropriate. Learners are never expected to understand every word they read. It makes sense, then, to use the newspaper as a stimulus for activities rather than as text for comprehension and exploitation. However, most teachers work in the EFL classroom, of course, and most sometimes feel that they have a harder task than those in the ESL classroom with all its sense of surrounding cultural richness, and its stress on realistic, acculturated language behavior (Brown, 1994). Whether we work in an EFL context or an ESL context, newspapers certainly encourage us to work in the more “natural way”. This is partly because even in EFL contexts they are plentiful enough to be used relatively freely.

### **Why are teachers reluctant to use newspapers in ELT?**

There are a number of points to make about the use of newspapers in the ELT class. Most center on the positive advantages newspapers have over other resources, but some also remind us of the difficulties newspaper materials can pose; from uncontrolled, ungraded language to the text being too long and confusing. These are some of the reasons many teachers don't/won't/can't use newspapers in their ELT class. Others, range from lack of teaching time, not teaching the right level, to the language of newspapers is too difficult. Of course, English language newspapers are 'difficult'. However, it is recommended to meet this difficulty not by exploiting and explaining the exotic or strange, but in a more natural way, by acquiring a gradual familiarity with it and by looking out for those things, that students can relate to as people. The same newspaper materials can often be used in



a wide variety of ways. This has two consequences: 1) One needs to think out carefully about the methodological implications of anything one does, and 2) The same text or picture can sometimes be used in a succession of activities, each of them depending on the level of understanding reached in the preceding. For instance, using pictures in the news to activate language firstly, then introducing a choice of captions, followed by that part of the text that explains or describes the picture is a pedagogically successful approach because it breaks down the task into smaller more workable tasks, at first. Working with the language of headlines is probably the most important first step in working with newspapers (Brown & Nethersole, 1987; 1988) followed by the structure of a news story (Short & Dickerson, 1980). Not understand-

ing the language of headlines will do little to help students know what the news story might be about and consequently could not

be used as a pre-reading strategy (Aebersold & Field, 1997). Those materials that initially seem too difficult can, if carefully approached, eventually be understood fully. When that happens, the resulting sense or achievement for the learner is very important and highly motivating. Unless students become accustomed literally to getting their hands dirty on and finding their own way around newspapers, they will never learn to read English language newspapers for themselves. It is rare that the different working speed of individual students is a problem.

Teachers who have not used the newspaper in ELT will want to begin by using proven methods and activities (Baddock, 1983; Brown & Nethersole, 1987,1988; Grundy, 1993; Sanderson, 1999). It is obvious that each teacher will select his/her own goals when making the decision to use newspapers,

but it seems quite important to decide upon certain primary purposes before beginning. It is expected then, that teachers, in cooperation with the students, will set new goals as time progresses. We must accept that when using newspapers in ELT, students are listening, speaking, reading, and writing in ways that are natural and authentic.

The second most frequently given argument for not using newspapers in an EFL class is their availability. Sanderson (p. 5, 1999) states that over eighty non-English-speaking countries in the world today produce at least one English daily newspaper. He also goes on to suggest a number of ways of obtaining them more easily; from sharing with fellow teachers, getting the school to subscribe, asking local English speakers, to accessing the internet. The author posits that where there is a will, there is a way.

### How to use the newspaper at different levels

Many ELT practitioners don't attempt to use newspapers in their ESL/EFL classes unless their students are at an intermediate or higher level. Doing so, robs the pre-intermediate language learner of the opportunity of working with newspapers and the feeling of success at being able to cope with such an authentic source of material. It can be extremely rewarding and encouraging for language learners to find that they can cope quite successfully with difficult materials (Davis & Rinvolucru, 1990). It is true, of course, that newspapers contain language, which is in no way graded—they are, after all, authentic. The concern over language difficulty is perhaps the single most common reason why so many students are denied the opportunity of working with newspapers until they reach the intermediate level. Students are able to understand language at a level higher than they are able to produce



and as ESL/EFL teachers we should avoid falling in the trap of selecting material according to students language production rather than language comprehension, no matter what language level ability our students have (Krashen, 1981). We may choose bland materials which do not meet our students needs or interests, simply because the vocabulary and/or grammar is controlled. This practice denies students the opportunity of a positive learning experience using stimulating materials (Sanderson, 1999). There are several ways an ELT practitioner can make a newspaper accessible to students.

#### Elementary-level language learners

The newspaper with low-level language learners can be an interesting learning resource which provides pleasant activities centering on pictures, games, story-telling, dramatizations, discussions, simple exercises, making charts, constructing displays and making booklets.

If the materials are selected solely on the basis of their linguistic complexity, there are a number of risks. It is not simply the linguistic difficulty of materials that teachers should judge, but also how motivated their students will be reading them. We should not forget that motivation is a key factor in successful reading (Aebersold & Field, 1997; Brown, 1994). Also, we should not develop lower expectations of students than is appropriate, and choose correspondingly low-level materials, which do not challenge them sufficiently (Harmer, 1991). There are, at least, four ways ELT practitioners can successfully use newspaper materials with elementary-level language students (Sanderson, 1999). These are: a) preparing pre-activity tasks, b) selecting materials carefully, c) designing appropriate tasks, and d) recycling the materials. The success of any language-learning activity is directly related to the type and

quality of the pre-activities. As we know, pre-activities familiarize and prepare the learners to the subsequent tasks. Choosing the appropriate text does not only involve checking it for grammatical complexity or length. Not all newspaper materials have the same level of difficulty; some are easier than others and can stand alone, especially short factual stories or news briefs. When dealing with low-level language learners, it is not so much the language in the materials that needs to be graded but rather the task requires grading in order to instill success and build confidence in the students. Finally, using the same material to do other activities to accomplish different tasks is preferable. The familiarity of the material will lessen the element of language difficulty or complexity.

At this level, it is important to note that students are interested in pictures, and the newspaper has an abundance of pictures, illustrations and comics because these convey so much meaning (Wright, 1989). (A picture is worth a thousand words.) These may be cut out and used in many ways. They can be pasted and used as flash cards or as a frieze to tell a story. They can be strung together to make a comic book with language bubbles composed by the students, or picture books with captions expressing the students' own thoughts. Photos from news stories can be used for a variety of other learning activities; e.g. they can be used as the basis for discussion, or stories of what happened before the picture was taken and/or what might have happened after the picture was taken. Picture books about sports, pets, types of transportation, feelings, clothes, people and so on can be made and used as picture dictionaries. Using pictures from newspapers is probably the easiest, most successful and least intimidating way of introducing the

newspaper to low-level language learners. Comic strips, cartoons and photos in the newspaper can be used to develop all sorts of skills, such as, understanding sequence, causal relationships, noting details, observing, reporting, expressing or communicating emotion and vocabulary development. There are a variety of concepts that can be exploited with newspapers at this level, such as, the concepts of numbers, size, location, time, quantity, and value. Expressions that convey ideas of variation, balance, relationships and precision are quantitative in nature. For more activity types exploiting pictures in newspapers see Brown & Nethersole (1987).

The most appropriate newspaper features to exploit with pre-intermediate language students are: photographs, comics, cartoons, weather maps, TV guides, advertisements, some classified ads, movie guides, sports results, headlines, news briefs, and short human interest news stories. It is with the last two types of news items that students can be taught to look for the 'who', 'what', 'where', 'when', 'why', and 'how' normally found in news stories.

### **Intermediate-level language learners**

This is probably the level at which most ELT practitioners have used the newspaper with their students. However, if students at this level have never been introduced to this kind of material, they will be at a lost and find it intimidating. It is important to gradually lead students into using the newspaper as a learning tool by repeating some of the activity types used for pre-intermediate-level language students. It will not be time wasted since students will quickly gain the confidence needed to tackle much longer and more complex news items. The structure of a news item doesn't change because the language level of the student is different; however, it



shouldn't preclude reviewing the basics in order to familiarize the students with the text-type and genre of newspapers. At this level, news items dealing with the concepts of facts versus opinions, exaggerations, contrary statements, biased versus un-biased opinions, slanted versions, persuasive techniques, emotional language, and satire can be dealt with. It is with using daily news items that critical thinking can be developed where students are given an opportunity to question all sides. For instance, what society says, what the government says, what history says, or what journalists say can be found in newspaper stories. Students can formulate their own opinion or judgment and if it isn't like the teacher's or their friends'/classmates', that doesn't mean they are wrong. The newspaper is full of controversial issues and materials to be read and/or exploited from letters to the editor to advertisements. In keeping with the idea of accommodating individual interests and abilities, students should be encouraged to choose from a broad range of subjects and/or topics. However, the purposes should be clearly established at the onset. The two most important ones are: a) to learn for oneself and b) to help others in the class extend their learning. The kinds of purposes selected will dictate the kind of reporting and follow-up that is desirable. The opportunity to 'be an authority' usually has an appeal to students. It allows them to make a choice of the area of study and will almost certainly provide them with a feeling of accomplishment and confidence.

It is important to note that there will be various levels of self-reliance that will develop over time and several groups of students might develop informally depending on their interests and abilities. There will be those who can proceed immediately on their own

or there will be those who might exchange ideas in pairs or small groups to help one another get started, and then there will be those who need considerable help. This is a normal feature in any class whether one is using newspapers or not.

The most appropriate newspaper items to use with this level of language learner are regular news stories whether local, national, or international, news stories that carry over many days, advice columns, problem-page letters, letters to the editor, and short to medium length feature articles on sports, business, technology, and entertainment.

#### **Advanced-level language learners**

Anything in the newspaper can be used with these students. However, as with intermediate-level language students, if these are unfamiliar with English newspapers, it is important to instruct them in the language of headlines and the structure of a news stories in order to facilitate their entry into the newspaper genre. Everything mentioned for



the intermediate-level language student is applicable to this level. Only the topics and materials selected would vary according to the level of proficiency and age of the student. The main language-learning objectives to using newspapers at this level are: a) to quicken an appreciation of modern prose style and to give practice in the craft of writing and b) to improve the quality of their writing in showing how the manner of expressing ideas can sharpen their effect or add to their importance. The only section of an English-language newspaper which these students might find challenging is the editorial section or a very technical feature article. It goes without saying that daily newspapers are not written for academics but rather for the general public. For this reason, students at this level can produce a kind of class or school



newspaper with either individuals, small groups or teams of students being responsible for creating and writing the various sections and/or news features therein. This kind of task, not only helps students become autonomous and/or self-directed language learners, but they also feel a great sense of accomplishment and pride in seeing their written word in print.

## Conclusion

Using the newspaper in ELT at any level of proficiency can be an exciting and interesting language teaching and learning experience not only for the learner but for the teacher as well. However, it is important to keep in mind the aims and purposes the newspaper is used as a resource for language learning. No matter what language level we are teaching it is imperative to always be aware of preparing appropriate pre-activities, carefully selecting the materials we want to exploit, and designing appropriate and realizable language-learning tasks. After students read an absorbing newspaper article that introduces new words and ideas, they cannot wait to discuss their reactions with fellow classmates. In their urgency to express their own view on a subject they master the language skills introduced moments earlier. In the process of making a viewpoint known and learning the viewpoint of others, the students make language their own. After all, isn't this what language learning is about?

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# Lesson Plan for Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On?*

Thia Jackson-Maki

On a recent CD, *Speech*, one of the lead singers of Arrested Development talks about how relevant older music still is today. Many lyrics from the past are even more relevant now. Unfortunately, they are not what our youth are singing about these days, but perhaps may be avoiding.

The recent remake of Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On?* was recorded between September 5th and 7th by the well-known artist Bono of U2, with the help of such other famous musicians as Destiny's Child, Backstreet Boys, Alicia Keyes, NSYNC, Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, etc. They recorded as *Artists Against Aids Worldwide*, and intended for the proceeds to be donated to the fight against AIDS. However, after the tragedy of 9/11, the artists decided to re-do their recording. Half of the proceeds from the sale of the CD would now benefit The United Way's September 11th Fund as well. This song made it to #1 on the radio charts for three weeks in a row a few weeks after its release. I'd like to ask those of you who wish to use the following lesson plan to please also donate to these causes by buying this great CD yourselves.

I found the song's lyrics on the homepage noted in the CD and copied them out. For lessons, I blanked out difficult words I wished the students to learn and typed the missing words out into a numbered vocabulary list.

I also noted other expressions and difficult words within the lyrics and typed them in bold italics. I had these words defined in Japanese and typed them out, too, as another list, which I also gave to the students.

Following, first, are the prepared lyrics:

## ***What's Going On?* by Marvin Gaye**

P. Diddy: What's Going On?

Jermaine Dupri: Tell Me

P. Diddy: People Dying, People Crying

Bono: Mother, mother

There's too many of you crying

Gwen Stefani: Oh, brother, brother, brother

There's far too many of you dying

Jermaine Dupri: That's Right

Aaron Lewis: You know we've got to \_\_\_\_\_

To bring some lovin' here today

Nona Gaye: Oh my father, father

We don't need to \_\_\_\_\_

Backstreet Boys: You see war is not the answer

Nona Gaye/Backstreet Boys: For only \_\_\_\_\_

Christina Aguilera: You know we've got to find a way

To bring some lovin' here today

Britney Spears: \_\_\_\_\_, can't block our way

Jennifer Lopez: Don't \_\_\_\_\_ me with \_\_\_\_\_

Destiny's Child: Talk to me So you can see

Destiny's Child/Britney Spears: (First Chorus)

Oh what's going on?

What's going on

Yeah what's going on

Ahh what's going on

Ja Rule: What's going on in a world

filled with pain  
 Where's the love for which we pray  
 What's going on  
 When our children can't play  
 Homeless can't eat  
 There's got to be a better way  
 What's going on  
 When we are politically blind  
 Can't see the signs of \_\_\_\_\_  
 What's going on  
 Nelly Furtado: What's goin' on in the  
 world today  
 I'd rather be dead than to \_\_\_\_\_  
 \*We got this first world vision too  
 Comfy to lift up our hands in the air  
 And cry for \_\_\_\_\_

Michael Stipe: Father, father  
 P. Diddy: Father help us, come on  
 Michael Stipe: Everybody thinks  
 we're wrong

Alicia Keys: Oh, but who are they  
 to \_\_\_\_\_  
 Together we can all be strong

P. Diddy: \_\_\_\_\_ we  
 stand, Divided we fall

\*NSYNC: Oh you know we've  
 got to find a way

Mary J. Blige: To bring some understanding  
 here today

\*NSYNC: Barricades can't block our way

Darren Hayes (Savage Garden): Don't punish  
 me with brutality

\*NSYNC: Baby talk to me  
 So you can see

(Second chorus) Yeah, what's going on

Hey, what's going on

Somebody tell me what's going on

I'll tell you what's goin' on-uh

Nelly: What's going on 'cross seas  
 Every minute a child dies by this disease  
 In \_\_\_\_\_ indeed

Got momma's crying out please

My baby hold on

\*My child \_\_\_\_\_ done nothing

wrong  
 Still I want to holler  
 Ask them why they don't bother  
 Oh no, oh no  
 Make me turn to my father  
 And ask him why they all got a trapped  
 soul

Nas: I can feel what was bothering Marvin  
 Why his words forever remain  
 Dealing with these modern day problems  
 'Cause of \_\_\_\_\_ surrounding me  
 and my constituents  
 Too many infected Too many lives  
 diminishing  
 Nobody say Protestants, Jews, Blacks,  
 and Whites, Latinos and Asians  
 Pray together



Less fight  
 We better unite  
 As \_\_\_\_\_ chemical war  
 And the rich and the poor  
 Know that God delivers a cure  
 Eve: \_\_\_\_\_ our reality  
 is devastating  
 People praying for a cure  
 Dying while they're waiting  
 Ask the Lord for the comfort and

strength to face it  
 All the kids with dreams Won't get  
 the chance to \_\_\_\_\_ it  
 Makes me sad  
 Think about the lives they would've had  
 \*Think about the orphan babies got  
 no moms and dads  
 How can we sit back and not try  
 to make it right  
 \*We gotta come together  
 We \_\_\_\_\_ fight for life

Fred Durst: Somebody tell me what's going  
 on  
 (what's going on)  
 We got \_\_\_\_\_ using humans  
 for a bomb  
 But everyone wanna live



\*Don't nobody really want to die  
 You feeling me right  
 \*I can't be watching people die  
 (die)  
 And watching people cry  
 Let me break it down for a minute  
 If there's enough room here for you and me  
 There's plenty of room for some

Somebody tell me what's going on  
 (what's going on)

Somebody tell me what's going on  
 (what's going on)

Somebody tell me what's going on  
 (what's going on)

Somebody tell me what's going on  
 (what's going on)

Somebody tell me what's going on  
 (what's going on)

Somebody tell me what's going on  
 (what's going on)

The first list of vocabulary words to  
 plug in (with Japanese gloss):

1. Lord help us
2. brutality (you know Brutus?!)
3. escalate (escalator)
4. love can conquer hate T
5. find a way (somehow) h
6. a switch
7. punish
8. barricades
9. endangered times (endangered species)
10. turn my head away
11. judge us
12. united " "
13. record numbers
14. ain't = is not " -
15. It's a shame
16. genocide

17. ignorance
18. chase your dreams
19. humanity "
20. human beings
21. gotta = have got to X

Also these questions are noted at the bottom  
 of this vocabulary list.

Questions:

- How does what they say make you feel?
- What sentence stands out for you?
- What do you dis/agree with?

The second list to read is:

politically blind Z  
 world vision Z E  
 comfy (comfortable) Z  
 holler  
 don't bother



trapped soul  
 dealing (deal with it)  
 Z  
 constituents Z  
 Z  
 infected  
 diminishing  
 Protestants

cure  
 devastating  
 face it  
 orphan  
 sit back d  
 wanna  
 break it down  
 plenty

In the first lesson, I present the song. I  
 spend time showing the CD and pointing out  
 the date and the background information,  
 who the musicians are, and their purpose  
 in making the record. Then I go over the  
 vocabulary lists with the students. For the  
 second vocabulary list, I have the students read

through all of the lyrics, noting the boldfaced, italicized words. Depending on the level of the class, all this may take anywhere from 20 to 40 minutes. If we don't get through all of these vocabulary items in the first class, we work on it again in the next class.

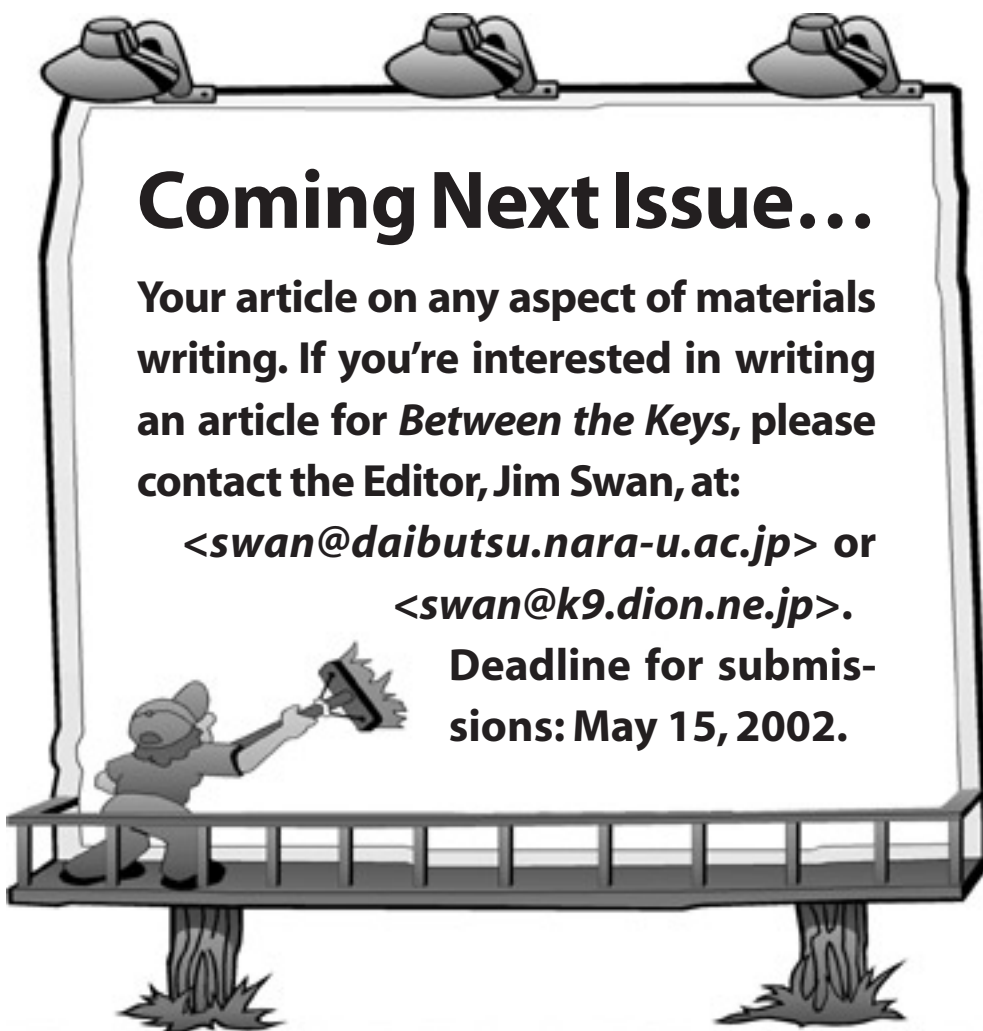
Once all the vocabulary has been gone over, I play Marvin Gaye's original version of the song. For the first quarter of the song, the lyrics are the same, but the tempo is slower than in the new version. I stop partway through the original, though, then start again with the new remake. The students are asked to fill in the blanks with the numbers from the vocabulary

list, or with the whole words if they can. Some parts are sung very quickly. I will pause the CD at those places and give the students a better chance to catch the new vocabulary.

Once everything is done, I show the MTV video clip of all the musicians singing. Some of my students have told me later that they had heard the song somewhere and were happy to have been able to recognize it.

As one of the musicians, NAS, sang:  
*I can feel what was bothering Marvin  
Why his words forever remain*

It's true; this song can be used for a long time still. BK



# News & Announcements

## CALL SIG Conference

JALT CALL SIG now invites proposals for participation at JALTCALL2002: Local Decisions, Global Effects, the 7th Annual International Conference of the Japan Association for Language Teaching Computer Assisted Language Learning Special Interest Group (JALT CALL SIG).

Hiroshima Jogakuin University  
4-13-1 Ushita-Higashi, Higashi-Ku  
Hiroshima City, Hiroshima Prefecture  
732-0063, Japan

Saturday, 18 and Sunday, 19 May, 2002  
(with special events on May 17 and 20)

Supported by:

Hiroshima Jogakuin University  
JALT Hiroshima Chapter  
IATEFL Computer SIG  
Hiroshima University  
Hiroshima City University

Submissions relevant to the conference theme will be given highest priority; however, all topics which address the issue of how computer technology is applied in the classroom are acceptable. Educators concerned with all levels of instruction are invited to submit proposals. People whose proposals are submitted on or before Monday, 1 April, and are accepted will be eligible to register for the conference at the discount rate. The deadline for receipt of submissions for panel discussion and workshops is Monday, 1 April. The deadline for receipt of submissions for presentations, electronic poster sessions, and poster sessions is Monday, 15 April. For details on how to submit, please visit our

website at: <<http://jaltcall.org/conferences/call2002/>>.

For assistance on any matters, please email us at <[confchair@jaltcall.org](mailto:confchair@jaltcall.org)>.

We look forward to receiving your submissions and welcoming you to JALTCALL2002 in May.

On behalf of the conference team,  
Conference Co-Chairs  
Timothy Gutierrez  
Naomi Fujishima  
Chiaki Iwai

IK

## Pan-SIG Conference

JALT's Bilingual SIG, Testing and Evaluation SIG, and College and University Educators SIG (CUE) are joining together for a Pan-SIG Conference, May 11-12. Don't miss out on this great opportunity to attend three SIG conferences for the price of one in one place at Kyoto Institute of Technology.

### On-site Registration (Register on site)

Yearly JALT Members

1 day — ¥4,000

2 day — ¥7,000

Conference JALT Members

1 day — ¥5000

2 day — ¥8,000

Student Volunteers (must show student ID card and work app. 5 hours during event)

Free

Pan-SIG Banquet—All you can eat and drink buffet at University Dining Hall (Saturday evening)

¥3,000

14

For conference participants living in Japan, fees for this conference should be paid via a Japanese postal furikae account. The Account Number for this event is 00990-8-89485. Write "Bilingual Japan" under the Account Name (even if you are attending the CUE or T-EVAL SIG symposiums) and "PAN-SIG 2002" in the Explanation Column. We will use the information on the furikae form to verify your address and phone number from this registration form. We do not accept credit cards.

The SIGs strongly urge you to submit your registration online using this form. However, in cases where this is impossible, please fax or mail a copy of this form to the address below and the information will be processed by hand.

Note: College University Educators speakers will be announced later. A full schedule of presenters should be up on the website by March.

## **Bilingual SIG**

The Bilingual SIG will have a colloquium with three presenters discussing linguistic and paralinguistic features of bilinguals. Two of the presenters will be talking about child language development while the third presenter will be talking about adult second language learners development of English. Furthermore, there will be a workshop for materials for bilingual kids. A well-developed home schooling program, founded over 100 years ago, will be displayed and Internet access materials available in this program as well as teacher's advice on tests and homework can be observed. Furthermore, other materials to supplement or create a learning environment for children will be available. Please take this opportunity to see materi-

als and programs available for your children to develop second language literacy skills. Tim Greer will be discussing chosen and ascribed referents for Biracial children. MengXian Shang will be discussing effects of phoneme similarities between two languages, specifically English and Japanese, English and Chinese. The number of phoneme similarities has an effect on how well a person learns English as a Second Language.

College University Educators speakers to be announced later. A full schedule of presenters should be up by March.

## **Testing & Evaluation SIG**

The deadline for pre-registration for the upcoming Kyoto Conference on Language Testing is approaching. You can pre-register for this May 11-12 event by visiting this website: <[www.jalt.org/test/regist.html](http://www.jalt.org/test/regist.html)>.

If you pre-register/pre-pay before February 15th you will receive a special conference discount. Of course, on-site registration is also possible for regular attendees. Presenters should pre-register by February 15th to make sure their time slots are reserved.

The conference pre-registration rates for JALT members are as follows: ¥3,000 for 1 day or ¥5,500 for both days. The regular registration rates (effective February 16th) for yearly JALT members are ¥4,000 for one day or ¥7,000 for both days. Since those rates are slightly lower than the regular conference rates, it makes sense to pre-register.

The testing strand of the upcoming conference will feature the following:

### **A. Featured Speakers**

1. JD Brown (Hawaii)

Saturday: Problems and Suggestions for Language Testing in Asia

Sunday: How Do Cloze Tests Work?

2. Liz Hamp-Lyons (Hong Kong)

Saturday: Developing a context-led English language assessment system

Sunday: Common Misunderstandings about and Misuses of Language Testing

### **B. Regular Session Presenters**

1. Mohammed Sallehhubin Abd Aziz (Malaysia)—Developing an EAP Test

2. Tomoyasu Akiyama—Issues for Sr. High School Entrance Exams

3. Richard Blight—Evaluating Test Performance

4. Rob Gibson—Annotated Cloze

5. Paul Hackshaw—Are the tests you give your students FAIR?

6. Gholamreza Hajipournezhad (Iran)—Judgments in Language Testing

7. Kemboja Ismail (Malaysia)—Using Portfolios to Assess Writing

8. Yuji Namakura—Rasch Measurement in Writing Tests

9. Rube Redfield—Analyzing the KU-BU Test

10. James Venema—Developing Oral Rating Scales

### **C. Colloquium on Institutional Assessment Presenters**

1. Kazuo Amma

2. Gabriel Lee

3. Thomas Robb

4. Steve Ross

5. Yoshie Yamashita

### **D. Poster Session Presenters**

1. Janet Hamilton—Context-led Online English Language Assessment

2. Kyong-hyon Pyo (Korea)—Usefulness of portfolio assessment

3. Takaaki Kumazawa—A Needs Analysis Pilot Study

4. Tim Newfields—JALT TEVAL SIG Publications

### **E. Display Booths**

1. Liz Hamp-Lyons—Introducing the Asia

Testing Journal

2. Youichi Nakamura—Japan Language Testing Assoc. Publications

Persons who register for the testing strand can also attend the Bilingualism or CUE strands of the conference for free.

Further details about this conference are available at:

[www.jalt.org/test/conference.htm](http://www.jalt.org/test/conference.htm) and [www.jalt.org/test/regist.html](http://www.jalt.org/test/regist.html).

If you have any additional questions about this conference or other TEVAL SIG events, please feel free to contact me at [testsig@jalt.org](mailto:testsig@jalt.org).

Sincerely,

Tim Newfields

JALT Testing & Evaluation SIG

## **Cancellation policy**

The final deadline for receipt of cancellation for the conference is April 19. Cancellation requests will not be honored after this deadline. All requests for refunds must be made in writing. A cancellation charge of ¥2000 will be deducted from your payment. There will not be any refunds at the conference site. Refunds will be made out to the registrant by postal money order about two months after the conference. Please keep a copy of your receipt. You will need this for proof of payment and to get a refund. Please make cancellation requests by contacting Peter Wanner by fax (075-724-7580) or e-mail [pwanner@ipc.kit.ac.jp](mailto:pwanner@ipc.kit.ac.jp).


Peter Wanner, Pan-SIG Conference Co-Chair

Kyoto Institute of Technology

Matsugasaki, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto

606-8585, Japan

Domestic Fax: (075) 724-7580

International Fax: 81-75-7240-7580 



# Task Support for Aural Decoding of Large Numbers

Chris Elvin

Ability/Age: upper beginner-intermediate;  
15 and older

Preparation time: none

Activity time: twenty minutes-half an hour

Objectives: listening and speaking practice  
of large numbers

## Introduction

Many of my high school students have initial problems with aural comprehension of large numbers. In part, this is because processing such numbers in real time requires sustained concentration, and also, in some cases, because of negative interference from students' L1 belief systems about how numbers are represented. I have found that a grid is a simple but effective way of eliminating interference and helping students focus their attention more productively.

## Procedure

On the chalkboard I draw the grid:

MILLION	THOUSAND	
.....	.....	.....

Then I show my students, for example, how easy it is to transcribe “two million, two thousand and two” if one writes the number “2” in each box, leaving the zeros to be written later.

Some students like to work with an alternative grid:

..... MILLION, ..... THOUSAND, ... ..
---------------------------------------

while others are happy to use two vertical

columns drawn down their page:

.....	MILLION
.....	THOUSAND
.....	

These strategies may seem a little trivial, perhaps, but many of my students have no strategy at all until they are presented with one. The important thing is that if a student cannot transcribe large numbers without a strategy, then she probably needs one.

I also insist on the use of commas. This is the convention, it makes for easier reading, and it allows students to “lock in” numbers before the comma to concentrate on the numbers that follow (another effective strategy).

After many more examples, and when I am convinced my students are ready, I hand out the pair worksheets (see my website at the address listed below). The numbers are perhaps a little strange, you may think, but my young learners find the activity both challenging and fun. If they can do it, they can usually cope with any number dictation.

If you don't want to make your own worksheets, please feel free to use mine. They can be downloaded from the resource box “room” of my website, EFL Club, at [www.eflclub.com](http://www.eflclub.com). The exact address is: <http://www.eflclub.com/resourcebox/levels/level3a/062number.practice.pdf>. **IBK**



Spring 2002

Vol. X, No. 1

# American Signs in the Classroom

Daniel Droukis

How can using signs and other authentic material help encourage the students to ask questions and become more involved in the learning process? One helpful source to solve this problem may come in *Looking at American Signs* from Oxford University Press. The book is a rather old one (1983), but I have used it for many years to support a great number of lessons. The problem is that it consists of a collection of pictures with the occasional question attached. However, it has been one of the most useful supplementary materials I have come to use.

## Contents

The book contains approximately 50 pages of signs ranging from airport signs to movie signs to train schedules. Many will challenge the intermediate learner with some new vocabulary that in some cases can be determined from the picture itself without much more information from the teacher. Others will require the teacher to explain vocabulary or to have the students consult the dictionary.

## Usefulness

The book can be very useful in instances where the assigned textbook comes up short on information. It is particularly useful as a prop for role-plays or in giving the students sources from which they can develop questions or explain situations. Since many textbooks contain sections on travel, this book will be helpful in giving the students the visual stimulus they may need to produce and practice conversations.

## What it can and cannot do

The book will not give any direction to the student. How appropriate language might be, explanations of vocabulary, or the reasoning behind a particular sign will have to be provided by the classroom teacher.

## Why it's important

Many textbooks will have dialogues on a variety of situations for which such authentic material will encourage the student to expand conversations, ask questions, and even give the teacher ideas that had not be thought of

when considering the lesson or consulting the particular textbook.

## Potential for dialogue creation

Many of the signs come from locations frequently found in textbooks, such as movie theaters, airports, stores, etc. The pictures will give the students the resources necessary to be able to picture the situation in their mind and thus allow them to be able to produce dialogues or questions appropriate to the situation. These dialogues need not be very long. Indeed, many of the situations may require only a few words or phrases, which can sometimes be more difficult than the long conversation. We can help the students to understand that not all communication needs to be made up of long dialogues and that clear yet simple statements can be very communicative.

## Potential for discussion

Adding a few questions to some pages can



produce the inspiration for some discussions. The movie signs contain the ratings of PG and R. This may be a good starting point for a discussion on the movie rating system and the need for such a system or other related matters.

### **Potential for questions to and from the students**

Teachers may tire of student questions with “why” regarding particular aspects of some sign (i.e., Why is this sign located here?). However, since many of my own students rarely ask questions with why, it may be a perfect opportunity for the teacher to encourage students to ask such questions based on the signs before them. From these questions could spring other questions, or perhaps even answers from students who have had experiences with a particular sign or situation where they have seen such a sign.

### **Easy to use?**

This will depend on the teacher. What do you want to do with it? The potential uses outlined above will require the teacher to produce some worksheets or question lists or guidelines for creating dialogues to set up situations. Some preparation will be needed, but probably no more than the average lesson from a particular textbook.

### **Authentic?**

Obviously, all the materials are authentic in that they are not edited for the classroom. This does give the student the opportunity to use authentic materials where such materials are beneficial and not confusing to the students. Simplifying the material by

whiting out some words or covering them with tape would allow the students to focus more closely on what you want them to be concentrating on. However, some teachers may feel that by doing this you destroy the authenticity of the materials and thus render them no better than what already may be available in the particular textbook you are using.

This will have to be the teacher’s personal judgment call.

### **Dated?**

Since the book is relatively old (I do not know if later editions are available), the teacher will have to consider that some prices and designs of some signs probably have changed over the years. This in itself could also be the starting point of a discussion on how inflation has changed our lives or simply how much more expensive things are today than they were just a few years ago.

### **What does the teacher need to do?**

This is not the kind of book you will want students to be buying for a course. However, it would be useful to the teachers of any institution to try to have a small number of them on hand. The teacher will need to match the sections of the book to appropriate sections in the chosen textbook. The teacher will also have to prepare some materials to make the connection between the “Signs” book and the lesson being studied.

The teacher may want to prepare dialogues which will fit the situations portrayed, or question sheets (where the students ask

each other questions) about the particular signs. Also discussion questions could be written by the teacher to give the students



a “jump start” in discussing some aspect of American (foreign) culture, which may be of interest to the students.

Pre-teaching some vocabulary may be required. However, this may be coming from the textbook you are using, and therefore may not require much extra preparation from the teacher.

### Conclusion

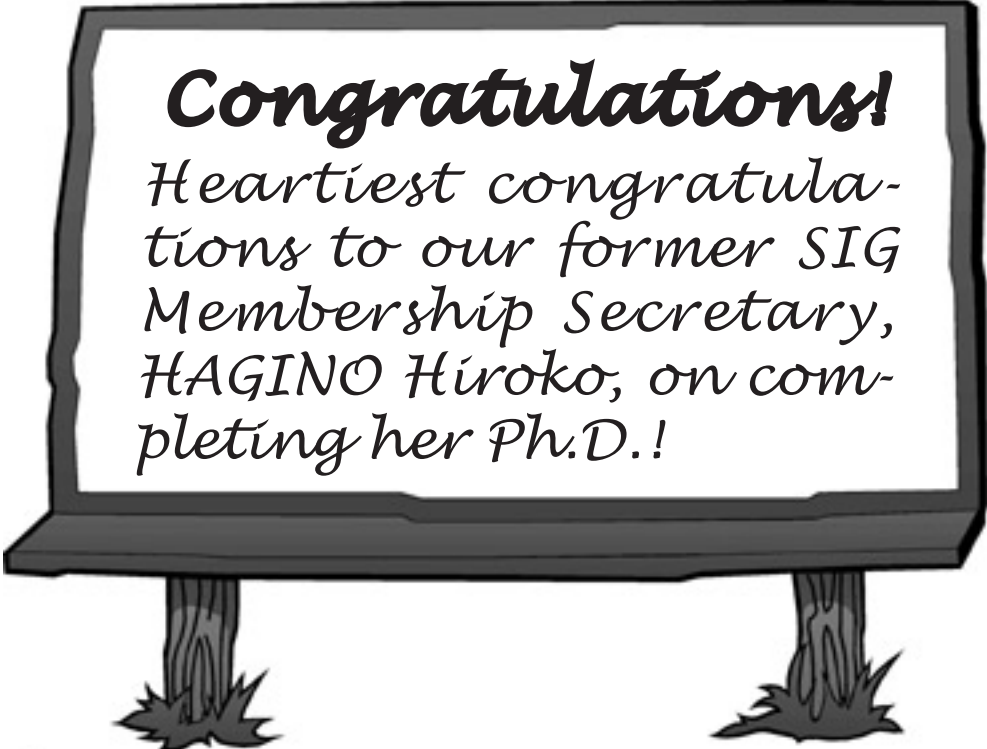
The teacher who considers using this book for classes will need to do some additional work to support the book. This type of material will obviously require the teacher to write more of his/her own material. By producing handouts with questions or situations for role plays, the teacher can make the connection between the student, the textbook, this material, and the course. Doing so will help the student have a better grasp of the use of the language in specific circumstances.

This resource will often make the students more interested in learning, because they are able to see how what they are studying in class is directly applied to the situations they may encounter in America. This kind of connection is something the most apathetic



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SMOKE FREE  
WORKPLACE  
YOUR COOPERATION  
IS EXPECTED

student may appreciate and thus make classroom lessons more interesting for all those involved. It also provides the students with exposure to some authentic material that the teacher can control, helping the students to focus and thus limiting the confusion caused by a barrage of too much language. **IK**



***Congratulations!***  
*Heartiest congratulations to our former SIG Membership Secretary, HAGINO Hiroko, on completing her Ph.D.!*

# From the Desk of . . . the Chair

Jim Swan, Materials Writers SIG Chair

## Greetings, fellow materials writers

By the time this reaches you, the new school year will be shortly beginning. Best wishes for a successful take-off.

Back in February I sent most of you an e-mail message including my take on the January delegate meeting of the JALT Executive Board, reprinted here. (If you were a SIG member in good standing at that time but did not receive it, please contact me: either we have no e-mail address for you or the one we have on record is

not valid.) That message, particularly my account of the budget issues and their effect of the JALT Publications Board, drew several responses from National Officers or other affected JALT members. This issue

also elicited an enormous outpouring of emotional response on the EBM-Net e-mail list, each poster having his or her own take on the true numbers, the true meaning of the numbers, or their true impact on JALT.

The upshot is that although the numbers below are *unfathomable* to poor ordinary English teachers such as myself, I think the gist of my report is more or less OK. The only figure that I feel I must revise in this reprinted version is the ¥500,000 cited for *The Language Teacher* monthly postage: Outgoing Editor Malcolm Swanson tells me that the true figure was around ¥200,000 per month.

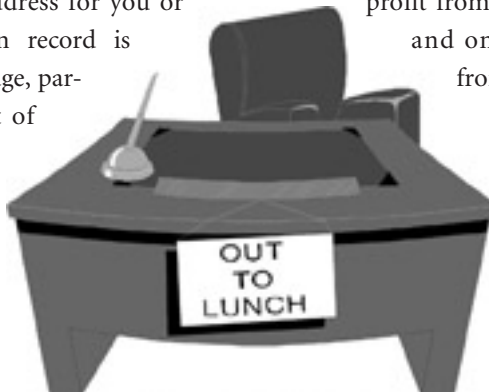
## The January Executive Board Meeting

The first thing you should all know is that this was a budget-centered meeting with a vengeance. As you all are probably aware, for many years now JALT's solvency has been precarious. Membership fees, even after being raised to ¥10,000 some years ago, provide nowhere near enough income to fund all the projects and services that JALT provides. We have been heavily dependent on making a profit from the annual conference

and on the income we raise from our Associate Members, the publishing companies and service companies which buy advertising space in our publications and display space at the conference. Unfortunately, as overall membership has fallen

over the past five or ten years, so has annual conference attendance and, following several years of mergers and acquisitions in the publishing industry, so has our overall income from the AMs.

*Cutting to the chase*, next fall's conference will be a two-day affair, rather than the usual three-days. Correspondingly, the number of paid "attendance-days" and display revenue will probably be something on the order of 33% less than usual. It was on that discouraging prediction that most of the 2002-3 budget decisions hinged. Essentially, in the face of a ¥6-million deficit, everything in JALT had to be scaled down to its bare bones to achieve





a balanced budget.

So here is the breakdown, as far as I remember it. Well, some of the main points, anyway:

—The Asian Scholar Program is killed, axed, deep-sixed, dumped. There will be no JALT-sponsored Asian Scholar recipient at this year's conference, maybe never again.

—The Publications Board's budget drops from around ¥22-million this year to around ¥15-million next year. Among other changes, you can expect fewer issues of *The Language Teacher*; precisely how many fewer remains to be determined, but the number 6 was mentioned repeatedly.

We delegates were all urged to go back to our constituencies and put a positive spin on this, so here goes: JALT has been moving steadily toward web-based management and info dissemination. Our current budget difficulties may serve to hasten this inevitable (and desirable) trend.

*The Language Teacher* is essentially a hybrid of journal and newsletter, with a combination of (timeless) features and (time-sensitive) announcements. However, the most timely source of information for chapter meetings, job opening, calls for participation, etc. are now—or will soon be—via electronic access, and the two-month deadline for inclusion in *The Language Teacher* renders the hard-copy newsletter version somewhat superfluous for these purposes.

The function of *The Language Teacher* should be seen more along the lines of providing practical value-added information for classroom teachers and as a historical record, maybe, while the *JALT Journal* will continue to emphasize research issues. Some monthly issues have a very low rate of advertising, and reducing the number of issues per year saves not only on the production costs but also on distribution costs—even at the bulk rate JALT pays, each issue's postage

is half a million yen! (That figure blew me away.) [Editor's note: This figure was later corrected to ¥200,000, as noted above.]

It was also opined that a reduced publication schedule might make it easier to recruit *TLT* and *JJ* staff. It is vital that the reduced number be counterbalanced by an increase in the value added to each issue, so we JALT members are all strongly encouraged—now more than ever—to submit articles of quality to our JALT publications.

Please consider all the foregoing as having been spun positively. Even so, whatever measures the Publications Board must adopt in order to comply with next year's budget constraints, they are hopefully only temporary expedients and not necessarily permanent policy changes.

—SIG annual grants for this upcoming year will be precisely **zero**. We all must make do with our membership fees, augmented by whatever funds we can raise by ourselves. One motion called for the establishment of a reserve kitty where SIGs can apply for special project funding. In response to four SIGs' recent announcements of intention to dissolve, the Board also passed three motions establishing procedures for the rational management of floundering SIGs, including procedures for their possible rejuvenation or possible dissolution. These parallel the long-established procedures governing the demise of failing chapters.

—The Board created an ad-hoc committee to explore a vast restructuring of JALT. This committee, under the Director of the Treasury, David Neill, is assigned to consider all the ramifications of David's own restructuring proposal and report back by the June EBM. Without going into great detail, let me just say that David's proposal is similar to the old idea of "menuizing" JALT, but even further-reaching: Under this plan, local chapters as well as national SIGs would

become virtually autonomous entities, affiliated with JALT but neither financed by it nor greatly obligated to it—much along the lines of a TESOL affiliate. My minimal description probably serves more to whet your appetite than anything else, but since the plan is still quite tentatively formed, let me avoid going into it any further for now.

Other than these few trifles, nothing much happened....

### JALT2002 Conference stuff

The deadline for conference proposal submissions has passed. Please let us know if and when your MW-related proposal is accepted, so that we can prepare a handy list of scheduled presenters.

Also in regards to the conference, Tim Newfields (coordinator of the T-Eval SIG) asked whether it would be permissible to schedule his group's Annual General Meeting after hours in a restaurant, rather than slugging it out in competition with a dozen other presentations in simultaneous slots. The answer was a resounding **Yes**. There will be no official JALT banquet this year, so both Friday (after the pre-conference workshops?) and Saturday nights are open. Of course, if every SIG did what Tim proposed, we'd still come down to the same competition problem, but what do all you MW folks say? **No time-conflict** is probably an impossible goal, but other than that minor obstacle, how many of you would be more willing to attend our MW SIG Annual General Meeting if it was held over dinner?

### Joint book project

Last December I was approached by the CUE SIG about the possibility of undertaking a book project jointly, under the umbrella concept "learner autonomy in the college classroom." Ian Gleadall, co-editor of MW's *Our Share* book and currently working on Vol 2, supports the idea. He thinks it could be integrated with some of the *Our Share 2* material currently on hand from the past five years' "My Share—Live!" sessions. MW has got the ISBN part covered, and CUE has the funding to pay for the whole thing single-handedly. Some CUE members have expressed interest in contributing to the project, and perhaps some of you MW members reading this message would like to contribute, too. If so, please let me know. The project seems on track to move forward, and I'll keep you posted as things develop.

### Check your membership status

If your membership in the MW SIG has lapsed and you would like to renew, please contact our Membership Secretary, Kathy Yamane, at <kkyamane@mpd.biglobe.ne.jp>.

### This newsletter's features

Thanks to Charles Brown, Chris Elvin, Daniel Droukis and Thia Jackson-Maki for their articles, which appear in this issue of *Between the Keys*. I now hereby declare the *Window of Opportunity* for submissions to the next issue **OPEN**. The deadline is May 15, so get cracking!

Out for now

BK

*Between the Keys* is published by the JALT Materials Writers Special Interest Group (MW-SIG). The editors welcome contributions in the following areas: publishing issues, classroom activities, page layout or desktop publishing, experiences in publishing or materials design, announcements of materials-related meetings or newly published materials, or any other articles focusing on aspects of materials writing or publishing. For information about reprinting articles, please contact the editor. All articles contained in *Between the Keys* ©2002 by their respective authors. This newsletter ©2002 by Materials Writers SIG.

Spring 2002

Vol. X, No. 1

## On the Inside

The Newspaper: A Materials Writer's Gold Mine

*P. Charles Brown* ..... 2

Lesson Plan for Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On?*

*Thia Jackson-Maki* ..... 10

News & Announcements ..... 14

Task Support for Aural Decoding of Large Numbers

*Chris Elvin* ..... 17

American Signs in the Classroom

*Daniel Droukis* ..... 18

From the Desk of... The Chair

*Jim Swan* ..... 21

The Materials Writers SIG is dedicated to continually raising the standards in the creation of language teaching materials, in all languages and in all media, whether for general consumption or for individual classroom use. The editors encourage participation from colleagues using new media or teaching languages other than English.

Spring 2002

Volume X, Number 1