

Lesson 1 Supplementary Material

As lesson 1 was given in English, we have decided to provide a summary of the lecture to supplement the presentations. Please note that the issues presented in this text, and the course as a whole, are well described in Glenn Paquette's textbook.

Lecture 1

The first part dealt with the important information for the course, so will not be presented here (see copy of presentation online for this information).

Part 2: Learning a Foreign Language

It is very difficult to write in a foreign language, so practice is very important. What you need to do is practice, by reading text by native English speakers and trying to reproduce that style yourself. To truly improve, at least an hour per day should be set aside for your English studies.

For Japanese scholars, most of the problems with English results from the difference between Japanese and English. Due to these differences, if English is written like Japanese, it appears to be very strange when read by native English speakers. There are two main areas where problems are created: Direct translations and the broader meanings of words in Japanese.

One example of problems with direct translation was given about pronouns. The words “これ” and “それ” are the closest that Japanese has to pronouns. However, they are used very differently to how pronouns are used in English. In English, a pronoun can (almost always) only refer to a noun that actually appears in the preceding text, whereas “これ” and “それ” can refer to many other types of things.

There are three common problems found in English text written by Japanese scholars. The first of these is **mistranslation**, where overreliance on Japanese-English dictionaries causes a lot of problems. For example, a Japanese-English dictionary will give the first translation of “特に” as “especially”. This will be inappropriate in about 80% of cases. Quite often the correct translation will be “in particular”. Another typical example is “示す”. The first meaning given in a Japanese-English dictionary will be “show,” but (at least in scientific writing) this will probably be inappropriate in 90% of the cases. The best solution is to use an English-English dictionary.

The second issue is **use of Japanese sentence structure**. To highlight this, the following example was given:

- × The difference of mass between the electron and the proton.
- The difference between the mass of the electron and the mass of the proton.

i.e. the structure required in English is “The difference between A and B”. The best way to solve this problem is to try to write English without using Japanese. Therefore problems that arise from translation will be avoided.

There was a question relating to the above example, which asked about why you can use “the electron” (relating to the second talk in the lesson which was about articles). Where you may expect it to be “an electron”, as this sentence is discussing an ideal electron, of which there is only one, “the electron” is correct.

The final issue is that of **lack of information**. As a language, Japanese expect more work from the reader than English does. This was hypothesized to be related to cultural. For Japanese, giving too much information is a statement that the reader could not understand your ideas without a lot of help. Therefore too much information is disrespectful. On the contrary, in English too little information is disrespectful, because you are asking the reader to do too much work.

The final comments from this section were that good writing is clear writing and to achieve clarity, simple is best. One of the best ways to avoid complexity is to perform the whole writing process in English.

Part 3: Scientific Writing

This section included a description of what a scientific paper should contain. Most of the information for this section can be understood by looking at the presentation. This was also discussed in depth during the TA office hours, so please look at the relevant information about that provided on the webpage. A few extra comments have been added below.

The most important part of paper writing is to have a good introduction and conclusion, as these are the sections that most people will read. Therefore, you should present your study so that it is clear to the reader just from these two sections.

There was a question about whether discussions should be separated from the conclusion. The advice given was that this should only be applied to long papers, where this will help clarity. Otherwise, keep them together to help the flow of the paper.

Special Topic 1 – Articles

There is only one small piece of information that we believe needs to be added to this section. The rest can be fully understood from the content of the presentation. This piece of information is about sand. As rocks are countable, it may be thought that sand must be as well. This is not the case. Sand refers to the collection of tiny rocks, shells etc. The individual item is called “a grain of sand”.