

Why Can't High School Graduates Write?

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It is extremely disappointing to find out that our freshmen fail to write even a short paragraph in English. They do not seem to have even basic knowledge about paragraph writing. For example, they fail to indent, they always start new paragraphs and new sentences from the left margin, and they do not even seem to know what a topic sentence and conclusion are. With a given topic, the best they can do is to write only a few sentences, which often do not make sense at all. Why do they fail so miserably after six years of English education?

To find the answer, a survey was conducted among college students to determine how they were taught writing in high school; nearly 400 essays written by college freshmen and vocational school students were analyzed, and twenty-two Monbusho-approved textbooks were examined. It was found that very few textbooks deal with paragraph or essay writing and very few students have ever experienced writing a coherent paragraph other than sentence-level translation from Japanese into English.

The objective of this paper is to find out why Japanese college freshmen cannot write a coherent composition and to suggest what should be introduced in secondary education so that the students can write at least one or two meaningful paragraphs with the knowledge they have by the time they graduate. As a conclusion, it is suggested that writing can only be learned through actual writing practice, not through mere translation.

I. HOW MUCH CAN THEY WRITE?

1. Initial Composition

In order to determine the level of the students' writing ability, a twenty-minute in-class writing was assigned to freshmen at Chubu University and at the Japan College of Foreign Languages in the beginning of the first semester 1990. 219 Chubu engineering majors and 81 English majors from The Japan College of Foreign Studies participated in the experiment. They were given five titles, on one of which they were expected

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to write an essay: "My Future Dream," "The Person I Like Best," "My Best Memory in my High School Days," "My Spring Vacation," and "Others." These titles were chosen because they are all closely related to the students' experience; therefore, it was assumed that the students should have something to say about them. Consequently, the key factor in the quality of their compositions was their writing ability, rather than the fact that they had little to write about or no interest in the topics. Directions were given both in Japanese and in English to assure that comprehension of these would not affect the results.

2. Evaluation Methods

The compositions collected were evaluated using the three criteria: the number of sentences, the number of words produced in twenty minutes, and scores based on a qualitative evaluation method with a nine-point, criterion-referenced scale. The readers were one Japanese and one American, each trained by a former TOEFL TWE reader in 1988. TOEFL uses a six-point scale, but in order to increase the differentiation power at a lower level, three points were added. The following are basic criteria for each point.

9. Native speaker level.
8. Release from any intensive ESL program
7. Advanced level
6. Low advanced level
5. High intermediate level
4. Intermediate level
3. High elementary level
2. Elementary level
1. Beginning or almost no English writing ability.

+ or - marks were also added when necessary, and 0.3 were added to or deducted from the score given accordingly.

Such holistic or impressionistic evaluation methods are often accused of being too subjective. However, many recent studies have revealed that evaluation using these methods is statistically "reliable" and "valid." The methods have shown high correlation with objective evaluation methods on a number of occasions (McColly, 1970; Chrney, 1984; Cooper, 1977; Jacobs et. al., 1981).

3. Results

The results were discouraging. The average number of words for each composi-

tion was 26.9 for the engineering majors and 51.9 for the vocational English majors. The average number of words for this first set of 300 essays was 32.3. The average number of sentences for each composition was 3.4 for the university students and 4.7 for the vocational college students. The average number for the entire group was 3.8.

The results of the holistic evaluation were disappointing as well. The average score of the entire group based on the nine point scale was 1.7. Two students from the vocational school scored 4, but the rest of the group scored mostly in the 1 to 2 range. Six engineering students could not produce even a single sentence.

The same test was given to another group of students in the first session of classes in April 1991. Fifty-five freshmen engineering majors and thirty-three freshmen international studies majors participated in the essay writing experiment at Chubu University. The average number of words the engineering students could produce this time was 14.1; the average number of sentences was mere 1.9. On the other hand, the average number of words the international studies majors produced was 72.3 and 6.0 for sentences. The qualitative evaluation score was extremely low: 1.2 for the engineering students and 2.2 for the international studies students. Table 1. summarizes the above figures.

		Engineering	Vocational	International	Average
1990	AW	26.9	51.9	—	32.3
	AS	3.4	4.7	—	3.8
	AQ	1.5	2.1	—	1.7
1991	AW	14.1	—	72.3	35.9
	AS	1.9	—	6.0	28.3
	AQ	1.2	—	2.2	1.6

AW=average number of words, AS=average number of sentences

AQ=average number of scores in qualitative evaluation

Table 1.

4. Discussion

Each figure was extremely low, as might be expected. Especially the average number of sentences the 1991 engineering students produced in 20 minutes was surprisingly low, 14.1, which means they took an average of 85 seconds to write each word, or almost 11 minutes to write a sentence. Even the best performance group, 1991 international studies majors, took an average of 5'26" to write a 8.5 word sentence.

There are several possible reasons for their poor performance. One is that most of the experimental group were engineering students: a number of them are taking English because it is a required subject, not because they like English. Their motivation to learn the language is rather low, compared to that of English and international studies majors. A second factor might simply be a lack of general English proficiency. The estimated average TOEFL score for the vocational school English majors would be somewhere around 350 – 380, and 400 for the international majors. Michigan tests were administered to a number of international studies majors in April 1991. The average scores for each class fell somewhere along a range from 45 to 50 out of a possible 100. In short, their overall English proficiency is still at the elementary level. If the same writing assignments were given at other institutions whose freshmen had higher English proficiency, they might produce much longer and much higher quality compositions. The third and perhaps most logical explanation would be that these students had not had any previous composition writing experience.

II. SURVEY

1. Questions

In order to examine the third hypothesis above that the students cannot write a composition because they have not been given any instruction in writing, a questionnaire was given to a group of over 400 students, including most of those who participated in the essay-writing experiment. (See appendix) The survey consisted of five major questions:

- 1) Do you like writing English? If not, why?
- 2) Do you know such words often used in English composition as “paragraph,” “indentation,” “introduction,” “body,” “conclusion,” “support,” “capitalization,” “summary,” “sentence connectors,” and “topic sentence” ?
- 3) Have you done any paragraph or essay writing in junior or high school? If yes, how often, and on what topics?
- 4) Have you taken English IIC, or English writing courses?
- 5) What are the types of activities you have done in English classes you took at your high school? Circle the three most common activities?

- a. memorization of a number of words and phrases
- b. short sentence translation

- c . paragraph translation
- d . exercise completion at the end of each chapter
- e . free composition writing
- f . instruction in how to compose paragraphs
- g . writing sentence on the board and having them corrected by the instructor
- h . using pictures to write a composition
- i . others, specify ()

274 engineering students, 81 vocational school students, and 57 international studies majors, a total of 412 students, filled out this survey in 1990 and in 1991.

2. Results and Discussions

The results of the survey generally supported the above-mentioned hypothesis for why the students failed to produce meaningful paragraphs, i.e., they had not learned paragraph writing in secondary school.

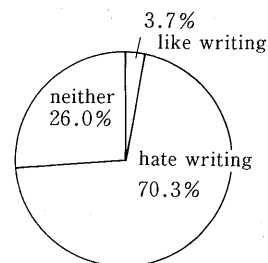
Question 1 (see chart 1)

Only 3.7% of the students responded affirmatively for question 1. The rest said that either they hated writing English or did not care. This is not a surprising figure, considering the fact that one rarely meets Japanese students or even teachers who love to write in English. The surprising result, however, was in their reasons for hating English writing. Some of the common reasons were "It is just too difficult," "We don't have large vocabulary," "We don't know grammar," "We cannot translate what we want to say from Japanese into English," "English we learned in high school was much easier." Judging from the above, in their minds, the reasons why they could not write an essay were that writing is too difficult for them, that they do not have enough vocabulary or a good command of grammar, and that they do not have translation ability.

However, none of these factors are essential to the ability to write a readable piece of composition. Taylor (1983) claims that non-linguistic factors are more important than linguistic ones for successful writing. It has also been proved on numerous occasions that students who do not have the above-mentioned abilities can produce coherent compositions, even from the very beginning of their language learning. (Miyata, 1991; Matsuzawa, 1991; Blanton, 1979) The very fact that most of the intensive English course programs in the U.S. offer writing courses to elementary or even introductory students is further evidence in support of Taylor's assertion. The students enrolled in those elementary courses do not possess a large set of vocabulary nor is their know-

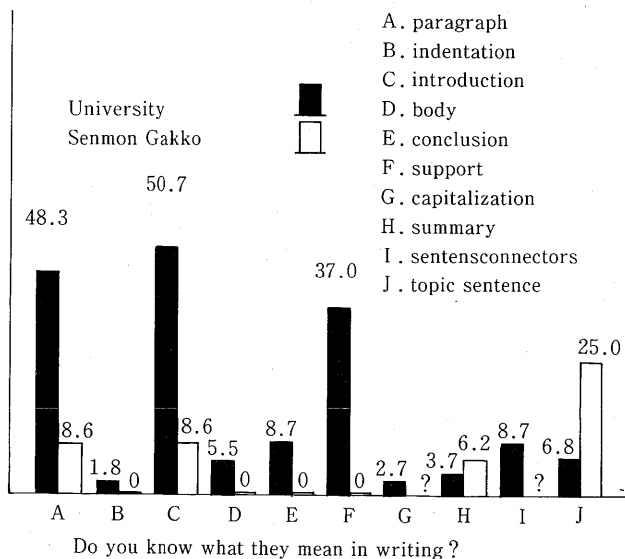
ledge of grammar as advanced as that of most Japanese college students. Still, they produce readable compositions when adequately instructed.

Certainly, writing an essay is not the same as translating one sentence to another in a different language or putting translated sentences together. Nevertheless, Japanese students seem to believe that once they acquire a broader vocabulary and better translating skills, they can write good multiple-paragraph essays in English. They may have been unintentionally programmed to believe this through their language learning process. It is this unfounded belief that the experience of secondary education should lead students to discard. It is this belief that is causing students to give in to the feeling that English writing is difficult, and therefore, "no fun."



Do you like writing?

chart 1.



Do you know what they mean in writing?

chart 2.

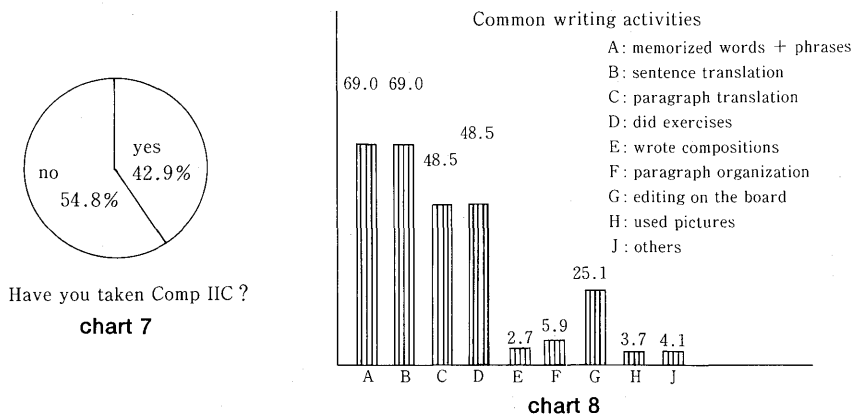
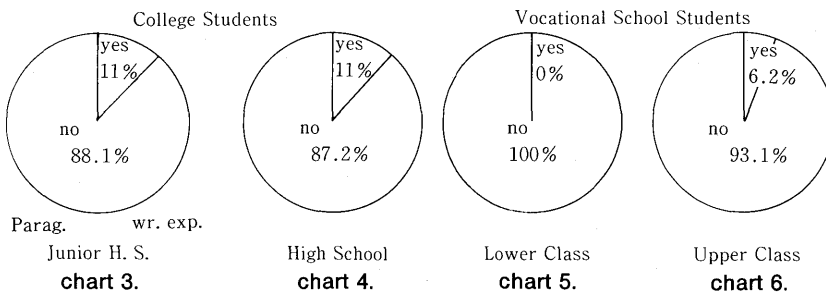
Question 2 (Chart 2)

The chart above shows the percentage of students who responded positively to the second question. The only words recognized widely among the students were

"paragraph," "introduction," and "support." The rest of the key words often used in essay writing were not familiar to them. They did not even know such essential words as "conclusion," "summary," or "topic sentence." The students' inability to recognize the terms used in essay writing does not necessarily imply that they had no previous discourse-level writing exercises; yet the fact that those highly specialized common terms in writing such as "indentation," "body," "summary," and "sentence connectors" showed very low recognition rates does suggest that the students were not exposed to any systematic writing instruction while they were in high school.

Question 3 (Chart 3, 4, 5, 6)

To determine whether the students had discourse-level writing exercises, the third question was given on whether they had done any paragraph or essay writing in junior or high school. In both junior high and high school, only 11% of the college students responded yes; 88.1% responded no for junior high, and 87.2% for high school. Of the vocational school students enrolled in a more advanced class, a mere 6.2% said yes; in the lower-level class, no students reported experiencing paragraph writing exercises in secondary school. Charts 3.4.5.6. below show how much experience the students have had in paragraph writing.



Question 4 (Chart 7)

42.9% of the students responded that they took Composition IIC or some kind of writing courses while they were in high school. However, as was revealed in question 3, only 11% of these college students had paragraph writing experience in their high school days. These two figures suggest that language learning activities in so called "composition courses" in Japanese high school are for the most part not those exercises which aim at improving sentence or paragraph organization skills, but something else. What are the activities conducted in writing courses in Japanese high schools, then? Question 5 served the function of exploring this matter.

Question 5 (Chart 8)

Judging from the results on this question, the most common activities conducted in high schools in Japan are memorizing words and phrases and translating single sentences. Doing exercises at the end of each chapter and paragraph translation activities are the next most common. Those exercises which involve more than sentence-level organization skills showed up as extremely rare in high school English instruction. These include paragraph organization, editing exercises, and exercises using pictures, all of which are very common ESL writing class activities in the U.S. Of all the 412 students surveyed, only 2.2% reported composition writing as a common classroom activity. In fact some students even indicated that they took a course called composition IIC, but in practice it was a grammar course designed to prepare the students for college entrance exams. Taylor (1983) severely criticizes programs which leave out such activities, insisting pattern practice, grammar exercises, and controlled composition exercises taught in low-level ESL [composition] classes do not really teach "composition" but are simply providing written practice in grammar use.

Two conclusions can be drawn from the results of this five-question survey:

- 1) most Japanese college students hate English writing, because they think it is too difficult for them, and
- 2) they have taken writing courses in high school, but they were not provided with more than sentence-level translation exercises.

It is, therefore, quite natural to further conclude that Japanese college students cannot produce a meaningful piece of composition because they have not acquired skills in putting words, sentences, and paragraphs together in an organized fashion.

III. TEXTBOOK ANALYSIS

1. The Course of Study in Writing

Another reason why college students cannot write a good composition might be the lack of treatment of paragraph writing in the textbooks used in high school in Japan. Despite the fact *Monbusho*, the Ministry of Education, clearly stated long ago that what is important is the very act of writing in English and, therefore, so called "wabun eiyaku" or Japanese-English translation activities need not be emphasized too much (Monbusho; 1947), current textbooks approved by Monbusho still use translation activities and exercises as the main teaching tools. It is strikingly surprising that teachers and publishers have held on to the traditional translation method for nearly fifty years since Monbusho started encouraging actual writing activities in secondary education.

The history of *the Course of Study* is one of discouraging traditional translation activities in writing and in reading. The English version of *the Tentative Course of Study* issued in 1952 clearly states, "Modern methods justify very little translation" (Chapter IV, 3, C), although, as a language activity, it still contained the phrase "expressing the meaning of Japanese in English," which connotes the justification of translation to some extent. However, in 1954, the Course of Study did not mention anything about translation activities in writing class. In the 70's, the words which suggest translation activities disappeared. Instead, terms such as "summarization" or "writing English for the purpose of communication" were inserted. The current objectives for writing courses at the high school level are as follows.

"To expand the basic ability in writing sentences in English so that the frame or thesis of the statements is understood, and to foster a positive attitude towards expressing things in English."

As suggested activities the following three points are presented.

- 1) To listen to sentences and write them down correctly.
- 2) To organize and write what the student wants to write in such a manner that important things are not left out.
- 3) To comprehend the content of written statements and to write comments in response.

As an explanation of the above statements, the following words are added to the Course of Study:

.....when the afore-mentioned activities are conducted, it may be necessary to have the students translate Japanese sentences into English ones, but do not depend on it too

much. It is important to conduct a variety of activities to fulfill the objectives of the course..... (Monbusho; 1979: 52)

The reason why Monbusho keeps discouraging excessive translation activities is probably that teachers of English prefer translation activities to paragraph writing. As often mentioned, the translation method is easier to teach with, and is time-efficient when dealing with over 40 students. Also, teachers themselves may not have any experience with expository writing. As a consequence, it is quite understandable that their students have not experienced composition writing. What is difficult to understand, however, is the reason why textbooks submitted for censorship and approved by the Ministry of Education still include translation exercises as the main or, in some cases, the only language teaching activity. Although some books claim to be functionally or situationally constructed, most activities included in those textbooks also involve sentence-level translation.

2. Method

In this study, 22 textbooks¹⁾ used in composition IIC offered at Japanese high schools were examined according to the number of discourse-level exercises and explanation sections. Four specific evaluation categories were created: paragraph writing exercises; essay writing exercises; the regularity of the inclusion of these exercises in each chapter; and any exercises or explanations which might lead the students to discourse-level English writing, such as those which introduce expository writing, the mechanics necessary for composition writing, the kinds of transition words, or the styles of writing. These areas were evaluated using a four-point scale, utilizing the following criteria.

- 1 : Almost no explanations or exercises of the target area are presented. Main activities are sentence-level translation or completion exercises.
- 2 : Very few exercises, but some explanations or model paragraphs or essays are given; mostly presented for the purpose of introducing grammatical or topical structures.
- 3 : Some exercises on paragraph writing, such as reshuffled sentences or paragraph exercises, are presented.
- 4 : Explicit explanation on how to put sentences or paragraphs together and enough exercises on these areas are presented throughout the book.

3. Results and Discussion.

The next table clearly shows that most Japanese English writing textbooks used

in high school do not treat discourse level writing to a satisfactory degree.

Names of textbooks	paragraph writing	easy writing	regularity	other discourse	Av.
1. <i>Milestone IIC</i>	2	1	2	3	2.0
2. <i>Sunshine</i>	2	2	2	3	2.3
3. <i>New Current</i>	2	1	1	2	1.5
4. <i>New Standard</i>	1	2	2	1	1.5
5. <i>Practical English</i>	2	2	2	2	2.0
6. <i>The New Century</i>	1	2	2	1	1.5
7. <i>Unicorn</i>	3	3	3	2	2.8
8. <i>Unicorn Grammar Based Comp.</i>	1	1	1	1	1.0
9. <i>A New Guide</i>	3	1	2	2	2.0
10. <i>Creative Writing.</i>	1	1	1	1	1.0
11. <i>The International English Writing</i>	2	1	2	1	1.5
12. <i>Communicative English Composition</i>	2	1	2	1	1.5
13. <i>Challenge IIC</i>	2	1	2	2	1.8
14. <i>Passport to English</i>	3	3	3	3	3.0
15. <i>New Wings</i>	2	1	2	1	1.5
16. <i>New Access</i>	1	1	1	1	1.0
17. <i>New Living English</i>	1	2	2	1	1.5
18. <i>My Eng. Composition</i>	2	1	2	1	1.5
19. <i>New Light Composition</i>	2	1	2	2	1.8
20. <i>Speak & Write Better</i>	3	2	3	1	2.3
21. <i>Enjoy English IIC</i>	2	1	2	1	1.5
22. <i>Mainstream</i>	2	1	2	1	1.5
Average score	1.86	1.46	1.95	1.55	1.69

Table 2.

The average evaluation score for these entire books is 1.69 out of possible 4.0. Those books which might survive a careful selection process in the U.S. would be *Unicorn*, *Passport to English*, and *Speak and Write Better*. They include not only sample para-

graphs, but exercises using a variety of paragraphs. *Unicorn and Passport to English* do assign more than paragraph-level composition in some chapters. *Milestone and Sunshine*, though their overall scores are not as high as those of these three books, are unique in their treatment of essay writing. They each include a special section for paragraph and essay writing at the end of the book. Among the topics included are summarizing, writing letters, keeping a diary, and writing a resume. *Milestone* explains how sentences are organized into paragraphs — the only section in any of the twenty-two books examined which includes an explicit explanation of paragraph writing. The fact some of the books do include more than sentence-level writing is a positive, though slight, sign indicating movement toward better programs with more essay writing.

Generally, however, most of the books surveyed in this study do not deal with discourse-level writing to a satisfactory degree. Some do not include anything but sections on sentence-level translation and the memorization of sentences. In most of the books, each chapter is treated in the following manner. First, dialogues or model paragraphs present the topic or the target grammar structure of the chapter. Next, several sentences to memorize are given. Some grammatical points are explained following these. Then drills or exercises are attached, filling one or two pages. Most of these exercises start with fill-in-the-blank or complete-the-sentence type questions, with Japanese translation next to them. Finally, a number of one or two-sentence-long translation exercises are assigned. The textbooks seem to reflect neither the 54-year-long intention of the Course of Study: to stay away from translation exercises, nor the most recent trend of ESL writing: process writing. (In process writing, writing is considered to entail a series of processes. The composing process usually takes four stages: prewriting activity, drafting, revising, and editing.)

A few other studies conducted in text analysis support these findings. Mouri (1981) reviewed 31 textbooks used in English I, a four-skill course for 10th graders. He, too, found that as much as 87.1% of the textbooks examined included sentence translation exercises. Yanagii (1984: 110) also claimed that every textbook for English IIC in his possession include sentence translation exercises. Yoro-zuto (1989: 23) criticized those exercises contained in structure-based text books used in Composition IIC because they did not motivate students to express themselves and because the formality of the sample sentences was not consistent. Thus, the overall style and contents of English language textbooks used in Japan do not seem to have been changed significantly over the past half century.

Another major problem with these textbooks in Japan is the way discourse-level

samples or exercises are presented when they are given at all. For example, *Passport to English* includes a number of good composition topics at the end of each chapter; however, they are simply no more than directions or topics for writing²⁾. Brainstorming exercises, or exercises to teach how to organize the given topic are missing. In the modern context, writing is not seen as simply producing a final product. A number of findings imply that the mental process of organizing what the writer wants to convey to the reader plays an essential role in the production of good compositions. (Inoue, 1977³⁾; Taylor, 1983; Shoemaker, 1989; Spanglar, 1990). It is very unfortunate that exercises which train students to become better sentence or paragraph organizers are not found in the typical writing textbooks used at the secondary school level in Japan. It seems that these textbooks and the students are in dire need of exercises such as reshuffling, revising, editing, connecting, combining, and completing sentences and paragraphs.

IV. WHAT CAN AND SHOULD BE DONE

Three things have been shown so far: 1) average Japanese college freshmen cannot produce coherent paragraphs; 2) one reason is that they have never learned how to write more than sentence-level composition; 3) another reason is that the textbook they are using are not constructed in a way that they enhance paragraph writing activities. Then the logical conclusion is that if they learned expository writing in high school, these students would be able to produce longer, more meaningful, and better organized compositions. However, this is not a simple matter. There are problems inherent in the current secondary school conditions in Japan: for example, time constraints, the teachers' own lack of training in the teaching of expository writing, and the wide spread use of textbooks not intended to emphasize paragraph writing. The purpose of the last chapter of this paper is to present possible solutions to these problems in using Monbusho – approved textbooks.

1. Getting Rid of the “Translation Syndrome”

The first and simplest thing a teacher at the high school level can do is to have his students realize that writing in English is totally different from translating a Japanese sentence into an English one. A number of students seem to believe that once they memorize a number of vocabulary words and grammar points, they can write good paragraphs in English. This may be attributed to the fact that writing textbooks used in courses named “composition” contain mostly translation exercises and that most lan-

guage activities done in class entail translation. Therefore, it is quite natural for students to initially assume that "composition" is almost the same as 'translation'. However, the notion that writing good English does not mean translating Japanese into English, word by word, is essential in order to orient the students' minds towards actual composition writing.

If students cannot escape this "translation syndrome," they will just keep memorizing words and phrases, believing that is the best and only way to acquire writing ability. What they need to know is that language cannot be acquired simply by increasing the body of "knowledge" about the language, but that they need to practice "skills" to handle the knowledge. As Greenberg points out, "people learn how to write by writing, not by doing exercises in workbooks or on a computer screen" (1986: 543). Hasegawa (1979: 68) also supports this idea: "One cannot expect his students to acquire writing skills simply by having them memorize sentence structures, vocabulary, and idioms without practice in thought development."

This can be done simply by showing how awkward sentences become when directly translated. The following are some examples.

Sample 1.

太郎：何になさいます。

What would you like?

花子：私は紅茶にします。

*I am red tea.

(I'll have tea)

Sample 2.

健治：あなたの足の指は長いですね。 *The fingers of your foot are long, aren't they?

(You have long toes!)

友子：象の鼻ほどではありませんが。 *Not so long as the nose of an elephant.

(Not so long as the trunk of an elephant)

Mizukami (1983: 100) gives a more complicated illustration of how translation can break down.

Sample 3-a.

Voltage fluctuation rate is $\pm 2\%$ of the rated voltages when the speed fluctuation of the diesel engine is assumed to be 4% and with the exciter with automatic voltage regulator used in conjunction. In the case of only the exciter without the automatic voltage regulator, it is 5% of the rated voltages when the speed of fluctuation of the diesel en-

gine is assumed to be 4%. (Translated version)

Sample 3—b.

With a 4% diesel engine speed variation, voltage fluctuation using an exciter is:

—2% with Automatic Voltage Regulator (AVR)

—5% without AVR (Rewritten version)

Obviously 3-a is a direct translation from Japanese into English. When it was written in Japanese it looked to be a perfectly good paragraph, but when directly translated it suddenly becomes almost incomprehensible.

Yanatori (1985: 31) gives another example written by a Japanese college freshman. Each sentence in this paragraph can be understood perfectly and some contain very complicated sentence structure, but the paragraph as a whole does not make much sense. He claims he does not understand what the student wants to say. The focus of the paragraph is very vague.

Sample 4.

I like reading books. When reading a book, we go into the world which we have never seen or heard. Perhaps you have read Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. The book will take you to an imaginary world. Suppose you are reading a book of French history. In the book you will meet Napoleon and understand how French Revolution broke out. On the other hand, we often get new ideas from a book, and sometimes learn the author's view of life. In an extreme case, it may happen that a reader finds a new meaning of life and begins to live a different life. After all, reading is beneficial.

The above examples show that translation more often than not fails to convey the intended meaning at word, sentence, and discourse levels. Once the students realize that what they have been doing in composition class, i.e., translation exercises, is only practice for a bigger project called "writing for communication," they are ready to start "real writing" in English.

2. Writing in a Paragraph Form

It is extremely important to make use of every available opportunity in the textbooks to have the students write an actual paragraph. Some books seem pitifully useless for the teaching of paragraph writing, but there are some ways to turn those translation

drills into paragraph writing exercises. The following are some examples.

When a sentence-level translation exercise contains several sentences constructed around the same topic, the teacher should have his students write them in paragraph form after they translate each sentence. For example, if there is an exercise like the one below in a textbook, the students should write their answers using a paragraph form like b) instead of a).

Sample 5.

英語になおしなさい。(Unicorn IIC, 1990)

- a. 春休みに私は長崎へ電車の旅をしました。
- b. はじめての長崎旅行でした。
- c. 長崎に着いた時、ひどく雨が降っていました。
- d. 私の伯父が駅で出迎えてくれました。
- e. 翌日、私は母にザボンを送りました。

a)

- a. I took a train trip to Nagasaki during the spring vacation.
- b. It was my first trip to Nagasaki.
- c. When I got to Nagasaki, it was raining very hard.
- d. My uncle came to the station to see me.
- e. Next day, I sent Zabon oranges to my mother.

b)

I took a train trip to Nagasaki during the spring vacation. It was my first trip to Nagasaki. When I got to Nagasaki (there) it was raining very hard. My uncle came to the station to see me. Next day, I sent Zabon oranges to my mother.

In this way, a sentence-translation exercise can be turned into a paragraph writing exercise, without drastic modification. Although the skills required are still primarily those of translation, a teacher can use the paragraph to explain why the sentences should be written in a paragraph form, by noting that a) looks very mechanical or 'cool', while b) looks more natural or 'warm'. He can also point out that one rarely finds sentences like a) listed one by one on a paper in prose writing, while b) is more likely. He may further want to point out that the use of the word "Nagasaki" three times in a paragraph form is somewhat awkward. Here is an opportunity for students to learn one rule of rhetoric, i.e., avoid redundancy, or do not repeat the same

word too often. A creative teacher may want to ask his students to add a few more phrases or sentences so that the paragraph flows more naturally. Some phrases or sentences in parentheses are added for that purpose in sample c)

b)

I took a train trip to Nagasaki during my spring vacation. It was my first trip to Nagasaki. When I got (there,) it was raining very hard. (I was alone and did not have an umbrella with me, so I was a little worried.) (However,) my uncle (soon) came to the station (to pick me up). Next day, (the weather was beautiful.) (I felt so happy). (When I went out, I found delicious Zabon oranges at the open-air market.) I sent (some) to my mother. () = added parts

The teacher may also want to point out the importance of transitional words or phrases such as "there," "so," "however," and "next day." An even more creative teacher may want to assign his students to continue this paragraph, or expand it to several paragraphs completing the rest of the story about the young woman's trip. Thus, a variety of activities or exercises for paragraph writing can be drawn from sentence-level translation exercises if the teacher tries to be creative.

3. Using a Sentence as the Base for a Paragraph

Some books do not contain even a series of sentences to translate around the same topic. For example, each Japanese sentence in the exercise below is totally disconnected in meaning from the others. Out of 22 books examined, 17 books (77%) assigned this kind of exercise as a main translation exercise⁴⁾.

Sample 6

a). 次の日本文の内容を英語で表現しなさい。 (*Creative Writing Course*, 1990)

1. その情報は私達には何の役にも立たなかった。
2. 私はいつもとても健康で医者はいらない。
3. そんな服は流行遅れだ。
4. その新製品は来月には売り出されるのですか。
5. もし困っているなら、だれかに忠告を求めなさい。

b). Put the following Japanese into English.

1. That information was of no use for us.
2. I am always in good health, and I don't need a doctor.

3. The clothing like that is out of fashion.
4. Will the new product be out in the market next month?
5. If you are in trouble, you should ask someone for help.

As can be seen, none of these sentences are connected in any way with the others except grammatically they all try to include an adverbial phrase. The teacher cannot assign his students to put them together in a paragraph form. However, one thing he can do is to have his students construct a paragraph based on each sentence. For example, the students can use the above sentences as topic sentences or starting sentences for a paragraph they might develop. They may also want to use one or two sentences here to show examples to support a topic sentence or, if possible, as a concluding sentence. In this way the teacher can show how sentences should be connected to each other.

Demaru (1991: 24) illustrates the example of this kind. He assigned his students to write free compositions using the expressions they learned. The following is one of the compositions his students produced. This student used the sentence he learned as a topic sentence (underlined).

Sample 7. (*Milestone 1*)

To know is one thing and to teach is another. Though my mother used to be a teacher of an elementary school and knows the target subjects well, she says to (tells) me that it is very difficult to teach students. But she likes to teach students, because perhaps she loves them. So she is a teacher of a cramming ("cram") school now. She is very severe with them when she is teaching them. But I think that she is (a) very good teacher.

It does not take a super creative teacher to modify translation exercises into paragraph writing. The "rule of thumb" is simple: make exercises that force the students to write more than two sentences which are connected in meaning, hopefully, in a paragraph form. With this in mind, almost every sentence-level exercise can be developed into a paragraph writing exercise. For instance, if the student fills in the blanks in the given sentences with appropriate words, it is a structure exercise; however, if the students put together the several sentences with the appropriate words filled in and copy them down in a paragraph form in a meaningful way, that is already a paragraph-making exercise. Even the busiest teacher can assign the work like this.

4. Beyond Textbooks

There are some aspects of writing which are very difficult to teach with Monbusho-approved textbooks. The teacher needs to provide students with certain kinds of information which most of the available text-books do not even mention; for example, mechanics: indentation, capitalization of titles, visual form of each paragraph, margins, and the use of paper.

Simple statistics show degree to which students are in need of this basic information. Of the 219 papers the college students wrote in April, 1990, 192 (87.2%) papers failed to indent, 170 (77.6%) papers did not give a title, and 182 (83.1%) papers did not have paragraph forms, i.e., sentences were simply listed on each line like a poem. In other words, the compositions these students initially produced were far from what a composition should look like. Furthermore, once they become aware of how a paragraph should look, students are instantly able to produce nice-looking work which gives them a great deal of satisfaction and a sense of achievement. Mechanics, therefore, should be introduced as soon as the students start paragraph writing.

The second aspect which has to be dealt with separately is the organization of paragraphs. Such basic concepts as topic sentence, support, and conclusion should be introduced at the initial stage. In the context of longer, multiple-paragraph compositions, the functions of introduction, body, and conclusion should also be taught. This information is so essential and so basic in paragraph or essay writing that it is taken for granted in composition textbooks in the ESL/EFL field, though not generally included in Monbusho-approved textbooks in Japan. Again, the above information is fairly simple to illustrate and so important that it can and should be introduced in writing class in high school. This can be done simply by using one class period to show examples like the one on the next page.

The third kind of knowledge which drastically changes the performance of students in writing and which high school textbooks do not deal with is outlining, i.e., developing ideas and organizing them in a logical fashion. For example, when the students are given a topic to write on such as "My Daily Life," they are at a loss where to start a composition. They just do not know what to write and how to organize the ideas they might develop. This is the reason why they can only write an average of 3.8 sentences in twenty minutes. However, once they learn outlining and paragraph organization skills, they start thinking, the moment they are given the topic: what types of logical order they should use, for example, chronological order or comparison or contrast, and they begin outlining. Even the slowest student will soon start thinking about what to write in the

Sample 8. (Revised from Mileston II c)

Title:	Why Do People Watch Television?	
Introduction:	Indentation:	People rarely think about the reason why they watch television. However, it is very interesting to find out that people watch TV for many different reasons.
Body:		
First reason		First, people like it because it is fun to watch TV. They enjoy music or sports programs. Movies are another form of entertainment on TV.
Second reason		Secondly, people find it useful to watch TV. They do so to keep up with the latest news. It tells you very quickly what is happening in the world.
Third reason		Thirdly, some people watch TV just to kill time, because they do not know what to do in their free time. Some even keep it on all day long because it makes an excellent baby-sitter for small children.
Conclusion:		People are thus interested in television for many different reasons.
	left margin	right margin

introduction and in conclusion. This way it is very likely that they can produce at least a two or three-paragraph composition within twenty minutes with the writing skill they have.

The last thing a high school teacher can and should do in teaching composition is to give his students as many opportunities for paragraph and essay writing as possible. What the high school students lack is actual writing experience. They have been exposed to a number of expressions and grammar exercises in their textbooks, but not to actual writing. The students who are left without actual writing experience are almost like baseball players who practice every day, but are never given a chance to play a game. To win a game, they need experience in actual games as well, and, hopefully, a number of them.

Writing games can be played in many ways. The teacher can find a topic related to a chapter in the text or something relevant to the students' school life. Each student may want to choose the topic he wants to write on. The teacher can also assign students to do in-class timed writing for 10 minutes, in which the students are asked to write as many sentences as possible within the given time. In this activity, they are not allowed

to use pencils, but only ball-point pens. Since they can not erase mistakes, eventually they will start not worrying about them. This way they can focus their attention on content rather than structures. They will also realize that they can produce comprehensible paragraphs without the help of a dictionary or textbooks. Yamanaka (1986) reports that with timed writing activities her students started to produce 200 to 250 word essays by the end of the second term.

A number of other successful activities have been reported. Tanaka had his students write poems, and reported that his students had great potentials for writing. (1991: 21) Even at a junior high school level, creative teachers will find a way for their students to write a composition. Kurihara (1991: 18) required his ninth graders to write a graduation thesis in English during the summer vacation. He claims that his seventh-grade students can produce a 100-word paragraph, and eighth graders, a 150-word paragraph. Wada (1990: 11–14) assigned his junior high students to write a dialogue using a picture each time they complete a chapter. As a result, the average number of sentences they could write increased from 2.7 to 8.3, and the number of students who claimed that they liked English, 3 to 3.5 times. He also reports that his students started to write more grammatically accurate sentences. Simmons (1990) had his vocational school freshmen write a novel. By his account, all his students, who still had a great deal of trouble in orally expressing themselves, completed the monstrous project. Thus, it is clear that quantity and frequency play a significant role in composition writing and possibly in other areas in language study. Gorman (1979: 190) eloquently expresses this fact: "Language is a self-correcting and self-expanding system, and the more it is used, the greater facility there is in the use of it."

V. EVEN A FEW TIPS WILL HELP

In order to prove that this discourse-level basic information and practice is essential in teaching writing and to show how drastically it changes the performance of the students, another small experiment was conducted. 46 freshmen from the Department of Management and Information Science and 147 freshmen from the Engineering Department at Chubu University took part in his experiment in January 1991. They were all asked to write a composition on a topic "My Daily Life" within twenty minutes. No special instruction was given to the students prior to the composition activity. Twenty minutes later, papers were collected and brief instructions on essay writing were given. The author illustrated what a composition in English should look like, using a sample

composition. Among the mechanics he focused on were such basic information as indentation, capitalization, and the fact that each sentence should start immediately after the former sentence. Also, it was emphasized that the composition should start with an introductory paragraph, include several supporting paragraphs, and end with a concluding paragraph. It was also suggested that writers use chronological order for paragraph development. The period of instruction was about twenty to thirty minutes. Then the students were asked to write a composition on the same topic again in twenty minutes.

The results were surprising. The number of words and sentences increased by almost 200% on an average. The average number of words the students in the Department of Management and Information Science increased from 53.4 to 115.7 and in the Engineering Department from 44.8 to 85.1. Of all the students participating, only six failed to give titles and two failed to indent paragraphs. No students failed to put sentences together in a paragraph form. The compositions this time looked like they should look, and had at least a flow of ideas. In other words they were comprehensible although the number of grammatical mistakes was still high. Holistic evaluation was not conducted because of unavailability of a second evaluator, but the second compositions were clearly "far better" than the initial writing. The author roughly estimates the average holistic evaluation score for the entire group would be around 2.5 to 3.0.

Below are the samples of the handout used in teaching basics of composition and the student's production. (Sample 9)

By just teaching some basic information about composition, it is clear that students can produce much longer and better compositions. (Sample 10) With some more time and practice, they would be able to learn to write longer and more coherent compositions. It is, therefore, strongly recommended that the above knowledge be introduced at a high school level.

V. CONCLUSION

Writing is a process (Yamanaka, 1986). It entails a series of mental jobs. One cannot expect students to produce a comprehensible paragraph or an essay as soon as they are thrown a topic to write on. They need to be guided through the stages of exploring ideas, arranging ideas, and clarifying ideas. It is this organization skill with ideas that makes a piece of writing comprehensible, and it is this guidance that composition courses in Japan lack.

A certain school of teachers and scholars claims that paragraph writing should be

Sample 9.

	Name :
	Class :
	Date :
Title	
Introduction : これから何を書くのか。一日の生活の基本的情報, 名前, 年令, 住まい, 大学, 登校手段など	
Body 1 : 午前中, 起床時間, 朝食, 通学, 授業, など	
Body 2 : 午後, 昼食, 授業, 放課後, など	
Body 3 : 夜, アルバイト, 勉強, 娯楽, 就寝など	
Conclusion : まとめる, 一口でいうと自分の生活は?	

postponed until learners feel comfortable in writing single sentences (Ogasawara, 1974; Saito, 1981). The author does agree that basic grammar points and some vocabulary play a significant role in writing. However, it should also be understood that by writing compositions, grammar points also become clearer and the extent of vocabulary will also widen. In this sense, as Taylor claims (1981) "writing is a two way street" : vocabulary and grammar help to put ideas into words, but ideas will also help learners to activate grammatical knowledge and passive vocabulary. They reinforce each other in a positive way. Wada's report on the high school students' writing, mentioned earlier, is a good example. This is why teachers in high school should not wait to teach paragraph writing until their students become "really ready" to write. They may never become ready in that sense.

The fact that even junior high school students can produce a 100-word essay, if

Sample 10. (writing before and after the instruction)

Sample 10.		中部工業大学	
科目名		教授名	教授
			年 月 日 施行

My Daily Life

I'm Chubu University student.

I live near Chubu University. It takes 5 minutes on foot from University to my apartment.

Every morning, I get up at 8:40 and ready to go to University. Then I go to University at 9:20.

I work part-time at night. My part-time job is clean Train. We clean 8 trains a day.

I - 名前 森田 公明から書く。

M - 起きてから学校に行くまで。

A -

E - 学校から帰ってきてからバイトに行くまで。

C

My Daily Life

My name is Masanori Saito. I'm a college student at Chubu University. I live in a apartment near college. It takes 5 minutes on foot from college to my apartment. I introduce my daily life.

In the morning, I get up at 8:30 and then ready to go to college. I don't have break fast. After I finish readying, I leaves for school at 9:20.

After class, I go to home and I take a shower before I have dinner. Because I work part time at night. It begins at 7:30 and end at 1:30. I don't a shower after part time job. After dinner I watch a TV and then go to work. My part time job is clean trains.

I go home, I eat anything, study and sleep at 3:00. These are my daily life. It is hard but I enjoy every day.

- 31 -

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they are guided and controlled, does prove that all our learners need is a chance. The results of the present experiment on the writing of college freshmen constitute further proof that, if they were given a chance and proper instruction, young people will start to express themselves in English. They themselves may not know that they can write a coherent paragraph. This is because they have a fear of writing, for they have not been able to translate sentences accurately and thus lack confidence in themselves as "translators." Nevertheless, the teacher might be surprised that once the students break through this mental block, they will start expressing themselves remarkably well. The role of a teacher in writing class, therefore, is to provide an opportunity and instill a confidence among his students as "communicators," rather than "translators," through constant writing practice. As Zammel puts (1988), teachers and students must realize that writing is nothing for the students to be afraid of. It is, on the contrary, a pleasant and rewarding experience of self-expression.

In this paper, the author has simply attempted to prove, with some empirical evidence, that the conventional translation activities conducted throughout Japan do not prepare students to write a meaningful piece of composition. He also has tried to show that a little instruction on the basics of paragraph writing can drastically change student performance; therefore, this discourse-level knowledge should be introduced at an early stage. In the future, there is a need for larger scale research, involving students at a number of different institutions, so that more statistical evidence can be found either in support of or against the argument introduced in this paper.

NOTES

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- 1). All these 22 books were published or printed either in 1989 or 1990 for the 1990 use.
- 2). Some of the topics assigned to write an essay on are "My Future Dream," "My Hobbies," and "My Favorite Sports." Some exercises include specific instruction on what contents should be included.
- 3). Inoue clearly states the importance of organization skills. He says, "Outlining has a practical, almost indispensable role to play in the business of writing anything logically and sensibly organized and therefore clear in meaning." (1977: 9)
- 4). Those five books examined whose sentences in translation exercises had close connection in meaning are *A New Guide*, *New Access*, *Practical English Composition*, *Unicorn*, and *Speak and Write Better*.

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